

# ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND MALPRACTICES: NAVIGATING OBSTACLES TO STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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## Abstract

*Nigeria's electoral process is marred by electoral violence, malpractices, and other forms of misconduct, which have become widely recognized as significant challenges in her efforts towards democratic consolidation. Successive elections since the dawn of Nigeria's Fourth Republic have been susceptible to legal disputes and violence that are undermining democratic stability. Political actors in Nigeria adopt a zero-sum mentality in political competitions. This study investigates the impact of electoral malpractices and violence on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The research explored the elite and frustration-aggression theories. It adopted a qualitative research design using key informant interviews to collect primary data and secondary data from the internet, textbooks, journals, newspapers and case study reports. The study's findings indicate the presence of severe violations of fundamental democratic norms, such as vote-buying syndrome, polling booth violence, and disregard for existing electoral regulations, which have become hindrances to democratic stability. The recommendations for an institutional check on the menace of political godfatherism and the power of incumbency syndrome, prosecution of electoral violence entrepreneurs and a review of electoral acts of violence in order to bolster the legitimacy of the electoral process and safeguard democracy in Nigeria. The study concludes that electoral violence is a precursor to political apathy and delegitimization of government, which could increase military ascendancy to power in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Election, Electoral Malpractice, Power of Incumbency, Violence

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## Introduction

Across the vast expanse of human history, civilizations from every corner of the world have grappled with a multitude of governance models, ranging from aristocracies, monarchies, oligarchies, theocracies, and fascism to socialism. Notably, the enduring presence of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes, marked by recurring shifts of military power, has been a recurring theme in this historical tapestry. Additionally, many African societies have witnessed a cyclical pattern of democratic regimes interspersed with periods of authoritarian rule

(Adenuga & Alabi, 2018).

One of the prominent systems worth mentioning is representative democracy, which has gained significant popularity and is widely regarded as the most acceptable form of administration in the modern world (Nachana, Auwalu & Yusuf, 2016). As posited by Ewuga (2019), this system affords citizens a substantial avenue for proactive engagement in the determination of their governing authorities, whether through direct personal involvement or the election of duly recognized representatives.

The concept of democracy is founded on the idea of appealing to the general population by offering attractive benefits, even to the extent that the most despotic individuals or dictators may cleverly attempt to align themselves with it (Oyekanmi, Moliki & Dauda, 2020). Elaigwu (2016) emphasizes that a key focus of democratic advocacy revolves around popular participation, underscoring the necessity of an informed and engaged citizenry for the proper functioning of democracy. Such an active citizenry is crucial to maintain democracy's responsiveness to majority aspirations and its resilience against challenges from power-seeking individuals who oppose its principles. Central to this engaged citizenry is the possession of knowledge required to understand their interests in the electoral process, which serves as a means to ensure government accountability and adherence to obligations.

Adebajo and Oyekanmi (2020) stressed that the most effective approach to fulfilling these responsibilities is through conducting trustworthy elections. Strengthening public accountability through a reliable electoral process is significantly enhanced by citizens' active participation in democratic activities. This involves productive discourse and, notably, exercising their voting rights during elections. The intrinsic connection between democracy and elections is widely recognized within scholarly discussions. Elections serve as a legitimate channel through which democracy operates effectively.

Scholars have firmly established a discernible correlation between elections characterized by unfettered autonomy, equitable procedures, and verifiable legitimacy, and the progression of

democratic governance, peace consolidation, and socioeconomic development. The central thesis posits that authentically untrammelled, equitable, and credible electoral processes serve as the bedrock for the emergence of democratic, accountable, and valid governing structures, which, in turn, are well-equipped to orchestrate and execute meticulously delineated developmental agendas (Igbokwe Ibeto, Osakede, Nkomah & Kinge, 2016).

Elections serve as a fundamental means of political engagement, perhaps becoming the sole avenue for participation for a significant portion of the governed population. Consequently, it fosters a sense of inclusion and a certain level of accountability for governmental choices. Elections can be regarded as formalized processes for selecting individuals to hold public office, conducted by recognized members of a certain society (Beetseh & Akpor, 2014; Ukachikara & Elechi, 2019). The *raison d'être* of an electoral system resides in affording the electorate the opportunity and prerogative to engage in the act of choice, thereby designating their representatives and forging a continuous channel of communication with them. Thus, a system of elections cannot be considered democratic unless it can ensure that each voter is fairly represented and that the people can freely exercise their right to vote without being subjected to threats or coercion (Eminue, 2015).

Nigeria, often regarded as a stronghold of democracy in the African continent, has successfully conducted seven consecutive elections since 1999, following a tumultuous period of

military rule that spanned from 1963. It is noteworthy to observe that despite the continuous existence of the Four Republics, elections at both state and federal levels have transformed into a recurring cycle of intense violence and manipulation facilitated by political elites and other dissatisfied individuals who are influenced by factors such as hunger, poverty, and an increasingly prevalent desire for rapid wealth accumulation. The emergent political elites in Nigeria have come to acknowledge that the era of military rule has waned in its allure and that the exclusive legitimate route to acquiring political authority resides within the electoral sphere (Oyekanmi, Ogundele & Salako, 2021).

Consequently, they employ a zero-sum strategy, encompassing tactics such as the accumulation of electoral violence, voter intimidation, and various forms of malfeasance, all aimed at subverting the electoral choices made by the broader citizenry. The electoral annals of the Nigerian nation bear the indelible imprint of instances where ethnicity is strategically wielded by political actors as a divisive instrument to secure political ascendancy, thereby posing a menace to the unity and stability of the state. Moreover, the political and democratic institutions in Nigeria have grown increasingly fragile, underscored by the pervasive absence of a robust democratic ethos among Nigerian citizens. The Nigerian electoral process has garnered notoriety for its engagement in fraudulent practices since attaining independence (Omodia & Egwemi, 2014).

The evidence clearly underscores the pervasive prevalence of electoral violence and malfeasance

within the Nigerian political milieu, thereby engendering an atmosphere of trepidation and bleak prognostications surrounding electoral cycles. Investors, too, evince a sense of unease, given the continual spectre of post-election violence. The efficacy of a multitude of measures devised and implemented over time to mitigate this issue has, regrettably, proven to be wanting.

