

**THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OBSERVATION MISSION IN
NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTION**

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**BEING A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
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27th June, 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation "The Role of European Union in Election Observation Mission's in Nigeria's 2023, General Election" has been undertaken by me under the supervision of Dr. Christopher O. Ngara. I further certify this work has been previously submitted for the award of Master degree or any certificate elsewhere. All ideas and views are products of my research where the views of others have been expressed, they have been duly acknowledged.

Miss Fatsuma Maina MOHAMMED

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Almighty Allah for his enablement to accomplish this great feat.

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work "The Role of European Union in Election Observation in Nigeria's General Election, 2023" presented by Miss Fatsuma Maina MOHAMMED has met the partial requirements for the award of Master Degree in Election and Party Politics of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies / University of Benin, Edo State.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that this dissertation “The Role of European Union in Election Observation in Nigeria's General Election, 2023” has been read and approved as having met the partial requirements for the award of Master’s Degree in Elections and Party Politics Management (EPPM) of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies/University of Benin is approved for contribution to knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, which were pivotal in shaping the nation's democratic trajectory. Nigerian elections had long been plagued by significant challenges, including violence, logistical failures, and allegations of fraud, and political interference, all of which contributed to a decline in public trust in the electoral process. Despite recent reforms, such as the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022 and the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), skepticism about the transparency and fairness of the elections persisted. The objectives of the study were to analyze how the European Union promoted democracy in Nigeria amid evolving domestic challenges and to assess the impact of the EU EOM on the 2023 general elections. The study was significant in strengthening electoral democracy in Nigeria by providing a critical appraisal of the EU EOM's influence.

The study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design, the study selected a sample of twenty (20) stakeholders, including INEC officials, observer groups, civil society organizations (CSOs), and members of academia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically.

Findings revealed that the absence of clear legal frameworks and weaknesses in electoral administration undermined the transparency, inclusiveness, and credibility of the elections, further eroding public trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Additional findings offered several recommendations to address these challenges, such as clarifying ambiguities in electoral law, establishing transparent and accountable procedures for appointing INEC members, ensuring real-time access to election results, enhancing protections for media practitioners, addressing gender discrimination in politics, and combating impunity for electoral offenses.

The study recommended that EU observers broaden the scope of their activities to include pre-election and post-election processes, noting that focusing solely on Election Day was insufficient and could not withstand rigorous integrity assessments. Furthermore, the study advocated for comprehensive legal and operational reforms to enhance accountability and transparency, ensure adherence to human rights and the rule of law, and enforce INEC's campaign regulations through robust monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms to prevent abuse of incumbency and government interference. Ultimately, the study concluded that the EU EOM played a significant role in advancing Nigeria's democratic development during the 2023 general elections.

Keywords: *Role, Election, European Union, Election Observation, General Election*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Democracy, an essential element of political discourse and governance, has been interpreted in numerous ways by scholars and philosophers (Fahner, 2017; Munck, 2016). The term democracy is used somewhat loosely and encompasses various interpretations. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that, politically, it denotes a system of governance where every citizen has the right to directly influence the State's decisions (Gillin, 1919). Citizens play a vital role in democratic discussions. Multiple research studies have shown that democracy implies that the populace governs in their own best interest (Morlina, 2004; Fahner, 2017). This self-interest is rooted in a shared sociopolitical identity. In other words, it indicates that "the people are the masters" of their governance (Wydra, 2009). The principle that leaders must obtain consent prior to implementing policies is fundamental to both the theory and practice of democracy. This notion likely originated in communities where rulers distributed power among councils due to disparities in information and financial factors associated with policy implementation, as will be illustrated in the context of modern societies (Ahmed & Stasavage, 2020).

Observing elections is inherently an act in support of democracy. Election observers function as neutral monitors who can evaluate whether an election's outcomes genuinely represent the people's will. Authentic democratic elections do not automatically ensure democratic governance but are essential for its establishment. They provide political legitimacy for those elected and a basis for governing, thereby limiting the potential for undemocratic power challenges. They facilitate the peaceful resolution of political power disputes and are generally more conducive to stability than undemocratic succession methods.

Election observation and monitoring are terms that are frequently interchanged, but they possess distinct meanings. Election observation is characterized as a process that involves

collecting information and forming an informed assessment of that data (Guidelines for African Union Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions, 2002; Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Toolkit on Election Observation, 2017). This process entails an independent group of observers assessing elections within a specific country or area against established standards to determine whether the elections meet accepted criteria for democratic participation, identifying defects and obstacles, and providing suggestions for future enhancements (Independent National Electoral Commission {INEC} guideline on election observation and monitoring, 2014). Observations are conducted to formulate an informed analysis of how well the entire electoral process aligns with particular national electoral legal frameworks and international norms. In contrast, election monitoring is an action-oriented and participatory form of research. The European Union Observation Mission has developed into one of the largest observation efforts globally since the year 2000. The Mission has participated in over two hundred operations across 75 countries since 2000 (European Union, 2023). Since 1999, the organization has engaged in the electoral process in Nigeria through its observation missions and electoral support initiatives. The body has deployed its observation mission for the general elections in Nigeria held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 (European Union, 2022).

In the previous two general elections, held in 2019 and 2023, the activities and reports of the Mission were notably prominent compared to reports from other Observation Missions. The Presidential and National Assembly elections in Nigeria took place on February 23, 2019, while gubernatorial elections for the various Nigerian States occurred one week later. On March 23, 2019, supplementary elections for positions that were inconclusive during the initial voting were organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Leading up to those elections, the nation was grappling with significant insecurity and a declining economy.

The context of the 2023 Presidential election mirrored that of 2019. In the lead-up to the 2023 Presidential election, Nigeria was confronting a high level of insecurity along with an underperforming economy. Kidnapping for ransom was widespread, and violent attacks by herdsmen against numerous communities intensified across the nation. Settlements in Nigeria's middle belt region were devastated by a series of relentless assaults. The violence was not confined to the middle belt; for instance, in Owo, Ondo State, located in South West Nigeria, a Catholic Church was attacked on a Sunday morning, resulting in the deaths of numerous worshippers (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022).

