

**ELECTIONS AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN
NIGERIA: TOWARDS A NEXUS**

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to examine *Elections and the Quest for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Towards a Nexus*. The objectives were: to examine the role of credible election in deepening democracy in Nigeria; to evaluate the extent to which the general elections since 1999 have laid the foundation for democratic consolidation in Nigeria; to examine the effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in election management in Nigeria; to examine the place of Constitutional/ Legal and Institutional factors in democratic Consolidation in Nigeria; and to identify the factors inhibiting credible, free and fair elections as well as democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The study adopted the survey research design, deploying the purposive sampling technique and Taro Yamane to determine the sample size and population. Primary data were gathered through questionnaires while secondary data were collected from published documents.

The study found that there is a substantial connection between periodic elections and democratic consolidation. This is because elections provide political education and consciousness among citizens and ensure that political leaders hearken to the demands of the public. It also shows that INEC has fared well in the conduct of elections and that series of electoral reforms have contributed to improving the conduct of elections in Nigeria. Specifically, the Electoral Act 2022 has reformed the electoral process by granting INEC financial autonomy, early part primaries, the extension of the timeframe for campaigns by political parties, the establishment of a central electronic voter database, electoral technology, etc.

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommended that critical actors in the nation's electoral space should synergize to improve the health, vitality and credibility of elections in

Nigeria: This can be achieved through the following: a. the independence of the judiciary and timely dispensation of judgments arising from elections before the winner is sworn-in; b. transparent voting and counting; c. voter registration and issuance of PVCs should be a continuous exercise in order not to disenfranchise some Nigerians who genuinely want to vote in elections. The study further recommended increased and adequate funding of INEC; adequate security to protect electoral materials and officials; etc.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

The yearning to evolve an administrative structure that avails the people the chance to assume seamless control of the leadership recruitment processes resulted in the demand for democratic governance from Europe to Asia, America to Africa and indeed across the globe (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). This was bolstered by Resolution 217 of the United Nations General Assembly's declaration of Fundamental Human Rights at the Third Session on the 10th December, 1948 Paris Summit. This is also reinforced by the support of some international organizations and development agencies in the believe that democracy would ensure equity, peace and justice and ultimately, good governance (Harry, 2008). Basically, world leader see democracy as the solution for mis-governance and this explains the quest for the consolidation of democracy in the United Nations member states. Election is a basic component that engenders seamless transition of authority from one regime to the other in every democracy (Oni, Eramah & Oladejo, 2017). Election is therefore, the means through which the people/electorate choose their leaders who in turn wield authority and run the affairs of the state built upon the peoples'/ state set agenda and programme designed to be accomplished by the elected leaders (Oni, Eramah & Oladejo, 2017; Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011). Election serves the purpose as the only channel of transition from bitter experiences of war and misgovernance in war torn, authoritarian and democratic states. Election therefore, avails the citizens the space for expression in hitherto authoritarian regimes. It provides governments the exclusive opportunity for legitimacy and is also a recognized way of building trust in former authoritarian states and also a way to validate negotiated political pacts (Oni, Eramah & Oladejo, 2017).

It is therefore, safe to state that elections are central characteristics in every democracy. This is because of the moderating and mitigating effects elections have on the process of political recruitment and in ensuring stability in society (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). Elections provide the citizens the opportunity to choose their leaders from among contestants across democracies. According to Ashindorbe (2018), elections are fundamental components and support systems in the democratic process as they underscore the principles of political or popular participation, accountability, legitimacy, freedom to choose, justice, and rule of law. Hence, when elections are credible, free, and fair, they engender peaceful political power transition and guarantee political stability. For Oni, Eramah and Oladejo (2017), election avails stable democracies a seamless transitory process and also serves as a way of strengthening an already perceived perfect system. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, the history of elections has been pervaded by all shades of malpractices and threats to statehood based on the high premium placed on political power and the primitive acquisition of both power and wealth that have engendered divisive and centrifugal mechanism. Thus, the delicate nature of Nigeria's democratic institutions has been blamed on poor/ shallow democratic culture among Nigerians (Majekodunmi & Adejuwon, 2012; Omodia, 2012; Ojukwu & Oni, 2016).

Elections in Nigeria since the nation's return to civil in 1999 have continued to be characterized by vicious circle of wanton systemic manipulations by the political elite that have attracted attention from both domestic and international actors. Consequently, it has engendered series of reforms and legislation in a continuous effort to align Nigeria's democracy with international standards (Suberu, 2007; Adeosun 2014; Ojukwu, Mazi-Mba & Maduekwe, 2019). For Igbokwe-Ibeto, et al (2016), there were high hopes and great expectations on May 29, 1999 following Nigeria's return to democratic rule and democratization after almost three decades of military

interregnum. According to Omotola (2014), though the military regime that supervised Nigeria's return to civil rule failed in its effort to significantly convince Nigerians on its success, vast majority the masses still believed it could herald the dawn of good governance in the country. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria succinctly captures and empowers the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to plan and administer elections in the country. Nigeria's democracy has continued to grow in leaps and bounds especially in the area of election management and has gone through six consecutive election circles counting from 1999. The 2015 experience where the incumbency factor failed to count bolstered peoples' thrust in the nation's electoral umpire and the entire democratic process. However, the alarming high handedness displayed by the ruling political party in manipulating the 1999, 2003 and 2007 electoral process, leading to political killings, religious bigotry, industrial actions, insecurity and other socio-economic maladies (Ayoade, 2008) remain serious cases of reference.

Interestingly, the 2011 General Elections presented a different scenario and became a great indication that democracy is a prerequisite for good governance and development. Oni, Eramah and Oladejo (2017) opined that the experiences before and after the elections indicated that nation's democracy grew drastically through the exercise (building of the strengths and avoiding the mistakes). Ken Nnamani (cited in Vanguard Newspaper 10 January, 2012) was of the opinion that the governorship and senatorial elections that brought Governor Rochas Okoracha of Imo state and Senator Chris Ngige of Anambra Central senatorial district to power in 2011 were clear testimonies that peoples will supersedes that of the minority elites in elections, if the masses persist despite all odds.

INEC's continuous efforts at reforming and completely overhauling the nation's electoral process by evolving a proactive election management body was a huge success at institutionalizing

democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Oni, Eramah & Oladejo, 2017). The deployment of the services of academic Professors (PhD holders) to all the polling centers nationwide as collation and returning officers was another boost to getting elections right in Nigeria. This according to Oni, Eramah and Oladejo (2017) and Mark (2015) was aimed at sanitizing the rot in INEC, and bring to bear the role of competent and unbiased umpire in election administration in Nigeria as a harbinger of democratic consolidation. This study therefore scrutinizes the interface of election administration and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic with reference to some selected issues in the Electoral Act 2022 and what they portend for Nigeria's contemporary democratic practice.

1.2. Statement of the Study Problem

Democracy, is undoubtedly the most accepted system of government in the contemporary world. Among the fundamental principles of democracy is citizens popular participation in politics by deciding who governs the state on their behalf (Elaigwu, 2014; Igokwe-Ibeto et al, 2016). According to the National Democratic Institute (2011), it is crucial to note that a functional democracy needs an active public that is in full-grasp how to voice its interests, act collectively, and hold public officeholders accountable through credible electoral process. For Igokwe *et al* (2016), functional democracy can also be achieved through democratic participation in forms of debate, and voting at elections. Elections ultimately encompasses a set of programmes and activities culminating in the selection of peoples' representatives/ leaders to hold certain public offices in trust for the greater good of the society. Scholars have asserted that there is a strong connection between free, fair and credible elections and democratic governance, peace and development across democracies (Innocent, Alhassan & George, 2012; Elaigwu, 2014; Igokwe-Ibeto et al, 2016). They noted that free, fair and credible elections provide the basis for democratic,

accountable and legitimate governments with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated development programmes to thrive.

Therefore, credible elections are indispensable in achieving political stability, democratic governance and national development (Omotola, 2014). Efforts at democratizing Nigeria politically dated back to 1959/1960 when the country at independence opted for the parliamentary system of government that was short-lived following the January 15th 1966 coup d'etat that ousted the Zik/Balewa led government. Again, in 1979 the military government led by Brig. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo returned power to civilians in a presidential system that had Alh. Shehu Aliyu Shagari as the president. This government was sacked by the military in December 31st 1983. This was quickly followed by the aborted third republic following the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections that was believed to have been won by late Moshood Kolawole Abiola. Sequel to intense domestic and international pressures on the military government, as well as the sudden demise of the then military Head of State General Sani Abacha, the military government finally returned power to dully elected civilian government in May 1999 (Innocent, Alhassan, & George, 2012). There have been regular and periodic elections in Nigeria since the reins of power and authority was returned to civilians; the nation's election management body (INEC) have thus far conducted six consecutive general elections for the first time in the Nigeria's political antecedent. Therefore, it is safe to state that the Fourth republic has been marked by an extraordinary progress towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Omotola, 2014; Innocent, Alhassan & George, 2012). Although elections are now more regular in Nigeria, the quality of these elections is a matter of grave concern to both the actors and observers.

There was serious dissatisfaction that resulted in the avalanche legal tussles that were before the election tribunals and courts with the concomitant or resultant nullification of election results

ranging from Anambra in 2006, Edo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Bayelsa, Kogi to Imo State. The question that arises include; Is there anything wrong with constitutional and legal provisions regarding election management in Nigeria? Is this development healthy for democratic consolidation or does it portend danger for the nation's democracy? Etc. This development suggests the need to interrogate electoral laws, performance of the elections management body (INEC) and the significance of elections within Nigeria's democratic process. This is necessary especially against the backdrop of Arab spring that swept through the Arab nations in the 21st century and military incursions in some West African countries in recent years. It is against this backdrop the study addressed the following research questions.

1.3. Research questions

- i. How can credible election deepen democracy in Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent has the 2015 General Elections contributed to democratic consolidation in Nigeria?
- iii. How effective was the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in managing the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria?
- iv. Where is the place of Constitutional/ Legal and Institutional factors in democratic consolidation in Nigeria?
- v. What are the factors inhibiting credible, free and fair elections as well as democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

1.4. Research objectives

Broadly, this study seeks to examine the role of elections in democratic consolidation in Nigeria with specific evaluation of selected issues in the Electoral Act 2022. Specifically, the study would:

- i. Examine the role of credible election in deepening democracy in Nigeria;
- ii. Evaluate the extent to which the 2015 General Elections have contributed to democratic consolidation in Nigeria;
- iii. Examine the effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in managing the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria;
- iv. Examine the place of constitutional/ legal and institutional factors in democratic Consolidation in Nigeria; and
- v. Identify the factors inhibiting credible, free and fair elections as well as democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

1.5. Scope of the study

This study focuses on elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with a special attention on some selected issues in the Electoral Act, 2022. It is also focused on the Fourth Republic (1999-2022) because this period serves as the longest democratic experience Nigeria has experienced as a democratic state after series of military interregnum. Also, under this same period, Nigeria has conducted six consecutive elections and five successful transitions even from one political party to another (i.e. 2015 General Election won by Muhammad Buhari of the opposition APC and lost by the Incumbent Goodluck Jonathan of the ruling PDP). This scope will also foster clarity and a better understanding of the objectives and findings of the subject-matter of study.

The geographical delimitation of this study is the Nigeria which consists of 36 states and the FCT and the 774 local government areas. The choice of Nigeria stems from its position in Africa especially West Africa in terms of size, resources and role in regional politics. The choice is also appropriate considering that it has practiced democratic government for 23 years and running and

for successfully transiting from one administration to another and from one political party to another.

1.6. Significance of the study

Election is central to democracy and its trappings such as good governance, accountability, human right, etc. The significance of the study is the value or contribution which the research intends to make to existing knowledge in terms of theoretical justification and relevance. Also, the study proffered solutions towards achieving credible, free and fair elections and deepening democracy in Nigeria.

At theoretical level, this study examines Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, lay critically analyzing some selected Issues in the Electoral Act, 2022. With this therefore, the study has enriched the existing stock of literature to expand the frontiers of knowledge through its findings, that will serve as a source of data/materials for scholars and researchers who may be interested in further studies in the area. The study has the potential of great benefit to policy makers, political actors, international and multinational institutions like the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, etc.