Historically, legislative actions were undertaken even before the advent of the First Republic to grapple with the scourge of thuggery and other forms of pre-election intimidation. Despite these early endeavours, the problem has endured without effective containment. During the transition from the Second Republic to the Fourth Republic, a substantial deployment of security forces was observed, primarily tasked with overseeing the electoral process and upholding order within polling precincts. Notably, cognizant of localized incidents of violence during electoral proceedings and the potential risks they pose to the long-term viability of democracy, Former President Muhammodu Buhari issued a directive authorizing the use of lethal force in certain circumstances against ballot snatchers. However, despite such measures, the 2019 Nigerian election witnessed a significant upsurge in election rigging and violence despite the implementation of various preventative measures (Punch, 2020).

This widespread violence and electoral impropriety have garnered significant attention from both domestic and international communities, thus rendering the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy contingent upon the conduct of genuinely credible, unfettered, and equitable elections (Oyekanmi,

Moliki & Dauda, 2020). Consequently, this research aims to examine the reasons existing election laws, norms, and policies have proven ineffectual in curbing electoral violence and electoral malpractice, as well as seeks to articulate the relevance of this phenomenon on the stabilization of democracy in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Debo (2016), Nigerian democracy is emphasized in order to foster political stability, encourage widespread involvement, and uphold fundamental human rights. Adeogun (2020) opined that democracy encompasses the ability to provide maximum happiness for a larger population through effective administration and a harmonious connection with the citizenry. The elections in Nigeria, which are intended to serve as a precursor to establishing a stable administration and are expected to be conducted with the agreement of the people, have deviated from these expectations as a result of instigated violence, blatant electoral fraud, and manipulations of electoral rules and procedures.

Adekanye (2015) provided additional support for this claim by elucidating the distressing magnitude of violence, which results in the lamentable loss of human life and extensive property damage. These harrowing conditions have effectively dissuaded people from participating in political affairs. The current situation poses a formidable threat to the sustainability of Nigeria's democratic framework, which is already contending with a growing number of politically disengaged adults who have lost faith in the fairness of electoral processes and the ability of relevant institutions to protect the

rights of voters and preserve the integrity of their votes. As a result, the subsequent occurrence of electoral misconduct has led to scenarios where the outcome of elections is increasingly determined through legal proceedings rather than at the polling stations.

One notable aspect pertaining to the phenomenon of 'judicialized' electoral processes is how the affluent and politically fervent elite have been afforded opportunities to control election outcomes. The persistent inability to find effective solutions to these issues poses a significant challenge to the preservation of Nigeria's democratic principles and the resilience of its institutions. In essence, politics permeates the process of attaining and exercising political authority. In the context of political contests in Nigeria, it is anticipated that participants would maintain a high level of decorum, civility, and adherence to established legal regulations. However, political elites and actors have now resorted to desperate and morally reprehensible tactics to perpetuate themselves in power. This shift has resulted in a circular cycle of tense reactions by opposing interested parties and individuals. Candidates and political entities engage in the strategic recruitment of individuals with a propensity for violence, colloquially referred to as 'thugs,' along with other operatives, with the explicit purpose of unlawfully seizing and absconding with ballot boxes, instilling fear among voters, and subverting the democratic process by negating the collective voice of the electorate during electoral exercises.

According to Adekanmbi and Ambali (2019), this manipulation of voting protocols and outcomes has

resulted in the tragic loss of human lives, extensive property damage as a result of ensuing protests, and a significant erosion of the credibility of the electoral oversight authority. The issue mentioned above poses a significant challenge to the establishment and strengthening of democracy in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is concerning that the electoral body, which is expected to maintain impartiality in order to guarantee the integrity of elections, has been compromised. This compromise often occurs when some influential individuals employ members of the electoral body to intervene on behalf of illegal candidates, thereby undermining the interests of both popular candidates and Nigerian voters.

According to Kurfi (2017), the prevalence of rigging in Nigerian elections has been noted as nearly synonymous, hence impeding the democratic ambitions of voters who have cast their votes or would have otherwise supported an alternative candidate instead of the declared winner. Numerous elections held in Nigeria have consistently faced swift legal challenges, serving as a stark indication that the integrity of the present democratic system has been undermined. The prevalence of such electoral misconduct and manipulation has detrimental implications for Nigeria's democratic trajectory as the frequency of these occurrences continues to rise rather than diminish. The developments above have had a detrimental impact on the prospects of conducting successful elections and achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Nwokeke & Jayum, 2011).

Unfortunately, Nigerian democracy in the 21st Century is inherently marked by political

instability, social turmoil, cultural absurdity, and economic crisis, which consequently lead to various forms of unemployment, resulting in severe hunger and extreme poverty. The ramifications of this mischaracterization are manifested in a spectrum of illicit activities, which encompass but are not limited to kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, sexual exploitation, theft, and acts of disruption during electoral processes (Nwanolue & Ojukwu, 2015).

Scholars have exhaustively examined an array of potential remedies for rectifying these adverse circumstances. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of comprehensive investigation into the intricate ways in which the multifaceted issues of election-related violence and malfeasance impede the longevity of Nigeria's democratic system and jeopardize the nation's security. Historically, coupists in Nigeria have prominently cited the pervasiveness of violence and the resultant breakdown of law and order, stemming from sociocultural tumult instigated by public protests. These protests, in turn, were often fuelled by allegations of electoral manipulation. The study's primary objective is to scrutinize the prevalence of electoral misconduct and violence in Nigeria, with the aim of identifying underlying causative factors and proposing solutions capable of bolstering the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research design with key informant interviews used as the primary instrument of data collection. In contrast, secondary data were sourced from the internet, textbooks,

journals, newspapers, and case study reports. The key informant interview was used to gather relevant information from the active participants in Nigeria's electoral process. These informants include former and active Independent National Electoral Commission Officers, ad-hoc staff, security agents (Police, Civil Defense, and Army), politicians, candidates of political parties and party agents. In total, seven interview sessions were conducted, which included one INEC officer, one security agent, two politicians, one ad-hoc INEC staff, one candidate of major political parties and one party agent. The participants were purposively selected because of their previous and present active role in Nigeria's elections, either at local, State or national level. The opinions expressed by these participants in the interview sessions were contextually analyzed to corroborate and also disagree with the information gathered through secondary sources as described in published journals, case study reports books, and internet materials. This was done to strengthen the conversation and discoveries that are centered on elections, violence, malpractices and the sustainability of Nigeria's democracy.