It is against this backdrop that this study explores the role of European Union Observation mission in Nigeria's 2023 General Election.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Nigeria's 2023 general elections marked a critical juncture in the nation's democratic journey, occurring amidst high public expectations and ongoing concerns about electoral credibility. Historically, Nigerian elections have faced significant challenges, including violence, logistical breakdowns, fraud allegations, and political interference, all of which have eroded public trust in the electoral system. Despite the reforms such as the Electoral Act 2022 and the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), skepticism about the transparency and fairness of the process persisted.

The central issue was whether the 2023 elections would deliver meaningful improvements in electoral integrity or simply repeat the systemic shortcomings of previous polls. The competitive political environment, coupled with security concerns and the potential for manipulation, raised doubts about the authorities' capacity to ensure a free, fair, and peaceful election. Operational failures, delays in result transmission, and gaps in the enforcement of electoral laws further complicated the process and fueled widespread skepticism among voters and stakeholders.

Despite the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) having observed Nigerian elections since 1999, there remains a substantial gap in assessing the actual influence of these missions on Nigeria's electoral reforms and public perceptions. While the EU EOM routinely presents detailed findings and recommendations-such as those following the 2023 general elections-limited research has systematically traced how these recommendations have shaped policy, improved election administration, or affected public confidence in the electoral process.

Given these challenges, this study seeks to address the existing gap by critically analyzing the role of the EU EOM in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, with particular attention to its influence on electoral reforms, institutional practices, and voter trust.

1.3 Research Question

- I. How does the EU promote democracy amid changing domestic issues in Nigeria?
- II. How does the EU observation mission impact the 2023 Nigerian general election?

1.4 Research Objectives

- I. Analyze how the European Union (EU) promotes democracy in Nigeria in the context of evolving domestic challenges.
- II. Assess the impact of the EU Election Observation Mission on the 2023 Nigerian general election.

1.5 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

Scope

This study focuses on the role of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Nigeria 2023 general elections, particularly in assessing electoral integrity, transparency, and democratic governance. While examining the legal and institutional framework guiding the EU's observation mission in Nigeria. It also assesses the EU involvement in monitoring

voter registration, campaign activities, and political participation while analyzing the role of EU observers in election - day proceedings, including polling unit operations, voter turnout, and ballot counting, collation and announcement of results, as well as electoral dispute resolution between candidates and political parties, and lastly reviewing the EU final report, thus highlighting irregularities, challenges, and best practices.

Delimitation

- The study does not provide a detailed analysis of the roles of other international or domestic observer groups, such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, or local civil society organization and does not examine the role of individual political parties and candidates in shaping electoral outcomes.
- This study is limited to the EU EOM'S findings and recommendations.
- The analysis focuses on the 2023 general elections only, without a comparative study of previous elections or broader historical electoral trends in Nigeria.
- This study primarily relies on reports, official statements, and media coverage of the EU EOM's mission. First - hand interviews with EU observers or INEC officials are not included.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for strengthening electoral democracy in Nigeria by providing a critical assessment of the EU EOM's impact. Therefore, there had been a knowledge gap hence, the findings of this study could fill the gap in the literature in this area as well as be beneficiary to the following;

- Encouraging public discussions on the role of international observers, addressing misconceptions about their influence on Nigeria's sovereignty and electoral processes.
- Democratic Institutions: The findings from this study could be beneficial to democratic institutions in Nigeria, such as Political Parties, Politicians, the judiciary, Civil Society

Organizations, the media, Electoral reform regulators (National Assembly), policymakers, the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), etc. in facilitating policies for delivering democracy dividends and democratic consolidation. In the same way, this study could be beneficial to Citizens/Electorates, etc.

- The significance of this study could potentially lie in its quest to restore citizens' trust and confidence in the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct free, fair, transparent, inclusive, and credible elections in Nigeria.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) and local election monitors can use the findings to strengthen domestic election observation efforts.
- The study assesses the impact of the EU's 2023 recommendations, offering insights into how Nigeria can adopt international standards for election management and governance.

1.7 Conceptual Clarifications

For clarity and ease of comprehension, it is essential to clarify the key concepts used in this paper. The concepts include election, election observation, and democracy.

Election: Election is one of the most popular words in Social Sciences' lexicon. Thus, a lot has been written on the meaning and essence of elections (see, for instance, Przeworski, 2018; Schubert et al, 2014; Dobratz et al, 2012; Igwe, 2002; etc.). In general, election refers to either the official process of choosing a person for public position/office, or the formal process of accepting or rejecting a political proposition through voting. For the purpose of this paper, however, the first definition of election (as the official process of choosing a person for public position/office) is adopted. It should be noted that not all elections are competitive. In fact, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2023), it is common practice for most countries to hold

elections in at least a formal sense, but in many of them the elections are not competitive, or the electoral situation is in other respects highly compromised.

Election Observation: Election observation has come to be an integral aspect of contemporary representative democracy – especially in the Global South. Election observation is done by both domestic and international actors. For the purpose of this dissertation, election observation is conceptualized as the process of collecting, organizing, and analyzing election-related data by non-partisan state and non-state actors, and using same to draw objective conclusive reports which could be used in assessing the overall electoral cycle. A few points are intrinsic in this definition. First is that election observation is a process which covers an entire election cycle – not just election days. Second is that both local and international election observers are involved – this provides a balanced yardstick for comparison. Third, election observers are non-partisan, non-state actors – this way, a high level of objectivity and neutrality (or impartiality) can be guaranteed. Fourth, election observation reports are valid and reliable yardsticks for assessing electoral outcomes. These four points underscore the fecundity of election observation. Tapoko (2017) pointed out that even though election monitoring is closely related to election observation, they are not the same. According to IDEA (1997, cited in Tapoko, 2017, p.53), *election monitoring is an activity which involves the authority to observe an electoral process and to intervene in the process if relevant laws or standard procedures are being violated or ignored*. On the other hand, *election observation seeks to evaluate a given electoral process in order to legitimise it, where appropriate*. Even though their main goals are to evaluate the entire electoral process which covers the pre-election, election and post-election phases, Matlosa (2002) noted that an election monitoring mandate is more comprehensive and extensive than that of election observation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study, including a conceptual overview of election observation, the role of civil society organizations in elections, European electoral assistance in Africa, and Europe's normative power. It also examines demographic, socio-political, and economic issues in Nigeria. Additionally, the chapter addresses the theoretical review, empirical studies, identified gaps in the literature, and the theoretical framework guiding the research.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Election observation is a valuable tool for improving the quality of elections. Observers help build public confidence in the honesty of electoral processes. Observation can help promote and protect the civil and political rights of participants in elections. It can lead to the correction of errors or weak practices, even while an election process is still under way. It can deter manipulation and fraud, or expose such problems if they do occur. When observers can issue positive reports, it builds trust in the democratic process and enhances the legitimacy of the governments that emerge from elections. Election observation by domestic groups encourages civic involvement in the political process. Following elections, reports and recommendations by observer groups can lead to changes and improvements in national law and practice (Mutie et al., 2020).