1.7. Organization of the Study

Chapter one captures the background to the study, statement of the study problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the scope, justification and the significance. Chapter two reviews literature relevant to the variables being studied as well as the theoretical framework of analysis for the study. Chapter three discussed the research methodology, while chapter four

analyzed the data from the field survey. Finally, chapter five provided the overall summary of the study, conclusion, and the recommendations based on the findings in chapter four.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Conceptual Review

2.1.1. Election

An election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office in trust for the good of the greater majority. Thus, it is the popular mechanism by which modern representative democracy operates since the 17th century (Stokes, 1999). It is through elections that various public offices at all levels are filled across democracies; ranging from legislative, executive and in rare cases judicial positions are constituted through competitive elections (Innocent, Alhassan & George, 2012). Similarly, Adeosun (2014) defined election as the means through which the people exercise their sovereign right to decide those who govern them as well as what the priorities of the government should pursue.

According to Ojukwu, Mazi-Mba and Maduekwe (2019) elections give the people the opportunity to express their sovereignty through the ballot to bestow legitimacy on the government, renew government's mandate when the and arises or withdraw from it the authority to govern the society. For the Independent National Electoral Commission (2019), election is a prerequisite for a transparent and accountable government. For Gwinn and Nortan, (1992) and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2016), election represents the formal process of choosing leaders to occupy public offices or accepting or rejecting a policy proposition of government through voting. They maintained that an election is a major channel through which a society may organize itself to influence the policies and decisions of government. They further added that when election is perceived to be credible, free and fair, it serves a dual purpose as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society, and as a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice

of the citizens' fundamental and basic rights and freedom (p.14). Ultimately, the fundamental goal of a democratic election is to guarantee citizens' freedom of choice and to ensure that the minority have their say but that majority will prevail.

For Oni (2016) election is a widely accepted mechanism for transferring the peoples' sovereignty governmental authority/ power to public officeholders in modern democracies by which electorates cast votes for their preferred candidates or parties in a competitive manner. Oni further posits that leaders are chosen to "represent the people in both the legislative and executive arms of government" (p. 229) at all levels of governance in the country. Oni, Erameh & Oladejo (2017) are of the view that election offers "the platform for debate, persuasion and common rules for choosing representatives of the people who can serve in executive, legislative, and other institutions of government". Therefore, election is a critical mechanism for social conflict management through peaceful deliberations and decision-making processes where parties with conflicting interests abide by promises extracted before the election. This provides a very potent avenue for the looser to provide constructive criticism as the opposition or merely wait for another election circle.

Similarly, Harry and Kalagbor (2021), see election as the selection of a person or persons for office(s) through ballot and making choice between alternatives. Hence, they define electoral process as the means deployed in choosing persons for political offices in a state or an organization. In concurrence to Harry and Kalagbor view above, Oni, Erameh and Oladejo (2017), see electoral frauds or malpractices as aberration, anomaly, improper, illegal, deceitful or immoral behaviours and conducts which impair or impedes the achievement of credible, free and fair electoral processes. For Onyeka (2002), a fair electoral process must have some fundamental structures, which include among others:

- Statutory provisions establishing the electoral management body;
- Delineation of wards/constituencies;
- Registration of political parties;
- Voter registration;
- Recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff;
- Procurement of electoral material, and logistic;
- Screening of candidates;
- Provision of polling agents monitoring agents;
- Actual voting, accreditation of voters, and counting votes; and
- Providing avenues for settlement of disputed results.

Jega (2014), opined that the basic thing election seeks to do is to choose the public official who are supposed to represent and make pro-people decisions in government. He posits that an electoral process reinforces the concept of self-rule, celebrates it, and legitimizes governmental power. Elections, according to Jega, extend and enhance the amount of popular participation in the political system adding electoral history started with restrictive voting based on property ownership and tax payment. The basic constituents of the electoral process according to Jega, include: political parties, political opinions, pressure groups and the mass media. They all converge on the electoral process to determine whom the leaders would be and ensure that the elected official will represent their constituencies effectively. There are some basic conditions needed for the conduct of credible, free and fair elections. They include:

- i. An honest competent, non-partisan institution to administer elections;
- ii. Extant laws as well as enabling rules and regulations;

- iii. A developed system of political parties; and
- iv. An independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws.

Elections do not meet international credibility standards of being “free and fair” in democracies with weak rule of law, as a result of incumbency interferences and the absence of strong institutions. Leaders lacking in democratic principles and character may take advantage of their being government to remain in power against popular will by deploying state resources – the police, censorship, physical implementation of the election mechanism, etc. Political parties with absolute majority in both legislature and the executive arms of government to enact laws or/ and make policies stipulating the electoral mechanisms including eligibility and district boundaries that are capable of jeopardizing the balance of power in a state. Similarly, non-governmental entities/ non-state actors can also interfere with elections, through physical force, verbal intimidation, deployment of state-owned media or fraud, which can result in inducement of voters or manipulation of election results.

2.1.2. Democracy

The concept of democracy is subject to diverse meanings and interpretations because political science is vast with different schools of thought sharing their views on every issue such as understanding democracy. Therefore, democracy represents different things to different people: a platform for power contestation and not the least a class struggle (Buhari, 2015). However, a plethora of definitions have been adduced about what constitutes a democracy, there is so far no consensus on the definition of democracy. Schumpeter (1947) as quoted in Xing (2021) famously stated that democracy ultimately entails that the people have the opportunity to either accept or reject those who have been saddled with the governance of the society. Therefore, it is safe to say

that there is no democracy devoid of regular and periodic elections. Hence, democracy suggests conducting elections and selecting those that will represent the majority and hold the sovereign power in trust for the state (Adeosun, 2014; Oni, Eramah and Oladejo, 2017; Harry and Kalagbor, 2021). Similarly, Elaigwu (2014) capture democracy to mean the power of the people as it manifests in ways of thinking, behaving, and organizing that enhance participation in and influence over the decisions affecting their everyday lives.

Democratic process becomes possible through public debates, election and representation, through consensus building and formidable decision-making mechanisms (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). Therefore, democracy suggests a political system that is basically hinged on periodic, free, fair and credible elections in which political parties field candidates in competitive elections to select those who in turn constitute government (Mark, 2015). In such environment, citizens of voting age (18 years and above in the case of Nigeria) enjoy the civic right that enables them to vote and be voted for as long as they are not restricted by any law, regulations or judgment. Besides, Osinakachukwu & Jawan (2011) suggest that democracy is a political system that is considered democratic because the most popular candidates are selected by means that is credible, fair and periodic elections which allows candidates a level playing field to freely compete for votes and in which the adult population who are not limited by any institutional or legal instruments are qualified to vote. Hence, democracy promotes political participation among legally qualified adult in the state. Therefore, public participation in politics especially is a veritable ingredient that covers legitimacy to any elected government. Noteworthy is the fact that any government that emerge from an election lacking public participation cannot boast of legitimacy for any reason. If conceptualization of democracy is correct, then election is key to democratic governance as there will be no government without election.

Social scientists especially of Western origin are unanimous that in their belief that democracy originated from the ancient Greek city states of Athens (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). This school of thought stated that democracy as a term was coined in Ancient Greece in 5000BC (World Bank, 2004; Encyclopedia, 2006). Thereafter, the principles and practice of democracy began to spread to other regions and countries of the world, including Nigeria, through colonial incursions (Harry, 2008; Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). The arguments of this school met a strong opposition in African social scientists such as Leo Oyewale, Sule Kano, Alex Gboyega, etc. Most African scholars of the Twentieth Century argued that African states in general especially Nigeria in particular had and still have the contextual manifestations of the tenets and practice of democracy akin to what obtained in the Greek city state of Athens (Adeosun, 2014; Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). Thus, it is safe to state that contextually, democracy is not new to Africa and Nigeria. Prior to colonialism, there were strong and renowned kingdoms, empires and acephalous societies such as the Oyo empire, Benin Kingdom, the Kingdom of Kerma (2500-1500 BC), Kingdom of Punt (2400-1069 BCE) and the Swahili Coast (50 CE-), the Kingdom of Ife (200 BCE – 1914 CE), the Ghana Empire (300-1240 CE), the Kingdom of Nri (948-1911 CE), Kwararafa Confederacy, Mali, Bornu and Songhai Empires, etc. had most of the features of modern states and systems of government akin to democratic system of government (Oni, 2014; Egwu, 2015). Some pre-colonial political systems that experienced democracy were the Igbos, Tivs, Yorubas, Kalabaris, Ibibios, Ashantis, Zulus, among others.

What then constitutes a democracy? Like many other concepts in the social sciences, democracy has been given different meanings and interpretations by different scholars to emphasize their understandings of the practice. Lijphart (1999), explained that the disparities in understanding and views of democracy are largely based on ways various democratic societies are organized and

administered. Ake (1996) while in agreement with Lijphart, opines that in spite of the variegated understandings and views on the concept of democracy among scholars, the meaning of democracy is uncharacteristically precise and specific. Ake (1996) further summed up the concept of democracy to mean “popular power, rule by the demos”. Hence, democracy is a political system where the people vote for government of their choice, its decisions, such as questions of whether to approve or reject laws or policy proposals, etc. (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). Thus, citizens popular participation in the politics and governance processes is a major ingredient in a democracy. One other fundamental element of a democratic system is that government consults with the citizens through public opinion sampling before major decisions are made (Eke & Oghoator, 2018). This perhaps explains why a former United States President, Abraham Lincoln in 1863, in an address at Gettysburg, opined that democracy is “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. What is clear in this Lincoln’s view is the fact that in a democracy the government is constituted from among the people for themselves to serve their collective interests or carry out their wishes (Eke & Aghoator, 2018; Harry & Kalagbor, 2021).

Essentially, in a democracy the rights of the people are usually guaranteed through constitutional provisions and there is the availability of independent judiciary to secure these rights. Whereas free, fair, credible, open and non-violent elections are critical ingredients of representative and constitutional democracy, other principal elements of democracy are: respect for the rule of law, multiple political parties, free and objective media, independence of the judiciary; majority rule and minority rights, political equality and popular consent by the people. With respect to Africa (which includes Nigeria) Ake (1996) prescribes the kind of Democracy which Africa needs to include a democracy in which the people have some real decision making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice which, among others, should include a powerful legislature

and decentralization of power to local democratic institutions; a democracy that places emphasis on concrete political and socio-economic rights and not abstract political rights; a democracy that recognizes collective right together with individual rights, such as the rights of ethnic groups, sub-nationalities and communities and a democracy of incorporation or inclusiveness which makes provision for representation of youths, women's groups, labour unions and other mass organizations in the legislative organs of government.

In the context of the fore going, Dahl cited in Diamond (2013) argues that democracy is:

A system of government that meets three essential conditions; an extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially political parties), for all elective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies at least through regular and fair elections, so that no major (adult) social group is excluded, and a level of civil and political liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

Hence, democracy clearly requires institutional mechanisms, established procedures and organization such as political parties, legislatures, interest groups through which public opinion is translated into government policy. The notion of government of the people, by the people and for the people is that, through periodic elections, public officials could be held accountable for their activities and those adjudged to have performed below expectations are defeated at the polls. The threat of defeat, according to Bangura (2008), is expected to motivate public officers to be responsible and responsive. The most important elements encapsulating the democratic agenda are popular participation, equitable representation and accountability. Thus, democracy provides

ample opportunities for the citizens to make their inputs in the policy process. In other words, democracy affords the citizens the chances to contribute to decisions that affect their lives and environments. It is also an avenue for the creation of the required political infrastructure by means of which diverse interests are aggregated and addressed and the institutionalization of mechanism to hold leaders accountable to the public will as well providing the means for removal of government from power without resorting to military approach.