## **Literature Review**

### **Electoral Violence**

Albert (2014) argues that electoral violence is a broad category of coordinated acts directed towards political opponents or stakeholders, including physical injury, threats, intimidation, and extortion. Before, during, and after an election, these activities take place with the ultimate goal of impacting, impeding, or reshaping the political landscape. According to Ogundiya and Baba (2015), electoral violence encompasses a wide

range of disruptive activities such as riots, rallies, conflicts between political parties, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, and kidnapping. These incidents, whether planned or spontaneous, occur in the period leading up to, during, and following elections.

Dele (2016) argued that electoral violence, referred to as electoral conflict, encompasses various acts, whether spontaneous or coordinated, directed to aim, manipulate, hinder, or impact an electoral process. These acts may involve tactics such as intimidation through threats or verbal abuse, dissemination of hate speech, spreading of false information, physical aggression, coercive measures under the guise of protection, blackmail, property destruction, or even assassination. Igbuzor (2010) believed electoral violence refers to acts of violence that occur during political activities, encompassing the periods before, during, and after elections. These acts may include thuggery, the use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and individuals involved in the electoral process, resulting in bodily harm or injury. While previous literature primarily defined electoral violence as physical assaults on voters and conflicts that could influence election outcomes, the political landscape and understanding of this electoral phenomenon have evolved. Electoral violence encompasses more than overt physical aggression; it has evolved to encompass covert methods of influencing electoral participants by enticing promises, including the utilization of monetary incentives. Suppose we accept the premise that the interaction between violence and

political behaviour affects voters and leads capable candidates to withdraw of their own volition. In that case, it can be inferred that the illicit utilization of money, such as vote buying and financial manipulation of electoral institutions, constitutes an additional aspect of electoral violence (Iseoluwa, Oyekanmi & Abiodun, 2021).

### **Electoral Malpractice**

Electoral malpractice can be interpreted as the violation of established institutions and procedures intended to guarantee the integrity of elections, thereby undermining the genuine expression of the electorate's preferences. This can be compared to egregious political tactics employed to subvert democratic procedures. Electoral misconduct encompasses multiple stages, such as instances of malpractice which occur during the phases of the voting process, actions before the voting commences, actual voting progression, and even after the voting activity has been concluded (Norris, 2012; Ugwaji, 2015).

Oyekanmi et al. (2021) inferred that electoral malpractice is characterized by the deliberate manipulation of regulations, voters, and voting procedures in order to confer unfair benefits onto undeserving candidates or opportunistic political parties. Hence, when a particular regulation is deliberately misconstrued to impede a candidate from participating in an election or to obstruct a political party from nominating their desired candidate, and when a segment of the electorate is disenfranchised, it can be identified as electoral malpractice. The act of manipulating voters aims to either mislead the preferences of voters or influence the manner in which they express their choices. The

initial category encompasses criminal campaign techniques that are fraudulent and contravene campaign funding regulations, as well as instances of pronounced bias in media coverage of the election.

The second variant entails the modification of how individuals express their preferences at the polling station, specifically by practices such as vote-buying or intimidation, with the objective of augmenting the electoral support for a particular political entity. Voting manipulation encompasses various forms of electoral maladministration, including but not limited to ballot-box stuffing, misreporting of election results, inadequate provision of voting facilities in areas where opposition support is strong, lack of transparency in the organization of elections, and biased adjudication of electoral disputes within the judicial system.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

The notion of democratic consolidation can be regarded as a discernible stage within the trajectory of transitioning from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one. This phase is pivotal in the formation of a sustainable, institutionalized, and permanent democracy. According to Linz and Stepan (2017), democratic consolidation refers to the establishment of a democratic regime characterized by structured rules and interconnections across popular governmental institutions. This framework serves to uphold the fundamental principles of democracy and facilitate the peaceful transfer of political power. Therefore, the process of democratic consolidation is a crucial

element encompassing various dimensions such as national, social, political, economic, and institutional factors. Its primary objective is to safeguard the legitimate power of rulers from potential usurpers and prevent circumstances that may enable unelected individuals to assume political control.

The prevailing sentiment among a significant portion of the populace is in favour of enhancing the current democratic processes and institutions in the management of public affairs. In the analysis of Osaghae (2015), the sustaining of government stability is achieved by voluntary popular support rather than relying on coercive means of state power. Ogundiya (2013) strengthens the concept of democratic consolidation by acknowledging that democracy and its many mechanisms are the primary framework for political competition. Additionally, it emphasizes that adherence to democratic principles serves as the central aspect of the political process. In order for a society to effectively adhere to the regulations of the political arena, a substantial shift in attitude from both the privileged class and the general populace is necessary.

This shift entails cultivating a mindset that deems election outcomes satisfactory as long as the principles and protocols of equitable competition are upheld. The acceptance being referred to enables individuals who have experienced defeat to gracefully acknowledge their circumstances while also discouraging their supporters from engaging in acts of political violence. The cultivation of an attitudinal disposition that is essential for the enhancement of the survival and prosperity of

democratic government is pertinent to the concept of a "stable democracy". In order for a democracy to be stable, it is vital to have a belief in the legitimacy of democracy (Fawole, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted two theories, elite and frustration-aggression theories, to analyze the underlying causes of electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria's democratic consolidation. The theory was conceived by Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), and Roberto Michels (1876–1936). The elite theory has been employed by Nachana, Yusuf, and Auwalu (2014), Yusufu Ogbu and Abundude (2017), and Oche (2014) in their respective studies. According to Oche (2017), it is seen that within any given society, privileged individuals maintain their socio-political and economic advantages over the larger population through the utilization of distinct characteristics such as awareness, unity, and collusion.

According to Mills (1959), Elite theorists argue that there are multiple strata inside the elite circle, suggesting the presence of various levels of elites. These groups can be classified as inner core elites, outer fringe elites, ruling elites, and non-ruling elites. Pareto, as referenced by Varma (1975), introduced a revised terminology to denote the ruling and non-ruling elites mentioned above. One of the fundamental tenets of this theoretical framework posits that within every given society, there exist two primary class divisions: the elite and the masses, among other assumptions. The split in question exhibits asymmetry and a lack of



coordination since it is characterized by one class assuming a leadership role while the other class assumes a subordinate position.