Observation takes on heightened importance in post-conflict countries, in which groups that have been contesting on the battlefield may harbour strong suspicions of the political system and the election process. In such cases, observation makes an important contribution to peace-building, since creating confidence in elections can help promote national reconciliation and sound democratic practices. Election observation by the United Nations or other

intergovernmental organizations can be especially helpful when domestic observer organizations do not have sufficient strength or resources to organize effective monitoring efforts, or when the impartiality of domestic observers is in question, as may often be the case in post-conflict countries or new democracies. However, international observers are typically less knowledgeable about the country they are observing, and a few may bring their own biases to the observation. In extraordinary circumstances international observers or supervisors in post-conflict countries may even be given the authority to certify or invalidate election results. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA 2012). Generally, however, observers have no power to interfere in the election process, but may only observe, assess and report. Carefully designed and conducted election observation can improve the implementation of the human rights of women and help to enhance their participation in electoral processes. Comprehensive observation should include an assessment of how all elements of an election process affect women as well as men. Targeted observation efforts can focus specifically on aspects of women's participation in elections. Since women should have the opportunity to participate equally as observers, observation itself can serve to bring more women into the political process. (Organization of American States, 2013).

2.1.1 Civil Society Organizations Role in Election

Elections are official procedures for making decisions, through which candidates seeking public office are selected, based on a legal electoral framework established at the national level (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2017). The collaboration that Election Management Bodies have developed with Civil Society can be attributed to their need to enhance the credibility of elections. Therefore, civil society is permitted to observe elections whenever they occur. According to Diamond (1999), civil society refers to the space of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-sustaining, at least partially funded independently, separate from government influence, and bound by a legal framework or a set of common rules. Another

researcher, Ghaus-Pasha (2004), defines civil society as the space outside the family, government, and market where individuals come together to promote shared interests. He further explained that the purpose of civil society is to represent the interests of a group with common socio-economic, political, or cultural goals, focusing on achieving good governance and serving the collective welfare of its members rather than pursuing political power or profit. The assertion by Diamond that civil society operates independently from the government and Ghaus-Pasha's characterization of it as an area external to the state presents some challenges. As Gromping (2017) noted, some domestic NGOs are established and managed by government entities (often referred to as GONGOs). Defining civil society as independent from the state neglects to acknowledge this phenomenon. Thus, this definition fails to account for the potential use of civil society by government entities. Additionally, Uwem and Yearoo (2009) describe civil society as a network of institutions and organizations that connect the state, the business sector, and families. They elaborated that it is a space for collective actions centered on shared interests and values.

Setting aside the limitations evident in the definitions provided by Diamond and Ghaus-Pasha, these three authors appear to agree on two fundamental points. The first is that civil society membership is voluntary, and the second is that there are common interests that are pursued. Election observation and monitoring are terms that are frequently used interchangeably, yet they possess distinct meanings. Election observation is characterized as a process that entails collecting information and forming an informed judgment based on the data gathered (Guidelines for African Union Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions, 2002; Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Toolkit on Election Observation, 2017). It is the act of observing elections within a specific country or locality against established standards by an independent group of observers, aiming to determine whether the elections adhere to recognized democratic participation guarantees, identify defects and challenges, and provide recommendations for

improving the process in the future (Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) guideline on election observation and monitoring, 2014). The purpose of observing elections is to form an informed opinion regarding how well the entire electoral process aligns with specific national electoral legal frameworks and international standards.

On the other hand, Bard-Andreassan (1999), cited in Olatunde (2016) defines election monitoring as a form of action-oriented and participatory research. The main purpose of the monitoring is to objectively collect evidence of the electoral process in order to make an assessment of whether the process was democratic. The research is action-oriented in that the result are not entirely of academic interest, but one intended to influence the situation in encouraging politicians to act democratically, in encouraging public institutions to allow free and fair debate, in enabling voters to know their democratic rights. It has also been defined as a process which involves the authority to observe an election process and to intervene in that process if relevant laws or standard procedures are being ignored and violated (Guidelines for African Union Election Monitoring and Observation Mission, 2002; INEC guidelines on election observation and monitoring, 2014). Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) clearly stipulates the difference between Monitoring and Observation. Two of such differences are worth mentioning here. First is that while a monitor exercises some level of lawful authority over the conduct of elections as well as over officials involved, an observer does not have such powers. Secondly, a monitor can issue instructions and take decisions on behalf of INEC and to that extent, would ordinarily possess a greater technical knowledge of the election process than an observer. On the contrary, an observer cannot issue instructions or take decisions on behalf of INEC. The guideline further states that under Nigerian Law, it is only INEC that has the authority to monitor elections.

Monitoring includes activities beyond the mere observing of polling places for instance...the promotion of electoral integrity practices, and probably deterrence of misconduct. At the same

time, it does not include activities associated with the supervision of elections – tasks more related to electoral administration (Gromping, 2017). It is important to stress here that the dichotomy between election observation and monitoring is not one that can be stretched too far, as it is difficult to isolate observation from monitoring. Although the Guidelines of African Union Election Monitoring and Observation as well as INEC guidelines on same make this distinction, it does appear that the aim is to ensure that interventions in the electoral process is strictly reserved for the election management body, as third party interventions might compromise the process. This perhaps explains why members of the civil society and other observers are restricted to observing and reporting their findings.

Election observers are in two categories. There are partisan election observers which are made up of political party agents and the party bureaucracy deployed to polling stations to observe the voting process. The second group is non-partisan observers, which comprises the civil society, the media and international observers. In this study, we are focusing on the non-partisan, non-state, non-profit and non-media observers; in other words, groups with this nomenclature who are accredited by INEC as civil society. The point cannot be denied though, that they may have party bias, however the fact remains that their accreditation to observe elections is not based on their political party affiliation. Besides, they are more concerned with the electoral process than the result outcome (Gromping, 2017).