Indeed, through the active practice of the democratic process, principles of accountability is institutionalized which in return acts as catalysts to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. World Bank (2015) and Haxhiu & Alidemaj (2021) added that through these principles, leaders are held accountable for their actions and inactions in the public realm by the collectivity of the citizenry acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives. From the foregoing, it would have been clear that democracy consists not only in “winning elections” but also and, more importantly, in establishing organic relations with the people and allowing them to control their leaders by holding them to account (World Bank, 2015.) This may sound abstract, particularly in Nigeria, where the political gladiators who conversed and solicit for votes from the electorates soon afterwards, abandoned the electorate as they assume office claiming as most often has been the case, that their political fortune was divine and not challengeable by any human institutions. In situations like this, elections become ritualistic and formalistic, incapable of changing anything.

2.1.3 Democratic Consolidation

Like democracy, the conceptualization democratic consolidation also varies from one scholar to another. However, the various definitions of democratic consolidation as advanced by scholars are hinged on two conceptions of democracy. One is a “minimalist conception”, emphasizing

procedural or formal democracy (Igbokwe, et al, 2016). The other is a “maximalist conception,” focusing on the outcomes of politics, such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality (Ibid.). building on the Schumpeterian conception of democracy (that equates democracy, with regularly held electoral competition), Elaigwu (2014) portrays the minimalist school of thought of a consolidated democratic regime as “the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and competition that are reliably known, regularly practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectives, that participate in democratic governance”. Igbokwe et al (2016) succinctly capture consolidated democracy to mean a democracy in which “none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces or institutions consider(s) that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers”. Simply put, democracy must be seen as “the only game in town” for effective consolidation. In other words, everyone works assiduously towards ensuring that democracy is maintained.

Conversely, many scholars adopt “out-come-oriented conceptions” of democracy, or a maximalist conception of democratic consolidation (Igbokwe, et al, 2016; Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). These scholars posit that both political and socioeconomic democracy is needed for a country’s democracy to be consolidated (Innocent, Alhassan, George, 2012). This school of thought emphasizes not only procedural or formal democracy but also substantive democratic elements, such as guarantees of basic civil rights, democratic accountability and responsiveness, civilian control over the military, democratic and constitutional checks on executive authority, and punishment of occupational and human rights abuses (Innocent, Alhassan & George, 2012).

Ultimately, democratic consolidation entails the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its numerous dimensions has been improved upon: “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent (Diamond, 2013). This therefore, means that beyond the importance of elections to select public officeholders, participatory democracy, human rights and civil liberties, systemic accountability, and inclusive system are the ingredients for democratic consolidation. Democratic consolidation refers to democratic experiment that can stand the test of time and survive despite all odds.

2.2. Literature/Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Election

Election is central to democracy as without election governance will not be participatory (Oni, Eramah & Oladejo, 2017). Hence, democracy connotes a form of government in which the people periodically choose those who will govern them at the different levels of governance. Therefore, it is through elections that citizens choose their representatives, participate in the policy process and the overall governance process (Igbokwe-Iboko, et al, 2016). For, Jega (2015) election presupposes the exercise of a choice among alternatives and constitutes a veritable and popular means of recruitment of political leadership and determination of issues and policies in democratic societies.

Similarly, Mark (2015) argued that election is an act of choosing by vote the candidates of one’s choice for a position, especially political office(s). Mark lays credence to Elaigwu (2014)), when he averred that election is a device for filling an office or post through choice made by a designated

body of people, the electorate. In the same way, Fadoju (2015) describe election as the process of electing qualified candidates into an existing vacant political post in a democratic setting. It is basically a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or group of individuals to hold public office on their behalf for a specific tenure. To Ashindorbe (2018), it refers to the process of selection by votes of a person or persons from among competing candidates for a position, especially a political office. Presenting a broader perspective to the concept, Nwoli (2007) defines election as:

The process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organization or group by the votes of its qualified members. Such an election may be in a university seeking a Vice-Chancellor, a corporate organization choosing a chairman, a political party conducting its primaries to choose its standard bearer for a presidential contest, a nation wanting to choose its president, or an international organization selecting its secretary general.

Election is a democratic process to choose the peoples' representatives to participate in the governance of a country. As Natarajan (2018) has argued, in a democracy, and only in a democracy, that election gives citizens an opportunity to give their assent or denial to the way the government has been working. Within this process lies the accountability principle democracy offers to the people in the sense that political leaders are periodically called to give account of their stewardship through the ballot. It is believed that in a democracy those in government stand for the welfare, well-being and aspirations of the people (Natarajan, 2018). Natarajan (2018) further asserts that, "if the people are satisfied with the performance of those in government at the next election they express their satisfaction by voting to return their representatives or where they are not satisfied they vote them out of office. In a democracy, the right to vote during elections is the

main way the citizens of a nation influence the decisions about how their country is governed. Therefore, to win an election politicians have to persuade the people to support them. It is for this reason election is very important. Commenting on the importance of elections, Brown (2003; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al, 2016) cited in Wallsworth (2015) posits that “elections provide legitimacy through direct popular participation, and in turn, legitimacy creates capacity for effective governance”. Other importance of election includes; it is used to check and control the activities of government; through election voters alternate between being the rulers of the polity and subjects of the government, and, by the act of voting the people demonstrate that sovereignty belongs to them, acting as master to select their government to come (Harry, 2014). The modern method of election, which consists of public choice of government officials, did not emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe (Gibbins, Eulah & Webb, 2009). Subsequently, elections have been the usual mechanism by which public offices are filled in modern representative democracies.

Osinakachukwu & Jawan (2011), states that election facilitates and shapes democracy. Democracy is regarded as the best form of government because its ideology promotes peoples’ will. The people have political right to decide who should govern them in a free and fair conduct called ‘election’. Therefore, elections constitute an essential principle in liberal democracy. Election in a democracy is very important because it is through which that the expression of the people are shown via legitimacy and leadership succession. According to Dickerson, et al. (1990) election is defined as a post mortem that investigate the record of office holders whose actual performance may have little to do with promises made when they were previously elected. This is a way of censuring, reposing function in a ruler that is popularly accepted and ejecting an unpopular leader. This

method shuns mutiny and chaos in a system hence it reflects peaceful hand-over from one administration to the other so long as the process is devoid of election rigging.

2.2.3. Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation encompasses all efforts channeled towards deepening the tenets and practice of democracy and eradicating or reducing threats to a newly instituted democratic system of government in order to allow it to grow to maturity for a sustained period and deliver on the dividends of democracy (Harry & Kalagbor, 2021). For Ojo, (2014), the idea of democratic consolidation was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, which was to achieve durability of the regimes or of expanding their life expectancy for a long time and of making them immune to the threat of authoritarian regression. Similarly, Grassi (2011) posits that democratic consolidation entails “the process of defining and firmly establishing the essential characteristics of the structures and norms inherent in a democratic regime”. Taking into holistic cognizance of basic features, tenets and norms for the consolidation of democracy in a state, Ojo (2014) outlined the conditions that are essential for the actualization of democratic consolidation. These conditions according to him, consists:

...popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty and economic stabilization.

Equally, democratic consolidation or a consolidated democracy can also be used to designate a democracy that is unlikely to breakdown or collapse despite the strain, stress and challenges facing it or as Iboi (2017) put it: “consolidation of democracy simply means the entrenchment or upholding of values of democracy”. It is measured by the extent to which a country has regular free and fair elections, genuine contestation over selection of leaders, citizenship participation in the electoral process, etc. (Ojukwu, Mba & Maduekwe, 2019). Linz and Stephen (1996) as captured by Ojo (2014) have listed five mutually inclusive supportive conditions for a consolidated democracy in addition to the existence of a state to include: the development of a free and lively civil society; a relatively autonomous and valued political society; the rule of law to guarantee citizens’ freedom and enforcement of their rights; an effective, efficient and dynamic state bureaucracy and a strong, productive and progressive and prosperous economy (economic society). Furthermore, Adeosun (2014) posit that economic reforms and expansion are necessary conditions that help in the sustenance of democratic regimes. According to these scholars, “economic expansion reduces the conflicts resulting from inequality or other social cleavages and accordingly mutes tendency to political alienation, polarization and destabilizing social violence.” Succinctly captured, a country is adjudged a democratic state “when democracy becomes routinized, institutionalized and normalized to the extent that acting outside its tenets and practices or desecration of democratic norms is both unappealing and disadvantageous for every politician and other political actor in the polity” (Gorokhovskaia, 2017). In contrast to popular views on democratic consolidation, Gorokhovskaia (2017) has observed and rightly too that, the durability of democracies does not appear to exempt or insulate them from a degradation in the quality of their democracy. It therefore means that, democratic consolidation is not necessarily about how long the democratic regime has lasted, but how well are the depth of the tenets, practices and

processes of democracy or how well do politicians and political actors uphold or observe the democratic principles in the society. The behavior, attitude and disposition of political office holders and the citizenry towards the democratic culture of “one man one vote”, rule of law, protection of human rights and peaceful co-existence are the core indicators of entrenched democracy/ democratic consolidation.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Considering the avalanche of theories of democratic consolidation, this study considers the adoption of the institutionalization and informal rules theory to guide the course of this work.

Institutionalization: Proponents of the institutionalization theory, are of the belief that the process by which a democracy becomes consolidated encompasses the creation and improvement of secondary institutions of the democracy. To Linz (1999) and Linz & Stephen (1996) opined that democracy is consolidated by the presence of the right institutions supporting and surrounding elections (such as the rule of law, electoral laws, constitution, etc.). According to Innocent, Alhassan & George (2012) and Igbokwe-Ibeto et al. (2016), certain institutional and legal frameworks must be in place to guide the actions and the inactions of political actors and citizens in the context of not just elections, but on other components of democracy. Therefore, democratic consolidation becomes near impossible where these institutional and legal frameworks are lacking.

On the contrary, O’Donnell (1988) suggests that the institutionalization of electoral rules is not the most interesting feature of democratic consolidation. For O’Donnell, the most important move is to compare the formal institutional rules (for example the constitution, electoral Act) with the informal practices of actors within the polity. Democratic consolidation in this perspective is when the actors in a system follow (have informally institutionalized) the formal rules of the democratic

institution (Igbokwe-Ibeto, et al. 2016). In clear terms, democratic consolidation becomes achieved when political actors and citizens understand within their informal dealings that certain actions and inactions are inimical for democracy to thrive and abandons such actions but embrace in full gear things and behaviors that foster and represent democratic tenets and practices.

This study adopts the informal rules approach. This is because, the inability of Nigeria to meet the challenges of rising expectations within the polity as well as lack of accountability and active citizenship have undermined democracy in the country. For Innocent, Alhassan & George (2012), the operational norm of democracy in Nigeria is less about political competition, but is more about public accountability and active citizenship, and the ability to adhere to the norms has been eroded on the altar of governance. Other factors include the inability of the political leaders to create an environment of shared ownership in the practice of governance and in the generation of ideas needed to govern as well as inability of the state to meet the challenge of rising expectations within the polity.

This approach is suitable for this study considering the fact that there are constitutional and other legal frameworks as well as institutional frameworks such as the INEC, Electoral Act, etc. in place to strengthen the nation's democracy and bring about democratic consolidation in Nigeria. However, political actors in their engagements constituted threats to the nation's young democracy despite the Electoral Act 2006, 2010, etc. and series of amendments to engender sanity and decorum in Nigeria's political terrain. Interestingly, sustained concerted efforts of successive administrations through the National Assembly to protect democratic rule in Nigeria is yielding positive results. Thus, this approach will help to ascertain whether political actors will on the informal setting seek to protect civil rules even when the odds are against them or not. It will also help in meeting the objectives of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter captured the various components of the methodology that will be adopted for the study. It also explains the various research methods that was deployed to achieve the objectives of this study.

3.1. Research Design

This study was focused on the role of elections in democratic consolidation in Nigeria's political space through the analysis of some selected issues in the Electoral Act 2022. Literature indicates that good governance, accountability, participatory democracy, human right, etc. are tied to credible, free and fair election. The study adopted the survey research design. This consists of both primary and secondary data. Data for the study were sourced from multiple sources that are quantitative, qualitative, other content, and historical in nature. Also, primary data were sourced through the administration of questionnaires, while secondary data were collected through the consultation of textbooks, journals articles, newspapers and magazines, periodicals, newsletters, conference and seminar papers, monographs, and other unpublished materials relevant to this study. The choice of these sources enhanced details of the various shades of public and stakeholders on the issue of elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

3.2. Sources of Data

This study utilized use both the primary and secondary data. Primary data were be sourced through the use of questionnaires administered to stakeholders such as policymakers and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Whereas, secondary data have been sourced from official publications of the federal government, 1999 Constitution (as amended) and Electoral Act 2022,

books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, etc., and other relevant materials were sourced from the internet.