Another premise posited by elite theory is that a small fraction of the ruling class holds significant influence in the process of decision-making, possesses advanced political acumen, and enjoys superior economic status. They exhibit outstanding aptitude and exhibit qualities of leadership that place them naturally and advantageously for the comfortable rule and control of the state, thanks to their incredible strength and bestowed abilities. The individuals in question strategically maneuvered themselves into positions of authority and have since employed various means, such as the control of resources and the intimidation of individuals, including the utilization of violence, to maintain their grip on power. Additionally, they have been known to influence the election process to their advantage.

The theory is closely related to the occurrence of electoral violence and manipulation, as it suggests that the elite class frequently resorts to questionable methods and unconventional zero-sum strategies in order to exert control over the political system and secure all economic advantages. This includes engaging in organized conspiracies to evade punishment for their criminal activities. The elite theory provides a comprehensive analysis of the political system in Nigeria, as it recognizes that the majority of political parties in the country can be categorized as either cadre or elite parties. These parties strategically exploit the sentiments of the general population in order to further their economic interests (Varma, 1975).

Currently, the definition of political power exhibits variation among different societies, although the disparities between them may be quite insignificant. In the Nigerian context, the analysis of political power often revolves around individuals who have held various political positions, particularly retired military personnel and other public figures like high-ranking government servants and former ministers. The individuals of this group have consistently occupied positions of power in the government since the nation achieved independence in 1960 (Dike, 2003).

According to Roberto Michaels, in the context of elitism, as a political party expands in membership, there is a need to assign increasing responsibilities to a select group of leaders. Over time, this can lead to a decline in the competence of the organization's members to oversee and manage these leaders effectively. Consequently, the officers gain more autonomy and develop a vested interest in maintaining their positions of power. Individuals fervently hold onto their rights and privileges, exhibiting a near-impossibility of being removed from their positions. Once the leader attained the highest level of authority, no external force could undermine their position.

It is crucial to underscore the diverse manifestations of the elite. These categories encompass several types of elites, such as bureaucratic elites, religious elites, military elites, and traditional elites. It is imperative to acknowledge that elitist categorizations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as an individual who is considered elite may belong to multiple classes simultaneously. The classification in question also exhibits temporal

variation. For example, in the context of a military regime, the individuals belonging to the military elite can also be considered as part of the political elite. This is particularly true when they are engaged in the authoritative distribution of state resources (Varma, 2006). This observation implies that elitist categorizations are not mutually exclusive.

Consequently, political elites can readily rely on other elite groups to manipulate support in order to acquire and maintain power. The manifestation of traditional rulers exerting influence on political candidates or bureaucratic elites manipulating the electoral process to safeguard their positions is readily apparent in Nigeria. Furthermore, it has been observed that those belonging to the political elite who seek elected positions have frequently employed financial means to procure votes and alter the results of elections (Ayoade, 2008; Oyekanmi, 2018).

Without a doubt, the occurrence of electoral violence and malpractices may be attributed to those who seek to gain political power and are willing to go to great lengths to secure victory in elections for themselves, their favoured candidate, or their affiliated political party. The behaviors undertaken by the individuals in question encompass acts of homicide, inflicting bodily harm, and engaging in acts of intimidation towards both voters and political adversaries.

According to Dudley (2013), the emergence of political instability in Nigeria can be attributed to the misuse of due process by both political and non-political elites. Therefore, the preservation of stability is contingent upon the adherence of

leadership and major participants in the electoral process to the established rules or the recognition and observance of the laws that define the boundaries of the process.

In the Nigerian context, the influence exerted by the elite class is highly conspicuous, to the extent that the outcomes of recruitment processes or elections are often predetermined. In the event that the anticipated results are not achieved, the elites employ economic and political strategies to manipulate the outcome. The protracted legal disputes surrounding local and state-level elections have been a persistent problem since the restoration of democracy in 1999. The arguments mentioned above, supported by Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, assert that the elite class possesses economic power and exercises control over the political system.

According to the elitist theorist, the establishment and strengthening of a democratic society require careful consideration and active engagement in cultivating a normatively favorable understanding of fundamental institutions such as political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, interparty alliances, and the legislature. These institutions play a crucial role in the political construction and oversight of democratic governance. However, the theory excessively emphasized the role of political hegemony in the utilization of amoral means to acquire power, retain it against the democratic matrix and enjoy the benefits thereof. It failed to explain how bribe and political patronage-seeking voters demand money and other largess from the political class as a condition to vote for them. This unexplained

phenomenon, according to the theory, has become the classic political behavior of average voters in Nigeria and, thus, a persistent danger to her nascent democracy.

The study adopted the frustration-aggression theory as an explanatory framework. The theory was proposed by Dollard, Miller (1941), Doob, Robert and Sear (1939). Miller made a further improvement of the theory's hypothesis in (1941) and Berkowitz in 1969. The theory was developed to explain the causative factors of people's and individuals' violent reactions to situations and needs. Dollard and other theorists opine that frustration and aggression become deeply expressed when the envisioned goal suffers a setback. They argued that the violent behavior of men manifests in their conduct and psychological disposition when their entitled needs are not met. The central assumption of frustration-aggression theory is rooted in the understanding that human nature is pleasure-seeking with ever-evolving needs. The theory argues that individuals and groups have a sense of entitlement that is expressed through material or psychological needs. The theory concludes that when these human material and psychological needs do not align with available reality, there is a higher tendency for spontaneous frustration and aggression by men.

The theory emphasizes that it is inevitable for men not to behave violently, react to displace normalcy and violate established protocols when there is a noticeable disparity between their expectations and reality. Thus, the theory hypothesized that man expresses feelings of frustration at the things he feels he deserves but cannot get because of certain

intervening variables from the actions and inactions of others or institutions. As a build-up from the deep-seated frustration, man is thus propelled to show aggression in his conduct while relating with others. This is why the theory is frequently called "displacement behavior".

Taking a cue from the above theory in relation to the pervasive violence associated with elections in Nigeria, the theory explains the average winner-takes-all mentality of politicians and political officeholders. Political parties, candidate and their supporters have inordinate ambition to win elections through all means, not minding the conformity to extant regulations. In most cases, when opinion polls, public sentiments and feedback from the electorates point to their defeats, they usually become more agitated, frustrated and desperate to return elected. Thus, violence, intimidation and harassment of voters, including opponents, become a "displacement behavior". It can be inferred that electoral malpractices and violence have become regular features of Nigeria's political behavior because politicians and their supporters have become purveyors of violence and irregularity as an alternative strategy for winning elections. In Africa and Nigeria, in particular, there is a wide disconnect between civil conduct in elections and political power incumbents. While it is noted in democracy that contested elections are either to be won or lost, however losing elections in Africa and Nigeria is treated as a tragedy that must be averted by all illegal means. In effect, multilayered machinations, ranging from attacks on electoral institutions, vote-buying, violence and infiltration of opposition political parties, are

intensely deployed, not minding the dysfunctional effect on Nigeria's democracy.