The sweeping tide of democratization across Africa has given rise to periodic elections in the continent. As a result of the role civil society has been playing in championing democracy, they do show keen interest in observing elections. This arises from the concern they have, that elections should be conducted according to international best practices. In the particular case of Nigeria, Gromping (2017) observed that the increased interest shown by CSO in monitoring elections is that since the return of democracy in 1999, elections have been fraught with

integrity deficit. The role civil society play in observing elections have attracted the attention of scholars across the continent.

Popoola (2014) opined that the conduct of regular elections is considered the single most important indicator of the presence of democracy. According to him, for elections to represent the wish of the electorates, both the process leading to it and the outcome must be credible. He thus studied the role civil society organizations play in electioneering in Ghana. His submission was that CSO's have played some crucial roles to ensure that electoral processes are credible in Ghana.

Popoola's assertion that civil society organizations (CSOs) have played significant roles in ensuring the credibility of electoral processes in Ghana is somewhat broad. Without specifying the particular actions, they have taken in the electoral process, it may be challenging to determine whether the successes achieved can be attributed to the efforts of CSOs. Nevertheless, the study suggests that CSOs are vital players in Ghana's electoral framework. While Popoola's research centers on Ghana's electoral process, Nigeria exhibits similarities to Ghana in terms of conducting regular elections and the involvement of CSOs in election observation.

In his research, Abdullahi (2015) examined the contributions of international development partners and civil society in fostering credible elections in developing nations like Nigeria. He recognized international development agencies as crucial elements for promoting democracy in these countries. Abdullahi pointed to the Democratic Governance for Development (DGD) as one of the strategies employed by international development agencies to advance democracy in Nigeria. The study indicated that the initiative has been offering support to both governmental and non-governmental entities, such as the Electoral Commission, Political Parties, and civil society organizations, to enhance the credibility of elections in Nigeria.

The research showed that DGD has granted technical and financial assistance to CSOs for monitoring and observing elections, raising public awareness, and strengthening various forms of civic engagement, all aimed at influencing the conduct of credible elections in the nation. However, the findings highlighted issues such as a lack of effective coordination of support, insufficient data on CSOs, absence of reliable evaluation tools, inadequate internal democracy within CSOs, and mismanagement of resources, all of which hindered the support for democracy and credible elections in Nigeria. Abdullahi concluded that for international assistance to promote credible elections effectively, it is essential to eliminate impunity, establish evaluation instruments for support, and continue the capacity-building efforts for CSOs in Nigeria.

Abdullahi's research highlights some of the shortcomings of CSOs that evidently affect the degree of assistance they receive from international development partners. Their failure to manage internal affairs impacts their ability to impartially fulfill the role of election observers. Olatunde (2016) focused on the influence of international observers in solidifying democracy in Nigeria, particularly regarding the 2015 general elections. He initially defined election monitoring, referencing Bard-Andreassan, and stating that it is a form of participatory and action-oriented research. The primary goal is to collect objective evidence of the electoral process to assess its democratic nature. This research is action-driven, meaning the outcomes are not just academically relevant but also intended to encourage democratic behavior among politicians, promote open discussions within public institutions, and inform voters of their democratic rights.

According to Olatunde, a key aspect of election monitoring is its role in validating or disputing election results, as well as assessing credibility based on specific electoral criteria. He concluded that the foremost function of election monitoring is to create a sense of confidence in the electoral process.

There is a dilemma in Olatunde's study, though not a major drawback. The dilemma arises from the fact that election monitoring and election observation are presented as synonyms, which they are not. There is a difference between monitoring and observation and this difference was established in the introductory part of this study. INEC accredits CSO's to observe and not to monitor elections as INEC is the only body empowered by Nigerian laws to monitor elections.

In a study done in South Africa, Mottair (2009) examined the role the five sub-committees of Kwazulu-Natal Democracy and Elections Forum (KZNDEF), a Civil Society Organization in South Africa play and their impact on the deepening of democracy, the reduction of conflict dynamics and the promotion of peace in Kwazulu-Natal, a province plagued with election related violence. He concluded that while it is not possible to attribute lower levels of election –related conflict and higher levels of peace during elections in Kwazulu-Natal directly to the work of KZNDEF, it is possible to suggest that the forum has made significant progress in promoting a

2.1.2 Overview of Election Observations

Elections are domestic affairs of individual countries. However, the interests it generates, goes beyond national boundaries. The increasing wave of democratization in Africa has stimulated the interest of the international community in elections held in the continent. For this reason, whenever election is taking place, observers come from different parts of the globe. Non-partisan election observation and monitoring by citizen organizations has emerged as one of the most tangible and significant dimensions of democratic development around the globe (European Commission of Democracy through Law, 2012). The overriding aim is to enhance the integrity of the electoral process, promote accountability in government and among contestants. To ensure there are uniform guidelines followed in observing elections, legal

instruments for election observation have been devolved at the international, continental, sub-regional and national levels.

At the international level, the United Nations Declaration of Principle for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers is the benchmark for assessing the quality of observation. It was commemorated in 2005. At the continental level, there is the 2002 African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Mission. In the ECOWAS sub-region where Nigeria belongs, it is encapsulated in the ECOWAS Guideline for Election Observation and Monitoring. Expectedly at the national level, Nigeria's Election Management Body, the Independent National Electoral Commission in 2014, published the INEC Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring, which was revised in 2018.

However, the legal instrument that empowers citizens' organizations like civil society to observe elections is the Declaration of Global Principles for non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizens Organizations and Code of Conduct for non-partisan Citizen Election Observers and Monitors (GNDEM). This was initiated by the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors and was commemorated on April 3, 2012 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. As at the time the document was adopted in 2012, it was endorsed by the following Nigerian -based CSO's: Civil Liberties Organization (CLO); Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL); Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC) and Transition Monitoring Group (TMC).

International election observation expresses the interest of the international community in the achievement of democratic elections as part of democratic development including respect for human rights and the rule of law. It assesses election processes in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections and domestic law, while recognizing that it is the people of a country who ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of an election

process (Declaration of principles for international election observation and code of conduct for international election observers, 2005)

The first reported case in modern history of international election observation took place in 1857 when a European Commission of Austrian, British, French, Prussian, Russian and Turkish representatives observed the plebiscite in the disputed territories of Moldavia and Wallachia (Mitchell, 2011). Mitchell further states that the post-World War era provided more examples as the United Nations was asked to monitor elections in Korea and Germany and in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, there were UN observation and monitoring type activities mostly by the Trusteeship Council in the context of decolonization. However, with the end of the cold war, election observation not only witnessed a boost, there also came the development of international standards on the conduct of democratic elections.