3.3. Population of the Study

This section discuss the population of this study which was conducted in the Federal Capital Territory. According Varden Bergh and Katz (1999), population is a group of people from which a sample can be selected from for the purpose of conducting research. Therefore, a population is the total collection of elements from which inference is drawn. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the research population consists Nigerians in the FCT. The total population of the FCT is 3,095,118 going by the 2006 National Population Census.

3.4. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The simple random sampling technique was adopted for the study. The simple random sampling technique avails every member of the population the opportunity of being selected thus eliminating any form of bias that may arise from the researcher's judgment. On the other hand, the sample size is fairly adequate to enable the study engage on acceptable generalization of the findings of the study. The sample size for this study have been determined by using Taro Yamane's Formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where: n = corrected sample size =?

e = Margin of Error (MoE) or desired level of precision = 0.05

$N = \text{population size}$

$$\text{Hence, } n = \frac{859}{1+864 (0.05 \times 0.05)}$$

$$= \frac{859}{1+(859 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{859}{3.14}$$

$$= 273$$

$$\therefore n \text{ (sample size)} = 273$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study was 273.

3.5. Research Instruments

The research instrument that will be used for this study is Key Informant Interview [KII]. The interview guide was drawn from the study objectives and the Electoral Act 2022 for clarity and precision.

3.6. Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods have been deployed for the analysis of data. This implies the use of prose and descriptive method of analysis. In addition, simple percentages, frequency tables, and cross-tabulations have been deployed to analyze the data and information gathered from the field.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the data obtained in the course of the study. As stated in section 3.5, two hundred and seventy-three (273) questionnaires were administered to respondents. However, two hundred and sixty-three (263) were successfully completed and returned as shown in Table 4.1. With this in mind, a review of the demographic attributes of the population was followed through the thematic presentation, analysis, and discussion of findings according to the objectives listed in chapter one above.

Table 4.1: Summary of Questionnaire Administration

S/N	STATUS OF QUESTIONNAIRE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Questionnaires returned	263	96.3
2	Questionnaires not returned	10	3.7
3	Total	273	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, January 2023.

4.1.1. Social Demography of the Respondents

From the population, the study identified the following demographic qualities, i.e., gender, age bracket, educational qualification, and professional designation of the respondents. Table 4.2 presents the demographic makeup of the study area using the two hundred and sixty-three (263) questionnaires that were returned.

Table 4.2: Social demography

<i>S/N</i>	<i>SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHY ATTRIBUTES</i>	<i>FREQUENCY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE (%)</i>
1	Gender	Male: 156	59.3
		Female: 107	40.7
2	Age bracket	30-50 years: 153	58.4
		51 and above: 110	41.6
3	Education qualification	Degree: 191	72.6
		SSCE: 72	27.4
4	Designated institution	Students of tertiary institutions: 32	12.1
		INEC: 35	13.3
		Private sector: 51	19.4
		Civil servants: 78	29.7
		CSOs: 67	25.5

Source: Fieldwork, February 2023.

Table 4.2 shows that 59.3% of the respondents were males while 40.7% were females. This situation may not be unconnected to patriarchal concerns plaguing Nigerian society. This concern, therefore, necessitates various gender studies (Oluyemi, 2016; Adedayo and Adedeji, 2019) and international and domestic efforts (1995 Beijing Conference 30% Affirmative Action, 35% National Gender Policy, Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], etc.) towards achieving equality for all gender. Within the stated gender composition of the population, 58.4% are in the age bracket of 30-50 years and 41.6% are 50 years and above. Given this, the age disposition of the respondents denotes an experienced population which is a formal requirement for election as a lawmaker as well as the length of years in service. In this light, it can be suggested that the population cum sampling frame is knowledgeable about the subject being investigated- legislative oversight and executive accountability.

Following the content of Table 4.2, 27.4% and 72.6% of the respondents have degrees and SSCE qualifications respectively in various disciplines. Indeed, there is no doubting the intellectual ability of the respondents to undertake their assigned tasks as well as provide accurate information

for this study. However, given the choice of the population for the study, the sampled population was made up of 12.1% students of tertiary institutions, 13.3% INEC staff, 19.4% from the private sector, 29.7% and 25.5% from the mainstream civil service and civil society organizations (CSOs) respectively.

In all, the following iconographic deduction can be made from the demographic distribution of the population (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Social Demography Iconographic Representation (Source: Fieldwork, January 2023).

4.2. Data Analysis

4.2.1. The relationship between elections and democratic consolidation.

To understand how competitive elections deepen democratic consolidation in Nigeria, respondents' level of awareness of the link between periodic elections and democratic consolidation was tested. While 237 (representing 90.1%) of the respondents stated that they are aware that is a precondition for democratic consolidation both in Nigeria and across the world, 3 (1.1%) indicated that they are not aware. The remaining 23 respondents were undecided in their answer (8.8%).

Table 4.3: Do periodic and competitive elections engender democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

Response	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	237	90.1
No	3	1.1
Undecided	23	8.8
Total	263	100

Source: Fieldwork, February 2023.

To substantiate the answers given by the respondents as captured in table 4.3 above, they were asked to identify the ways through which periodic elections deepen democracy in Nigeria and their respondents are listed in table 4.4 below. Whereas, 228 respondents which represents 86.7% affirmed that elections engender democratic consolidation they serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings. It reinforces that sovereignty reside with the people (the citizens). Same figure (228; 86.7%) affirmed that elections deepen democracy as they provide political education and consciousness among citizens and

ensure that political leaders hearken to the demands of the public. This leaves a paltry 5.7% of the respondents disagreeing with both assertions respectively.

However, 222 of the respondents, representing a total of 84.5% agreed with the assertion that elections engender democratic consolidation as it reinforces the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Ensuring a peaceful and harmonious society by ensuring that no interest is imposed on the greater majority of the society. This is true considering that only 7.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 7.9% remained undecided.

Table 4.4: Responses to channels through which periodic and competitive elections deepen democracy in Nigeria.

	Periodic and competitive elections deepen democracy through the:	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	Election of good leaders who reflect the wishes and aspiration of the vast majority of Nigerians. It enables citizens to elect leaders and hold them accountable.	85 32.3%	133 50.6%	23 8.7%	15 5.7%	7 2.7%
2.	It reinforces the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Ensuring a peaceful and harmonious society by ensuring that no interest is imposed on the greater majority of the society	133 50.7%	89 33.8%	21 7.9%	10 3.8%	10 3.8%
3.	Elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings. It reinforces that sovereignty reside with the people (the citizens).	143 54.4%	85 32.3%	20 7.6%	10 3.8%	5 1.9%

4.	It avails the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics and the decision-making process of the state since they have the right to elect policy-makers (i.e., elect new leaders, re-elect the old ones or reject them).	85 32.3%	133 50.6%	23 8.7%	15 5.7%	7 2.7%
5.	It provides political education and consciousness among citizens and ensure that political leaders hearken to the demands of the public.	143 54.4%	85 32.3%	20 7.6%	10 3.8%	5 1.9%

Field Survey, February 2023.

Similarly, 82.9% of the respondents agreed with the assertion that periodic and competitive elections deepens democracy as it leads to the election of good leaders who reflect the wishes and aspiration of the vast majority of Nigerians. It enables citizens to elect leaders and hold them accountable. The same percentage of respondents (82.9%) also affirmed the statement that elections deepen democracy as it avails the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics and the decision-making process of the state since they have the right to elect policy-makers (i.e., elect new leaders, re-elect the old ones or reject them). This leaves only 8.4% respectively disagreeing with these statements.

The results of this study so far are in tandem with existing literature (Innocent, Alhasan & George, 2011; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2016; Ojukwu, Mazi-Mba & Maduekwe, 2019; Ndambwa, 2020). Innocent, Alhassan and George (2011) had argued that regular elections gives the citizens the opportunity to choose leaders of their choice who reflect the wishes and aspiration of the vast majority. For them, it avails them the opportunity to hold leaders to account for their stewardship in public office. This is because, elections enable the citizens to elect new leaders, re-elect older performing ones and vote out the bad ones.

Igokwe-Ibeto et al., (2016) underscored the important role elections play in deepening democracy when they posited that elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings with the constitutional power to determine their leaders. This reinforces that sovereignty resides with the people (the citizens) instead of in political godfathers and wealthy elites. They opined that elections also provide the society with a huge opportunity for political education and arouse the political consciousness of citizens. This according to them has indeed accounted for the surprising swing of votes in most elections among advanced democracies where the level of political consciousness is high.

Ojukwu, Mazi-Mba and Maduekwe (2019) stated that elections brings about and reinforces the stability and legitimacy of the political society. Thus, regular elections ensures a peaceful and harmonious society by ensuring that no interest is imposed on the greater majority of the society. It avails the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics and the decision-making process of the state since they have the right to elect policy-makers (i.e., elect new leaders, re-elect the old ones or reject them).

2.1.2. To what extent has the general elections since 1999 laid the foundation for democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

To ascertain whether general elections since 1999 has contributed to deepening democracy in Nigeria, respondents were asked to indicate yes or no to the question. Their answers are captured in table 4.4 below:

Table 4.5: Has General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed in deepening democracy in the country?

Response	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	252	95.9

No	8	3.0
Undecided	3	1.1
Total	263	100

Field Survey, February 2023.

Table 4.5 above indicates that 95.9 percent of the respondents affirmed that general elections since 1999 have contributed no less profoundly to consolidating democracy in Nigeria. This is in tandem with existing literature. According to Omotola (2010), the relationship between elections and democratic consolidation, in other words, is not a given, but is contingent upon a number of forces, chief among which is the administration of the election. Thus:

The regularity, openness and acceptability of elections signal whether basic constitutional, behavioral, and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule . . . while you can have elections without democracy, you cannot have democracy without elections. If nothing else, the convening of scheduled multi-party elections serves the minimal function of marking democracy’s survival.

Elections since 1999 has been conducted under a multi-party political system which availed citizens open space to register political parties and compete for power under such platforms. Other scholars such as Egwu, Leonard and Matlosa (2009) also agreed that Nigeria’s political system has remained multi-party since the fourth republic commenced in 1999.

The study further sort to ascertain the ways through which credible elections drive sustainable development. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or otherwise with the ways credible elections engender democratic consolidation and their responses are captured in table 4.6 below:

Table 4.6: Responses to means through which elections engender democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

	General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy through:	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	Fostering good governance and throwing up good leaders	85 32.3%	133 50.6%	23 8.7%	15 5.7%	7 2.7%
2.	Maintaining peace and stability in the society	133 50.7%	89 33.8%	21 7.9%	10 3.8%	10 3.8%
3.	Opening up the political space for citizens' participation	143 54.4%	85 32.3%	20 7.6%	10 3.8%	5 1.9%
4.	Election outcomes reflect the will of the majority of Nigerians.	85 32.3%	133 50.6%	23 8.7%	15 5.7%	7 2.7%
6.	Allowing civil society organizations (CSOs) to thrive	143 54.4%	85 32.3%	20 7.6%	10 3.8%	5 1.9%

Field Survey, February 2023.

The study found that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed more to deepening democracy by “opening up the political space for citizens’ participation” and “allowing civil society organizations (CSOs) to thrive”. With 54.4% of the respondents strongly agreeing to the statements and 32.3% agreeing to them, a total of 86.7% agreed with the assertions while a wobbly 5.7% disagreed with the statements. This is in agreement with existing body of knowledge that recognize this obvious fact. Elumoye (2023) stated that in Nigeria today, the system is made more open for citizens’ participation and to enable CSOs to monitor government activities and electoral process with a view to making their inputs and achieving a better society. PLAC (2021) explored the civic space in Nigeria and opined that although there is still room for improvement, the space has allowed ample space for the citizens and CSOs to thrive. According to PLAC (2021), the

defunct #Endsar that swept through Nigeria in 2020 was a manifestation of the frustrations of Nigerians under the excesses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force. The organization maintained that the successes recorded by that protest was made possible by the fact that citizens are gradually beginning to get involved in the political system and desire a change. However, the alleged mindless massacre of some of the protesting youths at the Lekki Tollgate is a suppression of citizens' civil rights to peaceful protests.