In summary, the indices and assumption of the theory help to explain the propelling reasons why violence and malpractices have become regular features of Nigeria's democratic trajectory, given the fact that Nigerian's natural inclination to win elections without recourse to rules and public legitimacy has remained unabated. The theory also highlighted that the choice to deploy violence to win elections in Nigeria arises from the obvious lack of electoral credibility and popularity of the many candidates of the existing political party, contrary to expectations.

However, the theory can be criticized for perceiving expressed frustration and aggression as negative, illegitimate and destructive. It does not investigate if the expressed anger and violence were motivated and expressed to repel unjust treatment or as a protest against violated due procedure by other individuals or groups. Thus, the theory failed to clarify the dimension of frustration and aggression that is linked to an attempt to protect established rules in the interests of the public. The theory rather challenged the narrow-goal of aggression and violence. However, threats of violence, mass demonstrations, and expressions of public dissatisfaction with perceived irregularities in elections in Nigeria and other government misdemeanors' have also contributed to driving public policy, good governance, and measures of public accountability. This gives credence to an aphorism that "violence may be destructive, but its potential threats can also help government and individuals to act appropriately". The theory

ascribed frustration and aggression as the dominant nature of all men. It does not, however, offer curative measures to put this nature of man in check for the good of human relations.

### **Electoral Malpractices: A Comparative Assessment of Nigeria and Other African Countries**

The post-1960 political experience in African countries represents a political paradigm shift from regular military interregnum and anti-democratic political structure. Specifically, this was the period when distributive politics were spearheaded by autocratic individuals against the rule of general conduct. From the 1970s to the 1980s, the political trajectory of Africa shifted to popular government through the ballot as against the barrels of the gun (Dengiyefa, 2023; Kifordu, 2013). This was the moment most African countries began their democratic or civil rule experience. In Nigeria, there was a parliamentary election in 1959, a presidential election in 1964 and 1979, and an aborted 1993 election, down to the current Fourth Republic held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023. However, the history of these elections was characterized by irregularities, violence, ethnocentric politics and clear violations of electoral guidelines. The consequences of these political malfeasances have intermittently propelled different military coup d'etat in Nigeria; for instance, as noted by Oyekanmi, Salako and Ogundele (2022), the Nigerian democratic problem began sooner than expected from the 1965 western region election, whose result was largely disputed by the political parties involved such as Action Group (AG) and Northern People's Congress

(NPC). The election was reputed to have been widely rigged; the reaction that followed led to the outbreak of violence in the southwest, with many houses and other properties destroyed.

The trajectory of electoral irregularities in Nigeria continued with the controversial argument on two-thirds majority votes between Obafemi Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and National Party of Nigeria's presidential candidate Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979. The election which NPN candidate won was challenged up to the Supreme Court on the argument that the candidate failed to get two-third majority votes as stipulated in the electoral guideline and the Constitution (The Cable, 2019). It is worth noting that the 1999, 2003, and 2007 presidential elections in Nigeria marked a rebirth of political sit-tightism and incumbency in Nigeria's electoral experience. President Olusegun Obasanjo, who sought re-election in 2003, had stiffened political opposition, civil societies and other geopolitical interests to return elected. Even though there are reported cases of ballot stuffing and voter intimidation, the president returned elected notwithstanding. In continuation of electoral power gain, Nigeria's democratic institutions were also subjected to the political melodrama of a botched third-term agenda driven by former president Olusegun Obasanjo. The president had schemed to buy members of the National Assembly to amend the provisions of the constitution to allow him to contest a third term (The Cable, 2019).

Also, in the 2007 general election, electoral malpractices and irregularities were so pronounced that former president Umaru Musa Yar'dua, who succeeded Obasanjo the same year, confessed that

the election that brought him to power was susceptible to manipulations, violence and electoral fraud. The trajectories of these electoral violence and malpractices have also found their way to different elections at state levels, which led to intervention by the judiciary and upturning election results. There are celebrated cases of gubernatorial elections whose results have been reversed by the Supreme Court. A case in view is Osun, Edo, Imo and Anambra states, among others (The Cable, 2019). Pertinently, it is evident that elections in Nigeria have become the theatre of violence, intimidation and a zero-sum mentality. Political incumbents see electoral victory as entitlements without recourse to good governance as a benchmark for victory at the polls; hence, all unconventional means are deployed to weaken electoral institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission, judiciary and infiltration of the opposition of political parties (Oyekanmi, Salako & Ogundele, 2022).

The issue of electoral malpractices, power of incumbency and political *sit-tights* has been a trend in other African countries. It cannot be overstated that incumbent power in African politics is overreaching due to the enormous resources and power reposed in African political leaders, which made them find it difficult to lose elections. The 2021 Uganda election between President Yoweri Museveni, who had been in power for over four decades, and principal opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, popularly called Bobi Wine, was characterized by so many undemocratic practices and with the mounting pressures by Bobi Wine, who had the popular support of the people,

Yoweri Museveni, in a bid to ensure his victory at the polls, resorted to the power of incumbency and State resources at his disposal to prevent opposition rallies and campaigns, doused tensions of protests with military suppressions and engaged in heavy electoral manipulations and fraud to seal his tenure till 2026 (Thaler, 2021).