When the word election is mentioned, what readily comes to mind is casting of ballot. To this end, it is an activity which takes place on a stipulated day or days. Based on this conception, election observation is also perceived as the witnessing of event or series of events that takes place on the day of balloting. Defining election in this way is narrow and could therefore be misleading. A broader view of what an election and by extension election observation purports was succinctly given by Jega (2014) when he stated:

Election is a process and not an event. To that extent, election observation should cover all the activities undertaken in connection with the election. A credible election is not just premised on events of the Election Day. It is also based on the legal framework, prevailing political environment, respect for individual rights and internal party structures and collaboration among all the actors in the electoral process”.

The Declaration of Global Principles for non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations and Code of Conduct for non-partisan Citizen Election Observers and Monitors (2012) further states in rule 16 that:

Non-partisan election observation and monitoring by citizens organizations employs in its best practice, long-term observation and analysis that address all parts of the election cycle as well as the broader political context that affects the character and quality of elections. Where non-partisan citizen election observation and monitoring

organizations cannot examine every element of a given election process, they should consider the significance of pre-election and post-election factors and place election day process in the proper context of the election cycle as well as the related political environment. This is required in order not to over-emphasize election-day developments and thus potentially mischaracterize the nature of the election process.

2.1.3 European Electoral Assistance in Africa

Concerns surrounding foreign electoral assistance have captured the attention of International Relations (IR) for several reasons. Firstly, elections are regarded as a critical arena for the exercise of state sovereignty. Consequently, when external actors, whether states or organizations comprised of states, become involved, questions about the interveners' interests come into play (Strachan, 2017). Thirdly, concerns have been raised regarding procedural deficiencies in the involvement of foreign actors in electoral assistance (*Ibid*). This underscores the necessity to scrutinize the processes by which external actors engage in elections, particularly in the developing countries (Kelly, 2012) within the framework of the field of IR. Thus, pursuing this task with the aim of accounting for EU's electoral support in the form of technical and capacity building of elections concerned bodies/stakeholders in Kenya in the post-2010 general elections.

EP (2017) reports that before 1989, only Botswana and Mauritius conducted regular multi-party elections in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, since 1990, nearly every African country has held regular elections, with the European Union (EU) playing a significant role in supporting such democratic endeavors. The EU has deployed numerous Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs), totaling 85 out of 185 EOMs recorded on the EEAS website between 1993 and 2017. Nonetheless, reports also show that the quality of these observed elections and the democratic legitimacy of the governing regimes have exhibited considerable variation (Börze & Hackenesch, 2013; Farrell, 2013).

According to Motsamai (2012), the EU's electoral assistance role in Sub Sahara African region has changed over time becoming more formalized and underpinned with a sustainability

agenda. To this realization, to address the challenge of subpar electoral standards and difunctionalized electoral management bodies, the EU has transitioned towards an approach that encompasses the entire electoral cycle (*Ibid*, Hout, 2013; ELOG, 2023). The final reports from EU EOMs offer recommendations for enhancing future elections' quality. Electoral follow-up missions gauge progress on these recommendations and consider input from various stakeholders. The decision to conduct subsequent EOMs in a specific country is contingent on the government's commitment to implementing past recommendations (Gawrich, 2015).

Additionally, the EU provides electoral assistance to bolster the capacity of electoral bodies, empower civil society actors engaged in electoral processes, and facilitate public education on electoral matters. In specific instances, such as post-conflict scenarios, the EU has financially supported election organization, as exemplified by its €47.5 million contribution, along with €2 million for enhanced security, for the Democratic Republic of Congo's general elections in 2011. The EU has also extended substantial backing to enhance the African Union's electoral observation capabilities, offering €6.5 million through the Pan- African Programme.

To some researchers, the EU has established a reputation for impartiality, thereby enhancing the credibility of electoral processes and promoting peaceful competition among candidates, encouraging the use of legal channels for contesting election results (Abdulahi. 2015; Börzel & Hackenesch, 2013). An evaluation report for the European Commission, covering EOM activities from 2016 to January 2017, concluded that EU election observation efforts can help identify irregularities and deter fraud and malpractice, despite their inherent limitations (EP, 2017).

Furthermore, these activities are seen as fostering stakeholder confidence in the electoral process, consequently reducing the potential for election-related conflicts. Despite such appraisal, country-specific analysis remains scarce, prompting the need for in-depth case analysis of key African countries allies of EU like Kenya which has been a recipient of EU

electoral technical and capacity building support for over two decades with a ceiling of about Kes. 13 billion both to the basket fund and directly to the election concerned institutions in 2022 general elections.

Both Motsamai (2012) and EP (2017) assert that the EU involvement in poor countries has been regularized even through foreign relations documents targeting poor continents such as Africa. Kelly (2012) asserts that electoral assistance often takes on a tangible and technical character. For instance, international organizations may undertake tasks such as repairing or constructing voter lists and educating local authorities on their assembly and maintenance, thereby influencing who gets to vote in a given country. Additionally, international actors may supply ballot boxes, facilitate the production and distribution of election materials, and provide computer and communication equipment, and more. A striking example is the European Commission's oversight of electoral reform in the Palestinian Authority, coupled with substantial financial support for technical equipment and assistance (European Commission 2006). Similarly, in Nicaragua, international donors allocated over \$8 million for the issuance of national voter identity cards (*Ibid*). There are instances where international actors take on the responsibility of organizing entire elections, such as when the United Nations conducts "election supervision" (EP, 2017). Börzel & Hackenesch (2013) assert that while EU's impact has been huge within EU, such cannot be said in countries in Africa where the nature of politics plays out as the key determinant of whether technical assistance leads to free, fair and credible elections. This calls for an examination of Kenya's experiences with EU electoral support through technical and capacity building to understand in-depth by unpacking its dynamics through a systematic study of how this intervention has manifested.