Table 4.6 above indicates that 32.3% and 50.6% respectively, either strongly agreed or agreed with the assertion that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by fostering good governance and throwing up good leaders. This is true considering the fact that those who agreed and strongly agreed with that assertion sum up to 82.9% leaving a less significant 8.4% of the respondents disagreeing with the statement. This, therefore, means that elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by fostering good governance and throwing up good leaders. This was displayed in the 2015 General Elections when a ruling political party lost power to a relatively new political party over allegations of corruption and bad governance. However, if the experience of the APC Government from 2015 till date is anything to go by, the emergence of new crop of leaders from any general election does not necessarily translate into good governance.

Similarly, 50.7% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by maintaining peace and stability in the society, while 33.8% agreed with the statement. Therefore, a total of 84.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement while on the other hand, a total of 7.6% were undecided. Yet, 3.8% each either disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. This is indicative that despite incidences of electoral violence recorded in successive elections in Nigeria since 1999 which

reached its peak with the 2011 post-presidential election conflict that resulted to the death of corpse members serving as INEC ad hoc staff coupled with other hapless Nigerians in the North and a few states in the South, elections have ensured stability and relative peace in the country.

4.2.3 Understand how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fared in election management in Nigeria.

INEC is the nation's supreme institution charged with the administration/ management of free and fair elections to fill public positions in Nigeria. Thus, its activity involves well-coordinated actions by men and women aimed at achieving the goal of peaceful and orderly elections in the country (Ekundayo, 2015). Therefore, the overall goal of having an electoral body is to ensure a viable electoral system and hitch-free electoral management (Ighodalo, 2008). Ekundayo (2015) summed up election management activities to include the following:

- vi. participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance;
- vii. activities before, during, and after elections;
- viii. the legal and constitutional framework of elections;
- ix. the registration of political parties, regulation of political parties, and financing of political campaigns;
- x. the authenticity and genuineness of voters register;
- xi. the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country;
- xii. the activities of electronic and print media in terms of access;
- xiii. the activities of security agencies and the government in power;
- xiv. the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections; and above all;

xv. The independence or lack of it of the electoral agency, organ or body (P.50).

The study sought to find out how INEC has fared in election management in Nigeria in the fourth republic. Thus, a question was posed to ascertain whether INEC has done well in election management or otherwise, and their responses are captured in table 4.6 below;

Table 4.7: Has INEC fared well in election management in Nigeria?

Response	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	153	58.2
No	110	41.8
Undecided	0	0
Total	263	100

Field Survey, February 2023.

Table 4.6 above indicates that 153 respondents, representing 58.2% are of the opinion that INEC has fared very well in elections management in Nigeria while 41.8% held the contrary opinion that the electoral umpire has not fared well in elections management in the country.

Due to the diverse challenges that have continued to threaten electoral credibility in Nigeria, including, internal challenges affecting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s operations and management, as well as several external factors that are in many respects beyond the control of INEC, such as party primary processes, rampant vote-buying, electoral violence, and the investigation of electoral offences, the nation's electoral umpire successes are limited (Business Day, Sep 27, 2022). The nation's election management history has never been a positive one. It has consistently been characterized in recent years by lingering deficiencies in election administration, "including an uneven distribution of permanent voters' cards (PVCs),

malfunctioning card readers/ bi-modal voter accreditation system (BVAS), inefficient counting procedures, over-voting, and the lack of transparent results collation and announcement processes,” (USAID Report, 2022). Similarly, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room in its review of the 2019 general election observed that “postponing voting about six hours to the start of polls did more than expose how ill-prepared INEC was, it also dampened the nationwide enthusiasm that had built up for the elections.” This failure on the part of INEC adversely affected voter turnout “it made it impossible for many who had traveled earlier to vote in their constituencies to make a second trip, exacerbating voter apathy (Business Day, Sep. 27, 2022).

The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NSSSR) also identified a faulty collation system as a huge weakness of election management in Nigeria. “The collation of results, another major weakness of Nigerian elections, remained a concern throughout the elections, with observers reporting interference with the process, especially by political parties and security agencies and oftentimes with the active participation of INEC officials. Data in the voters’ register, as well as results figures declared by INEC, threw up several glaring discrepancies that have yet to be explained. There were also differences between the number of accredited voters and the total number of votes cast in many polling units. In a similar vein, Situation Room observed that there were significantly more votes cast in the presidential elections than were cast in the National Assembly elections which took place simultaneously with the presidential election” (Business Day, Sept. 27, 2022).

Some also argued that the avalanche of off-circle elections are an indication that INEC has not efficiently and meticulously executed its election management mandate well (Ojo, 2023). A look at the nation’s election history will show that eight (8) states do not elect their governors during the general elections. Governorship elections in a total of eight states namely, Anambra, Bayelsa,

Kogi, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, and Imo have had to be held on separate days from that of the general elections. Hence, on March 11, 2023, governorship elections will only hold in 28 of the 36 states. This is because the courts annulled the governorship elections in these states and ordered either a re-run or the swearing-in of the candidate that challenged the election of the seating governors in accordance with provisions of Section 178(2) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Conversely, INEC has been adjudged by some scholars to have done well in election management and electoral reforms in Nigeria (Udu, 2015; Ejalonibu 2019; Aliyu and Ambali, 2021). According to Ejalonibu (2019), INEC has through the introduction of electoral technology drastically reduced electoral fraud and increased its credibility and acceptability of results/ outcomes. Aliyu and Ambali (2021) also posited that the nation's electoral umpire has restored peoples' faith in the electoral process. According to them, the outcomes of the 2015 general elections are indications that compromising the EMB in Nigeria is hard and that the body is ready to ensure that the will of the masses counts in the most effective and credible means. The changes introduced by the Electoral Act 2022 are also huge foundations for efficient election management in the country.

4.2.4 What is the place of Constitutional/ Legal and Institutional factors in democratic Consolidation in Nigeria?

Nigeria's electoral laws have evolved over the years in a bid to engender credible electoral process. Constitutional and legal frameworks aimed at improving the quality of elections in Nigeria are the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as altered) and the Electoral Act 2022. This took the form of electoral reforms. Electoral reforms in the Fourth Republic started with inauguration of a 23-man electoral reform committee (ERC) on August 28, 2007 by late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua. The committee was headed by Justice Muhammed Uwais and drew

membership from the CSOs and other critical stakeholders. The committee was saddled with the comprehensive mandate “to evolve an electoral process that will enable us to anchor democracy as the framework for national integration, sustained growth and national development” (Yar’Adua, 2007). The committee in pursuance of its mandate, conducted a public hearings across the 36 states and the federal capital territory in order to feel the pulse of Nigeria on the subject matter. Based on its findings the ERC came up with a total of 1,466 recommendations aimed at comprehensive reforms of Nigeria’s electoral system. Chief among the recommendations of this committee according to Omotola (2011) include;

- i. The establishment of a truly independent, non-partisan and impartial national electoral umpire (INEC), comprising the chairman, deputy and six members who must be of unquestionable integrity and each must represent one of the six geopolitical zones;
- ii. Six more nominees, one each from the organized labour, the Nigerian Bar Association, the media, the National Youth Council, civil society and women organizations. All appointments must be subject to senate ratification;
- iii. INEC chairman to be appointed in an open and transparent process. Based on this, National Judicial Council is required to advertise and state the requirements for the position, review applications and shortlist candidates and finally forwarding nominations to the National Council of State to select one of the shortlisted for Senate approval;
- iv. INEC to be funded directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) as a way of guaranteeing administrative and fiscal independence of the nation’s EMB.
- v. Adoption of an open secret ballot system that allows voters to thumb print the ballot paper in secrete and drop into the ballot box in the open.

- vi. Voters' register to be displayed before the elections in order to allow registered voter, political parties and other stakeholders to view it and lodge complaints where necessary;
- vii. Election results to be announced at all polling units by the presiding officers, signed and copies given to party agents, security and intelligence agents/ institutions;
- viii. All objections arising from an election to be summarily dealt with before the winner is sworn into office in order to avoid situations where winners whose victory is being contested deploys state resources to prosecute cases brought against them;
- ix. Establishment of a Political Parties Registration and Regulatory Commission (PPRRC) to register political parties, monitor their organization and operations and arrange for the annual auditing of accounts of political parties;
- x. Establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission (EOC) to deter electoral malpractices, investigate where it occurs and prosecute alleged offenders' and
- xi. Establishment of a Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) to be in-charge of broad civic and political education of legislators, political officeholders, security agencies, political parties, etc.

Although the report recommendations made by Uwais Committee were rejected by the National Assembly when it was transmitted for approval, it has however continued to serve as a reservoir for reform ideas in Nigeria's electoral reforms. Despite National Assembly rejection of these recommendations, Yar'Adua's government went ahead and implemented part of it starting with the process of appointing and personality of INEC chairman (Prof. Jega's appointment), financial autonomy for INEC was guaranteed. INEC's national and resident commissioners were composed in line with the recommendations of the Uwais Committee. These and other changes fostered

peaceful and relatively transparent elections in 2011. Noteworthy, the fact that most of the committee's recommendations require constitutional amendment and resulted in the review of the 2006 Electoral Act ushering into the 2010 Electoral Act which accommodated some of the Uwais's Committee recommendations, for instance, sequence of elections and the new rule that forbids candidates elected from switching to another political party once they assume office. The new law demands that any elected public officeholder who contravenes this would forfeit the seat and stand another election on the platform of the new political party.

Despite all these changes there were still allegations of malpractices and technical hitches during the 2011 general elections. This led to several attempts to amend the Electoral Act 2010 by the National Assembly. However, the 2015 amendment was a success as it received presidential assent prior to the 2015 general elections that saw power alternate from the ruling PDP to the main opposition, APC. The improvements which the 2015 amendment according to PLAC (2016) include among others:

- a. A 4-year tenure for the Secretary from the date of appointment, which is subject to renewal for another 4 years only (Section 8(1);
- b. Increased the period for the conclusion of transfer of voter registration from 30 days to 60 days in Section 13(2);
- c. Application for a duplicate voters' card when the original is lost, destroyed, defaced, torn or damaged must be made not less than 60 days before the polling day. And the card should not be issued less than 60 days to election instead of the 30 days for both as captured in Section 18 (1) and (3) of the Electoral Act 2010;
- d. Section 26(1) mandates INEC to as far as possible ensure people displaced by emergencies are not disenfranchised;

- e. New Section 29(3) vests INEC with the power to request the deployment and assignment of security personnel for the purpose of election;
- f. Section 45(1) provides conditions that must be met by anyone before he/she is recognized as a political party agent;
- g. Removed the prohibition of e-voting. Voting to be in accordance with the procedure determined by the INEC;
- h. Election results to be accompanied by candidates available to the collation centers.
- i. RECs to issue election documents to applicants/political parties/ parties to a petition within 14 days.

The 2015 general elections were adjudged free, fair, and credible as a result of wide range of reforms introduced including the use of the card reader in the voter accreditation process. However, there were still room for further reforms and improvements. This informed the futile effort of the 8th session of the National Assembly to amend the Electoral Act in 2019 as the amendment was vetoed by President Buhari. However, the 9th Session of the National Assembly successfully repealed 2010 Electoral Act in 2022 to give to Nigerians Electoral 2022. The key provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act and their implications are:

i. Granted INEC Financial Autonomy

Section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 2022 made provision for the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission Fund to house all payments from the Federal Government, investments made from the fund and other aids and grants shall be paid to enable the Independent National Electoral Commission (“the Commission”) to perform its functions. Furthermore, Section 3(3) of the Act stipulates that election funds due to the Commission for any general elections are to be released not later than one year before the next general election. This provision grants

financial autonomy to the Commission, as INEC now receives funds for the conduct of elections directly as opposed to getting funds subsequent to vetting by the Ministry of Finance as provided under Section 5 of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended).

ii. Extension of Timeframe for Publication of Election Notice

Section 28(1) of the Electoral Act, 2022 provides that the Commission shall, not later than 360 days before the day appointed for holding of an election under this Act, publish a notice in each State of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory stating the date of the election and appointing the place at which nomination papers are to be delivered. According to Section 28(2) of the Act, such notice is to be published in each constituency in respect of which an election is to be held. This provision is in contrast to the provisions of Section 30(1) of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) which provided that the Commission should publish this notice not later than 90 days before the date of election. The effect of this extension of time is to give the Commission more time to prepare for the election and also give the political parties no excuse as regards the candidacy and the partisan and propaganda politics that comes with choosing a candidate and preparing for a campaign.