Also, in Papua New Guinea, the election of 2022 was not far from the trends that have been observed so far in Nigeria and Uganda. The electoral process suffered from violence, which is not surprising as it has characterized the country's election process for many decades. Terence (2023) argued that many voting processes were disrupted, ballot boxes hijacked, and at least about 50 people were alleged to have been killed at various polling stations across the country. The country is faced with issues ranging from election rigging by the New Papua Guinea's National Electoral Commission patron-client politics to the normalization of violence as part of electoral culture. The level of electoral malpractices and violence perpetuated in Cameroon is beyond imagination. President Biya, who had been in office since 1982, fraudulently abolished the term limits in 2008 and last held an election in 2013, which was heavily rigged to help him remain in power. Elections were supposed to be held in 2018 but were postponed twice due to security concerns and pre-election violence, especially in Anglophone regions of the country. On October 7, 2018, elections were finally held. Paul Biya won with over 71% of the votes, several oppressions and intimidations of Maurice Kamto, a strong opposition party candidate and his supporters (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Human Rights

Watch claimed that the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) presidential candidate, Maurice Kamto, alongside over 200 of his party members and other supporters, was imprisoned, which attracted low voter turnout and easy electoral manipulations. The trend continued ahead of the 2020 elections, which were evidently marred with violence by the armed separatists who felt betrayed by the failure of the Social Democratic Front to withdraw parliament members in solidarity with them (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

### **Impact of Electoral Malpractices on the Process of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Democratic consolidation is characterized by the durability of a civilian government and the acknowledgement and adherence to democratic institutions, fairness, and the conduct of free and credible elections. Consequently, these principles mustn't be disregarded or seen as an anomaly. Nigeria's democracy has witnessed notable advancements, as evidenced by its uninterrupted tenure since 1999, during which six general elections have been successfully conducted. An important milestone was achieved in 2015 when power was peacefully transferred from the incumbent party to the opposition, marking a crucial shift in political dynamics.

On the contrary, other areas require improvement in the implementation of democratic practices within the Fourth Republic as a whole, with a specific focus on the electoral process. Indeed, other intervening factors are emerging as potential challenges to the sustenance of democracy in the Fourth Republic. The implications of these factors

are evident in various issues, including the lack of respect and blatant disregard for electoral regulations, the presence of weak democratic institutions, instances of electoral violence, the prevalence of ethnoreligious politics, widespread corruption and mismanagement, high levels of poverty, the absence of internal democracy, the influence of political godfathers, and the excessive monetization of politics (Egbelubem, 2011).

*When electoral malpractice succeeds and ushers in undeserving candidates as winners of elections, it creates the potential for bad governance. This is because candidates who emerge through fraudulent processes may not have contractual morality to prioritize the needs of the electorates* (O. Caleb, Personal Communication, January 6, 2024).

The above, as captured in the opinion of Mr Ogunmakin Caleb, who is a strong All Progressive Party member in Ogun State, indicates the negative consequence of fraudulent election on good governance in Nigeria. When electoral practices are perpetuated, it gives political officeholders a sense of ownership and control of the electoral process and the voters.

The moral underpinning of the state's capacity to fulfil its responsibilities towards its residents, as well as the individuals' capacity to adhere to the state's laws, is subject to on-going scrutiny. Through a careful examination of a sequence of events, it becomes evident that these particular concerns have incited electoral crises of both a technical and logistical kind. The political conduct exhibited by numerous politicians exemplifies a tendency to expend human lives and public resources in pursuit of electoral victory, often using

strategies involving violence as a central component of their campaign tactics. Nigerian politicians often engage in actions aimed at obtaining an unjust advantage over their opponents or deliberately obstructing the electoral process when they perceive themselves to be on the losing side. Yakubu, a former local government chairmanship aspirant in Kwara State, claimed that:

*Emphasis on financial resources as a key factor in Nigeria's electoral process has shut out credible but financially deficient individuals from vying for political offices. Unfortunately, these better candidates have mostly been turned into opinion moulders and vote mobilizers for the money-bag politicians. The adverse effect of this is that narrow-minded and public-disoriented elected politicians now make dysfunctional policies which diminish democratic values* (M. Yakubu, Personal Communication, January 10, 2024).

According to Omolaso (2020), the act of manipulating elections and the subsequent protests by opposition candidates and their supporters have the potential to lead to political instability and economic decline, ultimately pushing Nigeria towards a state of fragility or complete collapse. Significant corrective measures must be implemented to address this issue. It might be argued that instances of electoral violence and widespread protests may potentially serve as catalysts for coup attempts, with the intention of justifying the restoration of public order and addressing perceived shortcomings in governance that are attributed to the current politicians of the fourth republic. This phenomenon hinders the maturation and solidification of our democratic system, resulting

in limited advantages derived from it. Hence, it becomes apparent that the Nigerian system is plagued by issues stemming from democracy rather than the electoral process itself (Osabiya, 2014).

The opinion of Adewale Adigun does not agree with the submission of Omolaso (2020) on the disruptive nature of post-election protests on Nigeria's democracy. A. Adigun (Personal Communication, January 14, 2024) opines that:

*Nigerian politicians and political classes have the mentality of a winner-takes approach to elections. Through this, they are always quick to victimize political opponents and create tension that would encourage political apathy in areas where they are unpopular. In many instances, these political misdemeanors' have only been challenged by public outcry, protest and potential civil unrest. As a matter of fact, the Amended Electoral Act and several INEC technological innovations were products of protest by opposing political parties and civil society.*

As expressed, protest against electoral irregularities helps to deepen the gain of democracy and exerts enormous pressure on electoral malfeasants. Although the fear of protest snowballing to civil unrest and threatening democracy can be understandable, the absence of the right to protest can embolden more daring election riggers in any part of the world.

### **Corruption as an Obstacle to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

The lack of responsibility, transparency, and commitment to service delivery among public office holders, along with their involvement in widespread corrupt practices, serves as a significant catalyst for the prevalence of electoral malpractices.

Civil servants and politicians seek to safeguard their acquired assets and maintain the system of political patronage for their benefit. Consequently, individuals willingly become accomplices in electoral manipulation, so posing a threat to the stability of Nigeria's democratic system. According to Ojo (2019), corruption has been widely prevalent, overt, and unabashed within the context of the new democratic system. The consequences of this action are evident in the deterioration of infrastructure and the continued existence of extreme poverty among the population in Nigeria. Interview extract with a leading Civil Society convener on free and fair election in Nigeria submitted thus:

*Many key actors in the electoral process in Nigeria are worldly and not patriotic. At every polling unit, from party agents to local election observers, there is always a subtle and direct willingness to be bribed by contending political parties, leading candidates and their supporters. We must also be very careful not to ascribe electoral corruption to the guilt of candidates and political parties alone. Many Nigerian voters now demand money as inducement before they can exercise their civil responsibilities (E. Bello, Personal Communication, January 14, 2024).*