2.1.4 Democracy Promotion

As a response to the inquiry regarding the precise definition of "democracy promotion," Hassan (2011) defined it as the facilitation of free trade integration within larger interdependent

markets, the calling for periodic elections, and the opening of markets in accordance with the tenets of neoliberal economics. Each approach fosters a progressive and enduring transition towards "market democracies." Nonetheless, developments will inevitably revert to their initial state if the ongoing political determination of both the aid-receiving and aid-providing governments does not substantiate this notion (Aka, 2002).

External democracy promotion has been the most essential practice of democratic foreign policy. It seeks to interpret and elucidate, using the democratic peace theory, how established developed democracies, such as the US, Western Europe, Canada, etc., use their foreign policy to promote and foster democracy in developing countries to ensure global peace. Inderjeet Parmar points out that foreign policymakers have used the concept of democratic peace theory to divide the world into opposing blocs based on democratic and non-democratic characteristics as part of an American effort to promote democracy and create a 'safer' global environment (Parmar, 2013). Previous research has established that a belief in the existence of the democratic peace phenomenon is increasingly gaining acceptance among Western leaders, not just in academia (Kahl, 1998). The global promulgation of democracy emphasizes the need for 'international peace' by aligning with the reinforcement of economic interdependence and international institutions (Placek, 2012). Such a conscious, active propagation of democracy tends to take a formidable and famous place in global governance, which encompasses the aim and strategy of democratic foreign policies to promote and protect democratic regimes globally by examining how donors exercise their leverage over aid recipients and, more importantly, why, using a cost-benefit approach to understand the incentives of both donors and recipients (Tan, 2020).

Before the twentieth century, there were few efforts to develop theories on international democracy support. In the 1980s, the debate focused on defining the terms 'democracy' and 'peace,' as used within the theoretical framing of the democratic peace theory. Over the past

twenty years, there has been a growing emphasis on states deliberately creating a democratic foreign policy that supports democracy, as shown in the literature on the topic. The shift in behavior of major powers such as the US and EU towards a democratic foreign policy can be attributed, in part, to the changing dynamics of the early twenty-first century, which include events like the 9/11 attacks in the US (Gat, 2005), the rise of globalism (Hambleton *et al.*, 2003), and the advent of the internet (Thornton, 2001). However, some scholars have argued that the foundation of democracy promotion and support may be traced back to the writings of the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant rather than originating in the second half of the twentieth century, as most literature constantly uses recent data (Diamond, 1992) and states' foreign policies and aid support for their analysis. Kant's essay on Perpetual Peace provides a utilitarian explanation for the current democratic peace, suggesting that peace in democracies is due to the behavior of individual people (Wolff & Wurm, 2011; Mello, 2014; Placek, 2012). Recent academic research has begun to catch up with the increasing focus on foreign and development policies that specifically target the worldwide advancement and safeguarding of democratic governments (Wolff & Wurm, 2011). However, a significant area that has not been thoroughly investigated is the need to understand 'democracy promotion' as a goal and tactic of democratic foreign policy (Wolff & Wurm, 2011). This involves integrating empirical studies on democracy promotion into theoretical frameworks of international relations, which the mentioned authors did in their work. There is a lack of international democratic theory that explains the link between democracy, democratization, and the global system (Smith, 2000). The mechanism such as the 'logics,' 'targets,' and 'pathways' of influence through which different democracy promotion policies of the developed countries impact a domestic political change of developing or 'fledgling' democracies is the substance of this theoretical interest. This led to Jonas Wolff and Iris Wurm's efforts to theorize about promoting external democracy (Wolff & Wurm, 2011).

In trying to theorize international democracy promotion, using the utilitarian and normative approach to democratic peace, some scholars argued that due to the peaceful nature of individual citizens, which collectively defines the domestic political atmosphere and is adopted in domestic aspirations influencing its foreign policy posture, established democracies externalize democracy and the accompanying process of democratization to other countries with the hope of economic and political cooperation (Wolff & Wurm, 2011). Moreover, the theory faces serious lashes as any effort to promote democracy would ultimately imply the long, tedious, and conflict-ridden democratization process, which might run counter to achieving the net benefit of international peace and closer economic and political ties between democracies. Due to the theory's close connection to the neo-functionalist approach of cross-cutting cleavages engagement in the receiving country (Diamond, 1988) and its effects on economic cooperation, industrialization, and modernization of the economy of the receiving country, which becomes a prime activity of the government promoting democracy, challenges abound. Hence, serious issues arise from the failure to account for and accommodate the understanding that in a space that experiences a domestic shift in its political architecture through democratic promotion by an external state that brings investment in a territory that faces ethnic tension between dominant groups and smaller groups, there is bound to be further conflict that restrains democratic growth despite its promotion. Just as Jeff Bridoux & Milja Kurki (2014) contend, we must ask if international democracy is context-specific or an imposition by Western powers like America or the EU. A failure to accomplish the contextual nature of territory illustrates the challenges in a context like Nigeria over the years, where dominant ethnic groups continue to cling to power and enjoy the role of kingmaker at the expense of other groups. Those groups threatened secession amid violent confrontations over the years.

The inability to draw broad conclusions for democracy promotion is a significant problem in the literature, even though one of the crucial effects of externalizing democracy is to socialize political elites to act by democratic norms whenever possible (Mello, 2014) and to avoid conflict with one another (Layne, 1994) to achieve peace. Wolff and Wurm (2011) argue that whether or not a state should prioritize promoting democracy depends on the level of demand for or lack thereof from influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs), interest groups, and public opinion concerning foreign and development policies.

Previous research on constitutionalism suggests that countries experiencing tumultuous and violent conflicts, particularly those in Africa, should adopt a minimalist approach during their transition to peace. This approach involves implementing specific election procedures and constitutional designs, including a clear separation of powers and power-sharing arrangements to achieve lasting peace (Watts, 2016). Even though it is as old as democratic peace research, this way of thinking about constructing a relevance of the activities of democratic promotion by the governments of the US or Europe (elite politics) dates to the liberal internationalism within states interaction (Layne, 2006). It is also consistent with recent thinking in the search for the essence of why engage in democracy promotion in the first place, sometimes coercing state actors of other countries (preferably considered "non-democracies") into democratic acceptance at their own risk.