Conversely, for by-elections, Section 28(3) of the Electoral Act, 2022 retains the same provision as captured in Section 30(3) of the 2010 Electoral Act, as the timeframe for publishing a notice stating the date of by-elections is 14 days.

iii. Early Party Primaries

In Section 29(1) of the Electoral Act 2022, political parties are mandated to submit the list of their sponsored candidates who have emerged from valid primaries conducted by the party, not later than 180 days before the date appointed for a general election. This is in contrast to Section 31(1)

of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) which prescribed that this submission should be done not less than 60 days before the date of general elections. The change in the timeframe to submit the names of party candidates from 60 days to 180 days makes it compulsory for political parties to conduct their primaries early enough to meet up with submission of their list of candidates at least 180 days before the general elections.

iv. Extension Of Timeframe for Campaigns by Political Parties

Section 94(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act provides that the period of campaigning in public by every political party shall commence 150 days before polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day. This is different from the provisions of Section 99(1), of the former Act which prescribes that campaigns shall commence 90 days prior to polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day. The impact of this provision is the extended time given to political parties to disseminate their campaign messages to the populace and the corresponding extended time for the electorate to decide what party and candidate would receive their votes.

v. Establishment of a Central Electronic Voter Database

Section 9(2) of the new Act provides that the Commission shall keep the Register of Voters at its National Headquarters and other locations, provided that the Register shall be kept in electronic format in its central database, in addition to being kept in manual or hardcopy format. Under Section 9(2) of the former Act, this Register was kept in manual or hardcopy format only. This provision is laudable as it will promote transparency and effectiveness in the Commission's record-keeping and in tracking the number of registered voters who will be voting in the upcoming elections, thereby curbing illegal voting by non-registered voters.

vi. Altered the Definition of Over-voting

Section 51(2) of the new Act states that where the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of accredited voters in that polling unit, the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit. “Number of accredited voters” as captured in Section 153 refers to the number of intending voters accredited to vote in an election on Election Day. Under Section 53(2) of the former Act, it is when the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of registered voters in that polling unit, that the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit. This is a great anti-malpractice measure introduced to forestall situations where desperate politicians in connivance with electoral officials manipulate election results to suit their preferred candidates and political parties. Based on the provisions of the new Act, ‘over-voting’ would mean where votes cast at a polling unit exceed the number of accredited voters and not the number of registered voters as provided in the former Act.

vii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s Power of Review

Under Section 65(1) of the new Act, the INEC has the power to review the final decision of the returning officer in respect of questions of an unmarked ballot paper, rejected ballot paper, declaration of scores of candidates, and the return of a candidate, within 7 days of the decision, and return where the declaration was not made voluntarily or was made contrary to the provisions of the law or the guidelines for the election. Under Section 68(1) of the provisions of the former Act, the decision of the returning officer was only subject to review by an election tribunal or court. However, it appears that under Section 65(2) of the new Act, the election tribunal or court can still review the returning officer's decision, but the Act is unclear as to whether this is to be

done after INEC's review or can replace the INEC review process totally. It is the writer's view that this should be after the INEC's review.

viii. Delisted Political Appointees from Acting as Voting Delegates or Aspirants

Section 84 (12) of the new Act stipulates that no political appointee at any level shall be a voting delegate or be voted for at the Convention or Congress of any political party for the purpose of the nomination of candidates for any election. This means that political appointees must relinquish their positions before they can be eligible to participate in the electoral process either as a candidate or as a delegate. This writer considers this provision positive because it will bar political appointees from using their influence in contesting for elections and prevent them from remaining in the helms of power for longer than they are supposed to. This in turn leaves room for fresh candidates with no prior political appointments to take up appointments, instead of recycling the same old candidates. This provision has, however, proved very controversial, and has been the subject of criticism and denouncement, with even a Federal High Court declaring it unconstitutional and directing the Attorney General of the Federation to delete same from the new Act (Vanguard, 18th March 2022).

ix. Death of Electoral Candidates

The death of a candidate in elections had generated lots of bickering among political parties and politicians in the past under the former Act, leading to cases in our courts. To cure some of the mischiefs in the former Act, Section 34(1) of the new Act provides that where before the commencement of polls a candidate dies, the election shall be postponed and shall commence within 14 days of the candidate's death. Section 34(3) (a) provides that where a candidate dies after polls, but before the announcement of the final winner/ announcement of the final result; the

implication is that the election will be suspended for not more than 21 days. Where the election is for a legislative house position, the election shall start afresh and the political party whose candidate died may, if it intends to continue to participate in the election, conduct a fresh primary within 14 days of the death of its candidate and submit the name of a new candidate to the Commission to replace the dead candidate (as captured in Section 34(3)(b)). Section 34(3) of the new Act states that for gubernatorial, presidential and FCT area council elections, the running mate shall continue with the election (as the new candidate) and nominate a new running mate.

x. Technological changes in the electoral process

Under Section 47(2) of the new Act, the use of electronic devices such as smart card readers, electronic voting machines, and other technological devices, is allowed in the accreditation process for voters and in the general conduct of elections. Furthermore, Section 50(2) of the new Act provides for the electronic transmission of election results in accordance with the procedure determined by the Commission. This will generally serve as a check on the manipulation of results during collation.

Electoral reforms in Nigeria have greatly transformed the nation's electoral process and outcomes. It is argued that given the introduction of electoral technology in terms of smart card readers (now replaced with the bimodal voter accreditation system – BVAS), voters' cards and the adoption of electronic transmission of results, it is now very difficult to rig or alter election results in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that results are transmitted to the server from the various polling units and that the presiding officer displays the BVAS to the public to convince them that no figures had been entered prior to the elections. These checks will no doubt limit the chances of election manipulation in the country. However, given the activities of hackers, there are fears that Nigeria's elections are

not free from manipulations after all (Punch, Dec. 14, 2022). INEC has also raised the alarm that politicians are trying to manufacture BVAS as a way of manipulating elections in Nigeria (Punch, Dec. 14, 2022). But the good news is that the days of ballot box snatching and stuffing are over. However, criminally minded politicians may still deploy political thugs to destabilize and cause crisis in their opponents' strongholds to get elections canceled in those areas and pave way for their own victory. How this can be curbed remains a serious matter to be pondered by INEC, federal government, security and intelligence agencies, CSOs and other stakeholders.

4.2.5 What are the factors inhibiting credible, free and fair elections as well as democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

Respondents were asked to identify factors inhibiting the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. Their responses are captured in Table 4.8 below:

Table 4.8: Responses from the factors impeding credible elections in Nigeria.

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Monetization of politics/ bribery and corruption2. Perennial logistic problem3. Political thuggery4. High level of illiteracy5. Lack of institutional and financial autonomy6. Poor administration of voter registration and PVC collection process7. Unnecessary militarization of elections8. Unreliable local suppliers of electoral materials9. Division along ethnic and religious lines10. Manipulation of election results and the collation process

11. Inadequate funding and misuse of funds set aside for elections
12. High level of poverty among Nigerians
13. Inadequate electoral security
14. Natural disasters.

Field Survey, February 2023.

These factors identified by respondents are in tandem with views portrayed by Ali, Dalaram and Dauda (2018) and Ayogu, Egbara and Aleje (2019) when they bribery and corruption, political thuggery, lack of institutional and financial autonomy, monetisation of politics, mindless militarization of elections, religious and ethnic divisions, abuse of the voter registration process, and manipulation of collation centres/ results. These are factors inhibiting the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria. According to Ayogu, Egbara, and Aleje (2019), all the principal officers of INEC, including its chairman, national electoral commissioners, and the resident electoral commissioners; are as constitutionally mandated, the political appointees of the President. Thus, INEC had to rely on the executive arm, particularly the presidency, for its actions and inactions. The loyalty and accountability of INEC, therefore, is first and foremost to the executive to whom it has to go cap in hand begging for audience and funding (Ayogu, Egbara and Aleje, 2019). And as the saying goes, *he who pays the piper dictates its tunes*; the commission remains the puppet of the presidency or its annex.

For Ali, Dalaram and Dauda (2018), there is an unprecedented monetization of politics as “moneybags” hijack the electoral process. The situation has deteriorated because of INEC’s inability to enforce political finance regulations. For instance, on the eve of the 23rd March, 2019 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State, two billion vans were said to be sighted in a private residence. Some raised their voices against it but the INEC and security agencies could not do

much (Ayogu, Egbara and Aleje, 2019). The political elites have “weaponized” poverty for political gains. Because of poverty and ignorance, electorates mount pressures on candidates and parties for material benefits; thereby making contest of elections in Nigeria an extra-ordinarily capital intensive venture and losing elections seems like a bitter personal tragedy.

Similarly, in elections held recently, there was alleged unnecessary militarization of the process via massive deployment of security forces. This militarization of voting has not only undermined voters’ turnout but also provided cover for INEC to rig elections in favour of the ruling party (Ajayi, 2006) as both institutions are extensions of the presidency/government. The most recent of the militarization of voting apart from heavy presence of uniform and deadly armed security forces was an executive fiat issued by President Mohammed Buhari to “shoot at sight” during the 2019 elections (Tribune 20th February 2019). Within days, a confidant of the President and the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam El-Rufai came up with his “body-bag” comments considered largely as threats on external election observers (Punch 6th February 2019). These no doubt raised tension and made the process scary. This is not in any way to deny the importance of adequate unbiased security in electoral process.

4.2.6 Strategies that could be adopted to ensure credible elections in Nigeria.

Respondents were asked to please proffer solution on measures to guarantee credible elections in Nigeria. Their responses are captured in table 4.9 below:

Table 4.9: Recommendations to ensure credible elections in Nigeria.

i.	The independence of the judiciary. Already, there is in existence independent judiciary to settle electoral disputes. Disputes arising from allegations of electoral malpractices are properly being handled by the judiciary in Nigeria. This has even resulted in the
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- judicialization of elections in Nigeria whereby the judiciary determines the winner of elections.
- ii. Adequate funding of INEC: this will strengthen the Commission's autonomy and remove vestiges of interferences.
 - iii. Adequate security to protect electoral materials, electoral officers and voters guarantees a free and fair election and prevents irregularities that may arise as a result of security lapses;
 - iv. Transparent voting and counting: this demands keeping to the rules as captured in the new Electoral Act 2022 as a way of forestalling what happened in the 2022 Osun gubernatorial election where the issue of over-voting has reared its ugly face;
 - v. Voter registration and issuance of PVCs should be a continuous exercise in order not to disenfranchise some Nigerians who genuinely want to vote in elections;
 - vi. Government should double its efforts at alleviating poverty in the country as a means to stop the thriving business of vote trading. People are easily swayed to sell their votes when they are hungry. Thus, when people are empowered to earn a decent living there will be less chances for voting buying to thrive;
 - vii. There should be aggressive voter education in local dialects across the country to sensitize Nigerians (both literate and illiterate) about the voting procedure, party logos, etc. This will go a long way in reducing invalidate ballots in every election;
 - viii. Government should discourage centrifugal forces and encourage things that unite Nigerians irrespective of religion or tribe.

Field Survey, February 2023.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

4.3.1. The relationship between elections and democratic consolidation;

The study sought to establish whether there is any connection between competitive elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria and found that there is a very significant link between them. The field survey report shows respondents' level of awareness of the link between periodic elections and democratic consolidation was high. While 237 (representing 90.1%) of the respondents stated that they are aware that is a precondition for democratic consolidation both in Nigeria and across the world, 3 (1.1%) indicated that they are not aware. The remaining 23 respondents were undecided in their answers (8.8%).