### **Political and Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

Political and electoral violence represent significant manifestations of violence that impede the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Political violence has the potential to disturb the principles of free competition and hinder political participation while simultaneously fostering an environment that encourages mediocrity. Engaging in such actions has the potential to generate feelings of disaffection, rancour, and acrimony, hence intensifying the political system. Incidents of



thuggery and violence marked the general elections held in 2011, 2015, and 2019. The observation mentioned above indicates that a sluggish pace characterizes the progress of democracy in Nigeria and fluctuates between periods of stagnation and regression. Consequently, this situation gives rise to crises where the fundamental principles of democracy are endangered, and the governance process is susceptible to privatization or even personalization by influential individuals (Arowolo & Aluko, 2020). This was corroborated by Chinedu, a party agent of the Labour Party, Lagos Chapter argued thus:

*Nigeria's elections have become a theatre of gun battles and intimidation because of the desperate nature to win at all costs. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that violence and protest should not be witnessed in any election again because Nigeria has been operating as a democracy since 1999. The truth is that democracy in Nigeria is not a contest of ideologies but that of domination, exploitation and intimidation. An average political candidate and political party will not only plan to gain more votes but also how to intimidate and suppress popular voices, which often manifests through unlawful arrest, kidnapping, assault and assassinations (A. Chinedu, Personal Communication, January 21, 2024).*

Electoral violence constitutes a significant catalyst for political instability, posing tangible risks to the endurance of Nigeria's democratic system. On the one hand, it might be argued that democracy and peace are inherently interconnected, with elections functioning as a crucial mechanism that links the two concepts. However, elections serve not just as a means for political rivalry, participation, and legitimacy but also as a mechanism for facilitating

a peaceful transfer of power. Consequently, elections enable the establishment of accountability for people in positions of governance.

### **Threats to Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

#### ***Weak Legislature***

The legislative of the Fourth Republic is perceived as lacking in strength and being a premature institution, mostly due to its relative inexperience upon its establishment in 1999 when compared to the executive branch (Aliu & Oni, 2013). Since the military resurgence in December 1983, legislative responsibilities have been abolished. Regrettably, the initiative mentioned above had a brief duration of merely two years (1991-1993) prior to its suspension by the Abacha military dictatorship subsequent to the toppling of the Shonekan Interim National Government.

Once again, the nation patiently waited six years before being able to observe the commencement of another legislative session. However, it is important to note that the executive branch consistently maintains its position during military strikes and often assumes legislative responsibilities. The salient observation to be made is that the amalgamation of legislative and executive duties typically occurs inside the executive branch of government during periods of military intervention. Undeniably, this legislation has established a framework and societal norms within the government that heavily prioritize the executive branch. The disparate development of the two arms of government has resulted in the emergence of an excessively empowered and burdened executive

branch. This was corroborated by Former INEC ad-hoc staff in the 2023 General Election that:

*Many of the electoral irregularities in Nigeria's electoral process would have been reduced to the barest minimum if there had been a collaborative effort by the legislature and executive to accelerate improved electoral guidelines that can de-radicalize elections. Unfortunately, even the established electoral guidelines on expenditure for political parties and candidates are not fully enforced. It is so bad in Nigeria that party agents and supporters now freely advertise vote-buying to willing voters on Election Day without appropriate enforcement from security agents* (O. Balogun, Personal Communication, January 24, 2024).

### ***Depleted Ideological Political Parties***

The absence of a well-defined ideology and the deficiencies within political parties, such as a dearth of internal democratic processes, have contributed to the occurrence of undemocratic elections within the fourth republic. The characteristics of internal elections within political parties were widespread and contradictory to established democratic principles. These encompassed practises such as the imposition of candidates during party primaries, the influence of influential individuals in the form of *godfatherism*, the excessive commercialization of election procedures, and the occurrence of intra-party conflicts.

The ramifications of intra-party conflicts on the process of democratization in Nigeria encompass several key aspects. These include the phenomenon of unhappy members defecting to alternative political parties, fostering an environment of

distrust, antagonism, and indiscipline among party members, and contributing to a lack of credibility and a negative public perception of political parties. The presence of factionalized political parties in conflict poses significant obstacles to the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This situation leads to a waste of valuable time and resources, as well as a division of loyalty among party members. Moreover, it generates discontent among party members and contributes to a breakdown of party activities. Ultimately, these factors contribute to instability within the party and exacerbate tensions within the political landscape of Nigeria (Momodu & Gambo, 2013).

The actions of Godfathers have had a detrimental impact on the progress and establishment of democracy in Nigeria. The practice of *godfatherism* undermines the fundamental principles of democracy. According to Eggebulem (2015), the obstruction of the selection of competent and qualified candidates for elective positions hinders the democratic process.

### ***Pervasive Power of Incumbency Syndrome***

On the contrary, incumbency refers to the utilization of democratic processes by individuals in positions of authority for their advantage. In order to consolidate their grip on power, they strategically appropriate and control the apparatus of the state. The impunity displayed by Obasanjo's administration, for example, was characterized by its tendency to issue judgements selectively and openly disregard and disobey the principles of the rule of law. This can be attributed to the presence of ineffectual regulations and the fragility of institutional frameworks. According to Arowolo

and Aluko (2016), when political opponents are suppressed, the political environment becomes highly charged and filled with tension as the opponents attempt to maintain a sense of equilibrium among the oppressive circumstances.

The phenomenon of incumbency and impunity in party politics entails the pursuit of political power, which gives rise to detrimental rivalries inside political organizations. The prevalence of political *thuggery* within the fourth republic poses a significant challenge to the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. According to Adeosun (2017), there is a widely accepted belief that ruling politicians predominantly employ, sustain, and provide resources to thugs with the intention of undermining the election process to maximize their political benefits. Abubakar, an aspiring chairmanship candidate in the 2023 General Elections, alleged that:

*The average political behavior of Nigerian politicians considers losing re-election as a political tragedy rather than valid feedback of his performance in government. Power incumbents are the most desperate individuals in Nigeria's election. In other dimensions, this desperation is not only expressed through their re-election; they turn it into an intense electoral battle to install their anointed candidates as successors. This has contributed to the orgies of violence and de-legitimization of democratic institutions like INEC and security agencies (A. Abubakar, Personal Communication, January 21, 2024).*

The period from 1999 till a succession of electoral crises and instances of violence has marked the present. One notable example is the aftermath of the 2003 general elections, which resulted in the

loss of over one hundred innocent lives and left numerous others injured. The consequences of the 2007 elections resulted in a death toll of over three hundred individuals. Similarly, the April 2011 Presidential voting led to the loss of over 200 lives, which included numerous incidents of post-election violence in 2019 (Yusuf, 2015).