Furthermore, the terrible events in Libya and Iraq have perplexed residents in donor and recipient countries and global political analysts. Muhammad Ijaz Latif and Hussain Abbas analyzed the US Democracy Promotion and Popular Revolutions in the Middle East, showing that the George W Bush administration's emphasis on the Middle East for democracy promotion was seen as a positive change in geographical priority. The policy of regime changes in Iraq to promote democracy became more contentious on the global stage (Hassan, 2011; Latif & Abbas, 2011). The Iraq war and the accompanying portrayal of removing Saddam

Hussein as a democratizing mission have hindered successful pro-democracy efforts in several Arab countries. The simplified notion of connecting the 'war on terror' with democracy was partly responsible for this outcome (Latif & Abbas, 2011). Past research on US democracy promotion in the Middle East suggests that the negative impact of American democracy promotion has led to societal destruction. This is attributed to radical groups successfully implementing democracy promotion strategies over conservative factions in the US government, prioritizing protecting the socioeconomic advantages and authority of existing autocratic allies in the region (Hassan, 2011). Conversely, the nature of the conduct, strategy, and approach of the American democratic foreign policy might differ based on the current temporal and regime conditions (Aka, 2002).

Christopher Layne's 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited' highlights that although liberal international relations theory focuses on shared norms and values among democracies such as the EU and the USA, polling data reveals apparent social and cultural values differences between the US and Europe (Layne 2006). There are conflicting views on domestic and global issues, particularly among elite groups on both sides of the Atlantic who share similar perspectives, but their general populations have different attitudes (Layne, 2006). The gap between the transatlantic elite and public opinion may be less significant. Suppose this situation continues at the citizen's level; it will affect foreign policy decisions on both sides of the Atlantic, impacting matters such as aid, investment, and support for democracy promotion in developing nations.

On the flip side, there is evidence in the academic literature that Western academics, especially those from Europe and the US, could augment governmental organizations to advance democracy in recipient nations (Burnell, 2013). The advancement of democratic peace theory has been greatly influenced by the contributions of interconnected organic intellectuals, particularly those associated with prestigious academic institutions and think tanks (Parmar,

2013). In congruence with the abundance of literature on democratic peace and democracy promotion, democratic peace theory is now a respected framework for managing national security rather than just an academic idea (Parmar, 2013; Kazmierski, 2011; Burnell, 2013).

2.1.5 Normative Power Europe

The EU and the US have sometimes been called normative powers (Larsen, 2014; Manners, 2001). However, the concept of normative power is widely associated with the EU, as the name implies (Manners, 2002; 2006; Sjursen, 2013; Diez & Manners, 2007; Kalvaski, 2013). Normative Influence Europe refers to the notion that the EU shapes and promotes norms, values, and standards in addition to employing conventional methods such as economic sanctions and military might to exert influence and authority (Bradford, 2019). This notion operates under the presumption that the EU's regulatory jurisdiction in domains including social welfare, the rule of law, human rights, democracy, and environmental protection sets an exemplary benchmark for other regions and countries to emulate (Scheipers & Sicurelli, 2007). It is also possible to define it as the regulatory authority of the EU to influence global values, norms, and standards (Manners 2001).

The genesis of the 'normative power Europe' was succinctly described by Ian Manners (2002). However, a closer look at the 1982 article entitled "Civilian Power Europe" by Hedley Bull suggested that the origin was in the 1970s following the oil crisis that gave rise to different 'powers' based on the geographic dominance in the production of a 'goods/event' held at the time (Bull, 1982). Europe's past with military conflicts in the first half of the 20th century and those centuries before it gave rise to the thinking that Europe was 'military power Europe' confirming the typical realist Machiavellian notion of international politics (Ferrero, 1939). The opening of the European Economic Community in the 1960s changed that notion from military to civilian power, where cooperation through international socialization is encouraged within new international organizations or groups (Greenhill, 2010). One study had a similar

conclusion in Africa following the rapid growth of international organizations striving to uphold global norms (Fischer, 1970). Daniel Hamilton, referencing the Italian political scientist Nathalie Tocci, contended that a foreign policy guided by norms, aiming to attain normative goals through normatively implemented strategies, would effectively fulfill its normative objectives. If this test is a reliable indicator, then neither the US nor the EU possesses normative power. The term 'normative power' is overly categorical, one-dimensional, and static to fully encompass the intricate and ever-changing nature of a country's foreign policy (Hamilton, 2008). Nations utilize diverse means to promote various foreign policy objectives, and the means and goals evolve. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the extent to which the aim of disseminating norms and values, such as democracy and human rights, is pursued, irrespective of the specific tools or strategies employed (Hamilton, 2008).

Although NPE is commonly regarded as a theoretical framework for analyzing the EU's efforts to promote values like democracy, the rule of law, and human rights beyond its borders, scholarly critiques have emerged to challenge certain aspects of NPE that are inconsistent with its goals of promoting and disregarding values. Michael Merlingen (2007) argues that the EU supports human agency abroad by advocating for fundamental civil, political, and economic rights. However, supporters of NPE still need to acknowledge that the EU's stated mission for humanity inscribes and imposes its power on those it aims to empower. This imposition is characterized by epistemic violence, the technologization of politics, and arbitrary administrative practices. The NPE attempts to diminish the relative significance of material interest, power, and resources by exclusively relying on the capacity to determine what is considered a norm and what is not, hindering and rendering it ineffectual. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that material interests and material power resources are crucial in determining the EU's foreign policy and its impact on world politics alongside normative elements (Pollack, 2020).

2.1.6 Demographic, socio-political, and Economic issues in Nigeria

Nigeria, located in both Sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa, is a federalist republic. According to section 2 of Chapter 1 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the supreme legal instrument of the state, Nigeria, shall be officially referred to as “The Federal Republic of Nigeria” (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The country shares its borders with Niger and Chad in the north, the Republic of Cameroun in the east, and the Republic of Benin in the west (Enemuwe, 2023). The country’s government controls a land size of around 923,768 square kilometers and is located on Africa's west coast. This area extends from the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic coast in the south to the borders of the Sahara Desert in the north. It is the country with the most people and the 14th largest landmass in Africa (National Population Council, 2011). In Nigeria, there are approximately 374 identifiable ethnic groups, with the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo being the three most prominent. Each of these social groups has its unique cultural characteristics. Currently, 36 states, the capital being the federal capital territory, comprise the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The internal geopolitical structure divides the Nigerian territory into six different geopolitical zones: North Central, North-East, North-West, South-West, South-South, and South-East (Enemuwe, 2023).