To substantiate the answers given by the respondents as captured above, they were asked to identify the ways through which periodic elections deepen democracy in Nigeria and their responses are listed in table 4.4 below. Whereas, 228 respondents which represent 86.7% affirmed that elections engender democratic consolidation as they serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings. It reinforces that sovereignty resides with the people (the citizens). The same figure (228; 86.7%) affirmed that elections deepen democracy as they provide political education and consciousness among citizens and ensure that political leaders hearken to the demands of the public. This leaves a paltry 5.7% of the respondents disagreeing with both assertions respectively. However, 222 of the respondents, representing a total of 84.5% agreed with the assertion that elections engender democratic consolidation as it reinforces the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Ensuring a peaceful and harmonious society by ensuring that no interest is imposed on the greater majority of the society. This is true considering that only 7.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 7.9% remained undecided.

Similarly, 82.9% of the respondents agreed with the assertion that periodic and competitive elections deepens democracy as it leads to the election of good leaders who reflect the wishes and aspiration of the vast majority of Nigerians. It enables citizens to elect leaders and hold them accountable. The same percentage of respondents (82.9%) also affirmed the statement that elections deepen democracy as it avails the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics and the decision-making process of the state since they have the right to elect policy-makers (i.e., elect new leaders, re-elect the old ones or reject them). This leaves only 8.4% respectively disagreeing with these statements.

4.3.2 To what extent have the 2015 General Elections laid the foundation for democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

The study further sought to ascertain whether general elections since 1999 have contributed to deepening democracy in Nigeria, respondents were asked to indicate yes or no to the question. Findings indicates that 9.9 percent of the respondents affirmed that general elections since 1999 have contributed no less profoundly to consolidating democracy in Nigeria. This is in tandem with existing literature. According to Omotola (2010), the relationship between elections and democratic consolidation, in other words, is not a given, but is contingent upon a number of forces, chief among which is the administration of the election.

Elections since 1999 has been conducted under a multi-party political system which availed citizens open space to register political parties and compete for power under such platforms. Other scholars such as Egwu, Leonard and Matlosa (2009) also agreed that Nigeria's political system has remained multi-party since the fourth republic commenced in 1999.

The study further sort to ascertain the ways through which credible elections drive sustainable development. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or otherwise with the ways credible elections engender democratic consolidation.

The study found that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed more to deepening democracy by “opening up the political space for citizens’ participation” and “allowing civil society organizations (CSOs) to thrive”. With 54.4% of the respondents strongly agreeing to the statements and 32.3% agreeing to them, a total of 86.7% agreed with the assertions while a wobbly 5.7% disagreed with the statements. This is in agreement with existing body of knowledge that recognize. Elumoye (2023) stated that in Nigeria today, the system is made more open for citizens’ participation and to enable CSOs to monitor government activities and electoral process with a view to making their inputs and achieving a better society. PLAC (2021) explored the civic space in Nigeria and opined that although there is still room for improvement, the space has allowed ample space for the citizens and CSOs to thrive. According to PLAC (2021), the defunct #Endsar that swept through Nigeria in 2020 was a manifestation of the frustrations of Nigerians under the excesses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force. The organization maintained that the successes recorded by that protest was made possible by the fact that citizens are gradually beginning to get involved in the political system and desire a change. However, the alleged mindless massacre of some of the protesting youths at the Lekki Tollgate is a suppression of citizens’ civil rights to peaceful protests.

The table 4.5 above indicates that 32.3% and 50.6% respectively strongly agreed and agreed with the assertion that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by fostering good governance and throwing up good leaders. This is true considering the fact that those who agreed and strongly agreed with that assertion sum up to 82.9% leaving a paltry overall

8.4% of the respondents disagreeing with the statement. This therefore means that elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by fostering good governance and throwing up good leaders. This was displayed 2015 General Elections when a ruling political party lost power to a relatively new political party over allegations of corruption and bad governance. Similarly, 50.7% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that General Elections conducted in Nigeria contributed to deepening democracy by maintaining peace and stability in the society. While 33.8% agreed with the statement. Therefore, in total 84.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement whereas a total of 7.6% disagreed (3.8% each disagreed and strongly disagreed) with the statement. This is indicative that that despite incidences of electoral violence recorded in successive elections in Nigeria since 1999 which peaked with the 2011 post-presidential election conflict that resulted to the death of corpse members serving as INEC ad hoc staff and other hapless Nigerians in the North and a few states in the South, elections have ensured stability and relative peace in the country.

3.3.3 Understand how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fared in election management in Nigeria.

The study sought to find out how INEC has fared in election management in Nigeria in the fourth republic. Thus, a question was posed to ascertain whether INEC has done well in election management or otherwise. Findings indicate that 153 respondents, representing 58.2% are of the opinion that INEC has fared very well in elections management in Nigeria while 41.8% held the contrary opinion that the electoral umpire has not fared well in elections management in the country.

Due to the copious challenges that have continue to threaten electoral credibility in Nigeria, including, internal challenges affecting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s

operations and management, as well as several external factors that are in many respects beyond the control of EMBs, such as party primary processes, rampant vote-buying, electoral violence, and the investigation of electoral offences, the nation's electoral umpire successes are limited (Business Day, Sep 27, 2022). The nation's election management history has never been a positive one. It has consistently been characterized in recent years by lingering deficiencies in election administration, "including an uneven distribution of permanent voters' cards (PVCs), malfunctioning card readers/ bi-modal voter accreditation system (BVAS), inefficient counting procedures, over-voting, and the lack of transparent results collation and announcement processes," (USAID Report, 2022). Similarly, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room in its review of the 2019 general election observed that "postponing voting about six hours to the start of polls did more than expose how ill-prepared INEC was, it also dampened the nationwide enthusiasm that had built up for the elections." This failure on the part of INEC adversely affected voter turnout "it made it impossible for many who had traveled earlier to vote in their constituencies to make a second trip, exacerbating voter apathy (Business Day, Sep. 27, 2022).

The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NSSSR) also identified a faulty collation system as a huge weakness of election management in Nigeria. "The collation of results, another major weakness of Nigerian elections, remained a concern throughout the elections, with observers reporting interference with the process, especially by political parties and security agencies and oftentimes with the active participation of INEC officials. Data in the voters' register, as well as results figures declared by INEC, threw up several glaring discrepancies that have yet to be explained. There were also differences between the number of accredited voters and the total number of votes cast in many polling units. In a similar vein, Situation Room observed that there were significantly more votes cast in the presidential elections than were cast in the National

Assembly elections which took place simultaneously with the presidential election” (Business Day, Sept. 27, 2022).

Some also argue that the avalanche of off-circle elections are an indication that INEC has not efficiently and meticulously executed its election management mandate well (Ojo, 2023). A look at the nation’s election history will show that eight (8) states do not elect their governors during the general elections. Governorship elections in a total of eight states namely, Anambra, Bayelsa, Kogi, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, and Imo have had to be held on separate days from that of the general elections. Hence, on March 11, 2023, governorship elections will only hold in 28 of the 36 states. This is because the courts annulled the governorship elections in these state and order either a re-run or the swearing in of the candidate that challenged the election of the seating governors in accordance with provisions of Section 178(2) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Conversely, INEC has been adjudged by some scholars to have done well in election management and electoral reforms in Nigeria (Udu, 2015; Ejalonibu 2019; Aliyu and Ambali, 2021). According to Ejalonibu (2019), INEC has through the introduction of electoral technology drastically reduced electoral fraud and increased its credibility and acceptability of results/ outcomes. Aliyu and Ambali (2021) also posited that the nation’s electoral umpire has restored peoples’ faith in the electoral process. According to them, the outcomes of the 2015 general elections are indications that compromising the EMB in Nigeria is hard and that the body is ready to ensure that the will of the masses counts in the most effective and credible means. The changes introduced by the Electoral Act 2022 are also huge foundations for efficient election management in the country.

4.3.4 Ascertain the place of Constitutional/ Legal and Institutional factors in democratic Consolidation in Nigeria.

Nigeria's electoral laws have evolved over the years in a bid to engender credible electoral process. Constitutional and legal frameworks aimed at improving the quality of elections in Nigeria are the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as altered) and the Electoral Act 2022. This took the form of electoral reforms. The 2015 general elections were adjudged free, fair, and credible as a result of wide range of reforms introduced including the use of the card reader in the voter accreditation process. However, there were still room for further reforms and improvements. This informed the futile effort of the 8th session of the National Assembly to amend the Electoral Act in 2019 as the amendment was vetoed by President Buhari. However, the 9th Session of the National Assembly successfully repealed 2010 Electoral Act in 2022 to give to Nigerians Electoral 2022. The key provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act and their implications are:

xi. Granted INEC Financial Autonomy

Section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 2022 made provision for the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission Fund to house all payments from the Federal Government, investments made from the fund and other aids and grants shall be paid to enable the Independent National Electoral Commission ("the Commission") to perform its functions. Furthermore, Section 3(3) of the Act stipulates that election funds due to the Commission for any general elections are to be released not later than one year before the next general election. This provision grants financial autonomy to the Commission, as INEC now receives funds for the conduct of elections directly as opposed to getting funds subsequent to vetting by the Ministry of Finance as provided under Section 5 of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended).

xii. Extension of Timeframe for Publication of Election Notice

Section 28(1) of the Electoral Act, 2022 provides that the Commission shall, not later than 360 days before the day appointed for holding of an election under this Act, publish a notice in each State of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory stating the date of the election and appointing the place at which nomination papers are to be delivered. According to Section 28(2) of the Act, such notice is to be published in each constituency in respect of which an election is to be held. This provision is in contrast to the provisions of Section 30(1) of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) which provided that the Commission should publish this notice not later than 90 days before the date of election. The effect of this extension of time is to give the Commission more time to prepare for the election and also give the political parties no excuse as regards the candidacy and the partisan and propaganda politics that comes with choosing a candidate and preparing for a campaign.

Conversely, for by-elections, Section 28(3) of the Electoral Act, 2022 retains the same provision as captured in Section 30(3) of the 2010 Electoral Act, as the timeframe for publishing a notice stating the date of by-elections is 14 days.

xiii. Early Party Primaries

In Section 29(1) of the Electoral Act 2022, political parties are mandated to submit the list of their sponsored candidates who have emerged from valid primaries conducted by the party, not later than 180 days before the date appointed for a general election. This is in contrast to Section 31(1) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) which prescribed that this submission should be done not less than 60 days before the date of general elections. The change in the timeframe to submit the names of party candidates from 60 days to 180 days makes it compulsory for political parties to

conduct their primaries early enough to meet up with submission of their list of candidates at least 180 days before the general elections.

xiv. Extension Of Timeframe for Campaigns by Political Parties

Section 94(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act provides that the period of campaigning in public by every political party shall commence 150 days before polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day. This is different from the provisions of Section 99(1), of the former Act which prescribes that campaigns shall commence 90 days prior to polling day and end 24 hours prior to that day. The impact of this provision is the extended time given to political parties to disseminate their campaign messages to the populace and the corresponding extended time for the electorate to decide what party and candidate would receive their votes.

xv. Establishment of a Central Electronic Voter Database

Section 9(2) of the new Act provides that the Commission shall keep the Register of Voters at its National Headquarters and other locations, provided that the Register shall be kept in electronic format in its central database, in addition to being kept in manual or hardcopy format. Under Section 9(2) of the former Act, this Register was kept in manual or hardcopy format only. This provision is laudable as it will promote transparency and effectiveness in the Commission's record-keeping and in tracking the number of registered voters who will be voting in the upcoming elections, thereby curbing illegal voting by non-registered voters.

xvi. Altered the Definition of Over-voting

Section 51(2) of the new Act states that where the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of accredited voters in that polling unit, the Presiding officer shall cancel

the result of the election in that polling unit. “Number of accredited voters” as captured in Section 153 refers to the number of intending voters accredited to vote in an election on Election Day. Under Section 53(2) of the former Act, it is when the number of votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceeds the number of registered voters in that polling unit, that the Presiding officer shall cancel the result of the election in that polling unit. This is a great anti-malpractice measure introduced to forestall situations where desperate politicians in connivance with electoral officials manipulate election results to suit their preferred candidates and political parties. Based on the provisions of the new Act, ‘over-voting’ would mean where votes cast at a polling unit exceed the number of accredited voters and not the number of registered voters as provided in the former Act.