### ***Compromised Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)***

Despite notable advancements in electoral administration during the 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections, there are existing deficiencies that pose a risk to the process of democratic consolidation. One example of the issues pertaining to the impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the selection of the Chairman and electoral commissioners, financial independence, and the utilization of temporary personnel in the execution of electoral processes. According to Yusuf and Zaheruddin (2016), INEC has been consistently marked by a deficiency in terms of independence, professionalism, and administrative efficacy since its establishment in 1999. The appointment procedures for INEC commissioners, both at the federal and state levels, serve as an initial indicator of the lack of institutional autonomy within INEC.

According to the Constitution, the President is granted the power to nominate all 12 commissioners, as well as the 36 Resident Electoral Commissioners, subject to the Senate's confirmation. The exclusive authority of presidents in the selection process has significant ramifications for the popular legitimacy of the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) and its capacity to conduct elections in an unbiased manner. The consequence mentioned above poses a disconcerting challenge to the endeavor of strengthening democratic governance. The impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is expected to function as an autonomous and trustworthy institution, has consistently been a subject of scepticism (Osabiya, 2014).

Another problem is the incapacity to provide education to the illiterate majority on the significance of voting and the process of voting. Additionally, there is a lack of ability to effectively prosecute those who commit electoral offences (Nkolika & Emesibe, 2015). Consequently, these factors contribute to the erosion of democratic consolidation. In light of the imperative for comprehensive systemic reform across political, economic, and social domains, it is essential to emphasize the significance of individuals possessing integrity and honesty, such as the former chairman of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), in effectively managing election administration (Oyekanmi, 2015).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Democracy is often regarded as the most esteemed type of governance in the modern era, as it facilitates substantial citizen engagement in decision-making and policy development via elected representatives. However, the viability of democracy is compromised in situations when there is a significant disregard for fundamental democratic ideals, particularly in regard to electoral malpractice, violence, and the electoral process. The restoration of democratic governance in the

country on May 29, 1999, generated much optimism and anticipation among the public. This development offered them the opportunity to freely and fairly express their preferences for political office holders through an open and competitive electoral system.

Paradoxically, empirical evidence indicates that these desires and ambitions were not fulfilled. The electoral cycles of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 have consistently seen instances of manipulation by political elites, who employ tactics such as ballot snatching and hoarding of electoral materials to benefit specific parties and candidates unfairly. The democratization process has been hindered since the inception of the Fourth Republic. On the contrary, in order to mitigate the adverse effects on Nigeria's vulnerable state and democratic institutions, it is imperative for civil society groups and other professional organizations that played an active role in ending military rule in the country to mobilize once more. In order to facilitate the democratization and developmental processes of Nigeria, it is crucial to recognize the significance of transformational leaders across many levels of governance, including local communities, states, and the federal government.

Numerous conjectures have been advanced by researchers regarding the strategies for attaining free and equitable elections in Nigeria. Several experts have proposed a set of proposals aimed at ensuring a free and fair election in Nigeria. These recommendations include the establishment of an independent electoral authority, the independence of the court, and the implementation of stated electoral regulations. However, despite the guidelines mentioned above, Nigeria has

persistently experienced electoral malfeasance and violence. Several of the approaches employed are of a fairly advanced nature.

The proposals put out by esteemed scholars have been ineffective in addressing the challenges related to electoral malpractice in Nigeria. This failure can be attributed to the scholars' oversight in considering the contextual factors that influence the implementation of their recommendations. This paper aims to propose environmentally viable alternatives for addressing electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria, taking into account the unique characteristics of the country's environment.

Efforts should be made to address the issue of Godfatherism and incumbency, as well as to mitigate the negative impacts of violence, corruption, and impunity in order to improve the election process. The sustainability of government legitimacy and the consolidation of democracy may be compromised unless political leaders consistently uphold the principles of the rule of law, constitutionalism, and democratic values.

Furthermore, it is imperative to discourage the current practice of two consecutive four-year terms in Nigerian politics due to the influence of incumbency. The presence of incumbency has significantly hindered the conduct of elections in a manner that is both free and fair. The current officeholders have faced allegations of utilizing the governmental machinery and leveraging patronage to sway electoral outcomes in their own favour. The act of voluntarily relinquishing political power following an electoral defeat necessitates leaders who possess a sincere reverence for higher power and demonstrate a profound regard for the well-being and dignity of all individuals. In contrast, the

entire apparatus of the state is mobilized to secure electoral triumph, even in defiance of the prevailing desires of the populace. In order to mitigate the influence of incumbency on electoral manipulation, it is imperative to actively prevent the phenomenon of second-term syndrome, which is now prevalent. Consequently, it is recommended that a single term of five years be implemented as a viable alternative. In order to effectively address electoral fraud in Nigeria, it is imperative to take into account the significant socioeconomic disparity between individuals of varying economic statuses. Undoubtedly, poverty has exerted a detrimental influence on electoral behavior through three distinct mechanisms. Firstly, it fosters the practice of exchanging votes for monetary gain among the electorate. Secondly, it hampers candidates and political parties from accessing media platforms on an equitable basis, thereby impeding the dissemination of information and knowledge to citizens.

Lastly, poverty facilitates the emergence of a perilous phenomenon known as the godfather-godson syndrome. The coexistence of intellectual poverty and economic poverty has created fertile ground for political manipulation. Several factors have presented obstacles to achieving political equity. An individual vying for office with substandard qualifications and a limited understanding of government may accumulate substantial wealth. This wealth empowers them to interact with intellectually curious individuals, create informative posters for educating the electorate, and provide incentives to various stakeholders in the electoral process.

This occurrence stems from the potential capacity of affluent candidates or their influential backers to utilize their resources in order to sway economically disadvantaged individuals, either before or on Election Day, thereby manipulating the voting process and electoral results. There exists an equal possibility of engaging in the purchase of votes, as well as influencing polling and counting authorities and law enforcement personnel who are experiencing financial need. The complicity of electoral officials in enabling election manipulation by affluent politicians is evident. The existence of poverty has facilitated the creation of a concerning phenomenon in Nigerian politics known as godfatherism and godson syndrome. In many instances, godfathers are individuals of affluence who strategically endorse financially disadvantaged politicians with the aim of reaping electoral gains.

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