xvii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s Power of Review

Under Section 65(1) of the new Act, the INEC has the power to review the final decision of the returning officer in respect of questions of an unmarked ballot paper, rejected ballot paper, declaration of scores of candidates, and the return of a candidate, within 7 days of the decision, and return where the declaration was not made voluntarily or was made contrary to the provisions of the law or the guidelines for the election. Under Section 68(1) of the provisions of the former Act, the decision of the returning officer was only subject to review by an election tribunal or court. However, it appears that under Section 65(2) of the new Act, the election tribunal or court can still review the returning officer's decision, but the Act is unclear as to whether this is to be done after INEC's review or can replace the INEC review process totally. It is the writer's view that this should be after the INEC's review.

xviii. Delisted Political Appointees from Acting as Voting Delegates or Aspirants

Section 84 (12) of the new Act stipulates that no political appointee at any level shall be a voting delegate or be voted for at the Convention or Congress of any political party for the purpose of the nomination of candidates for any election. This means that political appointees must relinquish their positions before they can be eligible to participate in the electoral process either as a candidate or as a delegate. This writer considers this provision positive because it will bar political appointees from using their influence in contesting for elections and prevent them from remaining in the helms of power for longer than they are supposed to. This in turn leaves room for fresh candidates with no prior political appointments to take up appointments, instead of recycling the same old candidates. This provision has, however, proved very controversial, and has been the subject of criticism and denouncement, with even a Federal High Court declaring it unconstitutional and directing the Attorney General of the Federation to delete same from the new Act (Vanguard, 18th March 2022).

xix. Death of Electoral Candidates

The death of a candidate in elections had generated lots of bickering among political parties and politicians in the past under the former Act, leading to cases in our courts. To cure some of the mischiefs in the former Act, Section 34(1) of the new Act provides that where before the commencement of polls a candidate dies, the election shall be postponed and shall commence within 14 days of the candidate's death. Section 34(3) (a) provides that where a candidate dies after polls, but before the announcement of the final winner/ announcement of the final result; the implication is that the election will be suspended for not more than 21 days. Where the election is for a legislative house position, the election shall start afresh and the political party whose

candidate died may, if it intends to continue to participate in the election, conduct a fresh primary within 14 days of the death of its candidate and submit the name of a new candidate to the Commission to replace the dead candidate (as captured in Section 34(3)(b)). Section 34(3) of the new Act states that for gubernatorial, presidential and FCT area council elections, the running mate shall continue with the election (as the new candidate) and nominate a new running mate.

The study found that under Section 47(2) of the new Act, the use of electronic devices such as smart card readers, electronic voting machines, and other technological devices, is allowed in the accreditation process for voters and in the general conduct of elections. Furthermore, Section 50(2) of the new Act provides for the electronic transmission of election results in accordance with the procedure determined by the Commission. This will generally serve as a check on the manipulation of results during collation.

Electoral reforms in Nigeria have greatly transformed the nation's electoral process and outcomes. It is argued that given the introduction of electoral technology in terms of smart card readers (now replaced with the bimodal voter accreditation system – BVAS), voters' cards and the adoption of electronic transmission of results, it is now very difficult to rig or alter election results in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that results are transmitted to the server from the various polling units and that the presiding officer displays the BVAS to the public to convince them that no figures had been entered prior to the elections. These checks will no doubt limit the chances of election manipulation in the country. However, given the activities of hackers, there are fears that Nigeria's elections are not free from manipulations after all (Punch, Dec. 14, 2022). INEC has also raised the alarm that politicians are trying to manufacture BVAS as a way of manipulating elections in Nigeria (Punch, Dec. 14, 2022). But the good news is that the days of ballot box snatching and stuffing are over. However, criminally minded politicians may still deploy political thugs to destabilize and cause

crises in their opponents' strongholds to get elections canceled in those areas and pave way for their own victory. How this can be curbed remains a serious matter to be pondered by INEC, the federal government, security and intelligence agencies, CSOs, and other stakeholders.

The study further sought to ascertain the factors inhibiting the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria and found that the following are serious impediments - monetization of politics/ bribery and corruption, political thuggery, high level of illiteracy, lack of institutional and financial autonomy, poor administration of voter registration and PVC collection process, and unnecessary militarization of elections. Others are unreliable local suppliers of electoral materials, division along ethnic and religious lines, manipulation of election results and the collation process, inadequate funding and misuse of funds set aside for elections, high level of poverty among Nigerians, inadequate electoral security, and natural disasters.

4.3.5 Strategies that could be adopted to ensure credible elections in Nigeria.

The following recommendations were made by respondents:

- a. The independence of the judiciary. Already, there is in existence independent judiciary to settle electoral disputes. Disputes arising from allegations of electoral malpractices are properly being handled by the judiciary in Nigeria. This has even resulted in the judicialization of elections in Nigeria whereby the judiciary determines the winner of elections.
- b. Adequate funding of INEC: this will strengthen the Commission's autonomy and remove vestiges of interferences.

- c. Adequate security to protect electoral materials, electoral officers and voters guarantees a free and fair election and prevents irregularities that may arise as a result of security lapses;
 - d. Transparent voting and counting: this demands keeping to the rules as captured in the new Electoral Act 2022 as a way of forestalling what happened in the 2022 Osun gubernatorial election where the issue of over-voting has reared its ugly face;
 - e. Voter registration and issuance of PVCs should be a continuous exercise in order not to disenfranchise some Nigerians who genuinely want to vote in elections;
- ix. Government should double its efforts at alleviating poverty in the country as a means to stop the thriving business of vote trading. People are easily swayed to sell their votes when they are hungry. Thus, when people are empowered to earn a decent living there will be less chances for voting buying to thrive;
- x. There should be aggressive voter education in local dialects across the country to sensitize Nigerians (both literate and illiterate) about the voting procedure, party logos, etc. This will go a long way in reducing invalidate ballots in every election;
- xi. Government should discourage centrifugal forces and encourage things that unite Nigerians irrespective of religion or tribe

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

Globally elections are indispensable components of a democratic process, thus, while there can be elections without democracies, there is no democracy without election. Regular and credible election is therefore, very important feature of a democratic state. Election is the means through which the society choose its leaders, check their excesses and grant them legitimacy. Democracy on the other hand is currently the most acceptable form of government across the globe. This is hinged on popular participation it avails the citizenry to get involved in their governance.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria succinctly captures and empowers the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to plan and administer elections in the country. Nigeria's democracy has continued to grow in reaps and bounds especially in the area of election management and has gone through six consecutive election circles counting from 1999. The 2015 experience where the incumbency factor failed to count bolstered peoples' thrust in the nation's electoral umpire and the entire democratic process. However, the alarming high-handedness displayed by the ruling political party in manipulating the 1999, 2003, and 2007 electoral process, leading to political killings, religious bigotry, industrial actions, insecurity, and other socio-economic maladies (Ayoade, 2008) remain serious cases of reference

Consequently, this study examined the relationship between elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. And found a very significant link between the duo. The study found that chief among these challenges impeding the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria include among others – bribery and corruption, unnecessary militarization of elections, lack of institutional and financial autonomy for INEC, manipulation of election results.

5.2 Conclusion

Countries across the world strive to achieve credible elections and deepen their democracies (Nigeria is no exception). This explains the regular reform efforts especially in Africa aimed at bettering democratic practices and improvements in the health and quality of their elections. This study made a modest effort at examining the link between credible elections and democratic consolidation as well as the means through which elections deepen democracy in Nigeria. This study also examined the place of the constitutional and legal framework in election administration in Nigeria. It further examined the factors impeding the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria and proffered solutions to them. The study also revealed the low interest and participation of the citizens in elections.

The choice of this topic is very important because of the importance of elections in democracies. It is also important as it brought to the fore, some of these challenges that make the quest for credible elections difficult in the country and proffered workable solutions.

The study indicates that there is a substantial link between the 2015 General Elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria as it heralded the first power transition from a ruling political party to the major opposition political party. It also revealed that significant electoral reforms arising from the subsisting Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) and the political will on the part of the government accounted for the success of the election.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the objectives and the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made to properly address election-related challenges and strengthen the nation's democracy:

1. **Critical actors in the nation’s electoral space should synergize to improve the health, vitality, and credibility of elections in Nigeria:** This can be achieved through the following:
 - a. The independence of the judiciary and timely dispensation of judgments arising from elections before the winner is sworn-in. Already, there is in existence independent judiciary to settle electoral disputes. Disputes arising from allegations of electoral malpractices and pre-election issues are properly being handled by the judiciary in Nigeria. This has even resulted in the judicialization of elections in Nigeria whereby the judiciary determines the winner of elections. However, these judgments usually come late when candidates must have been sworn into office and had enjoyed the pecks of such office. This results in the unnecessary wastage of public resources and its attendant implications on the tax-payers;
 - b. Transparent voting and counting: this demands keeping to the rules as captured in the new Electoral Act 2022 as a way of forestalling what happened in the 2022 Osun gubernatorial election where the issue of over-voting has reared its ugly face. This demands that INEC, the Police and CSOs synergize to ensure that INEC staff and politicians who collude to inflate figures, INEC staff who refuse to cancel results where the number of votes cast outnumber the total number of accredited voters, etc. are properly prosecuted and punished;
 - c. Voter registration and issuance of PVCs should be a continuous exercise in order not to disenfranchise some Nigerians who genuinely want to vote in elections. This demands that the government and CSOs should work closely with INEC to ensure that necessary human, logistics and financial resources are extended to the electoral body

to enable it meet this demand. Secondly, if an automated teller machine (ATM) card can withdraw money from other banks' ATMs across the country irrespective where it was gotten from, the permanent voters card (PVC) can also be modeled in a manner that Nigerians can vote anywhere in the country during each election irrespective of where they register. What is needed that is an electronic register which allows a voter to vote once in an election. This means that whether "A" registered in Abuja, he can also vote in Lagos, Kano, Enugu or any other part of the country. Once, such voter is accredited the electronic accreditation indicates on INEC server that "A" has been accredited to voter in such polling centre or unit. This will boost voter turnout and ensure that people are not disenfranchised as migrate out from where they registered.

d. There should be aggressive voter education in local dialects across the country to sensitize Nigerians (both literate and illiterate) about the voting procedure, party logos, etc. This will go a long way in reducing invalidated ballots in every election. This can take the form of radio jingles, handbills, talk shows, etc. to be anchored by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and INEC. With all these, the citizens interest and participation in election will increase.

2. **Federal Government should guarantee adequate funding of INEC:** this will strengthen the Commission's autonomy and remove vestiges of interferences. Although the Electoral Act 2022 made adequate provision for early release of funds to INEC for the conduct of general elections, it did not provide for continuous increase in INEC funding to meet the realities of the ever-changing world of elections and electoral technology.
3. **Nigeria Police Force to provide adequate security to protect electoral materials, electoral officers and voters to guarantees** a free and fair election and prevents

irregularities that may arise as a result of security lapses should be taken seriously by the government. Currently, there is no proper synergy amongst the various security agencies manning elections in Nigeria. Each of these agencies send their officers and men on election security operation without a central coordination. Thus, the need to create a special joint unit comprising an Assistant Inspector-General (representing the Nigerian Police Force), an Assistant Corps Commandant-General (representing the NSCDC), representative of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and a senior military officer. This special unit will determine the number of police officers, NSCDC officers, etc. to be deployed for election assignments. It will engender effective coordination of electoral security and professionalism;

4. **Federal and State Governments should double its efforts** at alleviating poverty in the country as a means to stop the thriving business of vote trading. People are easily swayed to sell their votes when they are hungry. Thus, when people are empowered to earn a decent living there will be fewer chances for voting buying to thrive;
5. **National Orientation Agency and other government** agencies should discourage centrifugal forces and encourage things that unite Nigerians irrespective of religion or tribe.

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