As a sovereign state, Nigeria has numerous ethnic-tribal groups matched by its vast territory, large population, and enormous land mass (Nwafor-Orizu *et al.*, 2018). The Hausa people predominate throughout the country’s northern region, whereas the Yoruba and Igbo peoples are concentrated in the country's southwestern and south-eastern geopolitical zones. Other than the three major ethnic groups, the different linguistic groups are also of significant sociocultural importance in the development of modern Nigeria (Enemuwe, 2023). The population is not evenly distributed across the country regarding its physical location as numerous areas, including but not limited to the Chad Basin, the middle section of Niger Valley, the grass fields, and the Delta region, have relatively low population densities. According to Akpotu (2008),

most of Nigeria's population lives in rural areas, while only about one-third is concentrated in urban areas. Lagos, Oyo, and Anambra are the states with the largest populations located in urban areas. Sokoto, Kebbi, Akwa Ibom, Taraba, and Jigawa are among the least urbanized states in Nigeria, each with an urban population of less than 15 percent (National Population Council, 2011). On a microeconomic level, agriculture is the primary source of income for most of the population because of the country's predominantly rural setting. Considering this, there is a growing demand for large families since the effect of significant development policies in rural areas, such as increased educational enrolment, which delays child marriages and pregnancies, might face challenges. At the macro level, the country's oil and gas reserves are the primary contributors to its current robust economy (Enemuwe, 2023). In 2022, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) was calculated to be \$427.62 billion (World Bank, 2022). Despite growth at the macroeconomic level, hunger and poverty continue to plague a vast proportion of the population. These factors have significantly influenced the prevalence of vote-buying, clientelism, and corrupt political practices, particularly during elections in the country. It has attracted the attention of foreign powers such as the EU and the US, actively promoting democratic governance.

2.2 Empirical Review

Several studies have been conducted on election observation in Nigeria, across Africa, and worldwide.

Fredrick, O. and Ugonna J. (2021) conducted a study on the effectiveness of domestic Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in election observation in Nigeria, particularly questioning whether their typical focus on Election Day activities alone allows them to credibly assess the entire electoral process. The study is grounded in Systems Theory, and employed documentary analysis and key informant interviews, with findings analyzed through content analysis. The study found that, unlike international observers who monitor the full electoral cycle, domestic CSOs often limit their observation to Election Day, neglecting crucial pre-election events and

aspects of result collation. This selective observation, risks producing incomplete or potentially misleading evaluations of electoral credibility. As a result, the study recommends that CSOs be empowered to observe all phases of the electoral process-including pre-election, Election Day, and post-election activities-and be granted full access to collation rooms, thereby ensuring more comprehensive and reliable assessments of Nigeria's elections.

Similarly, Oluwaseun Funmi, A. & Oluwatobiloba, D. (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of domestic and international election observers in determining the legitimacy and credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study is grounded in democratic oversight theory, the study utilized both primary and secondary data, analyzed through content analysis. Finding of the revealed that, although election observation by both domestic and foreign groups has become central to Nigeria's electoral process since 1999, but observers predominantly concentrate on Election Day activities, with limited attention to pre-election events and key elements of result collation. This narrow focus result to incomplete or potentially misleading assessments of the overall electoral process. Furthermore, the study identified persistent challenges, including a lack of internal party democracy, vote-buying, electoral violence, technical failures with the BVAS system, and administrative shortcomings by INEC, all of which undermined the credibility of the 2023 elections. The study recommends that election observers be granted full access to all stages of the electoral process-including pre-election, Election Day, and post-election activities-as well as unrestricted entry to collation centers, to enable more thorough and credible evaluations and to support meaningful electoral reforms in Nigeria.

Accordingly, Gafar, I. (2015) appraise the Role of Election Observers in Ensuring Transparency and Preventing Electoral Corruption in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study employed a descriptive research approach and drawing on secondary data, the study was anchored in a theoretical framework that highlights the critical role of oversight in democratic

governance. Findings indicates that, although election observation is internationally acknowledged for boosting public confidence and exposing irregularities, its tangible impact in Nigeria has been limited due to persistent electoral corruption characterized the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections, often occurring outside observers' view or in contexts where observer neutrality was compromised. The study recommends that future election observers should ensure comprehensive, impartial, and professional monitoring across all electoral phases-including pre-election, Election Day, and post-election activities, and intensify scrutiny of areas vulnerable to corruption, in order to genuinely enhance transparency and deter electoral malpractice in Nigeria.

In another angle, Derek, M. and Daniel, T. (2019) IRI/NDI Nigeria International Election Observation Mission Final Report evaluate the integrity and effectiveness of Nigeria's 2019 general elections, using a comprehensive observation framework rooted in democratic consolidation theory. The study employed direct observation, stakeholder interviews, and analysis of electoral data. Finding of the study revealed that, despite heightened expectations following improvements in the 2011 and 2015 elections and Nigeria's historic 2015 peaceful transfer of power, the 2019 elections fell short of public hopes due to significant administrative lapses, including the last-minute postponement of the presidential and National Assembly elections, delayed poll openings, and widespread irregularities such as vote buying, intimidation, and violence. Further highlighted the persistent weakness and lack of internal democracy within political parties, the exclusion of women and youth from candidacy, and the failure of party leaders to uphold commitments to peaceful conduct. The study recommends urgent electoral reforms, including establishing strict time limits for adjudicating pre- and post-election petitions and revising the electoral calendar to ensure disputes are resolved before officeholders are inaugurated.

Additionally, Olaleye, D. (2024) carried out a study on comparative study of the European Union Election Observation Mission's (EU EOM) reports on Nigeria's 2019 and 2023 general elections. The study is grounded in Kelly's (2012) theoretical framework, which distinguishes between "progress reports" and factual observation, the study employed desk research methodology, systematically analyzing EU EOM documents and comparing them with those from other international bodies such as the Commonwealth, African Union, and ECOWAS. The finding revealed that, unlike other organizations whose reports often reflect diplomatic optimism, the EU EOM's assessments are more factual, candidly highlighting both improvements and persistent systemic flaws-such as legal ambiguities, operational shortcomings, and issues of transparency and inclusiveness-without the bias of a "progress narrative. The study recommends that for Nigeria's democracy to advance, its elections should continue to be scrutinized by impartial and evidence-based observation missions like the EU EOM, even if such scrutiny provokes resistance from political actors implicated in electoral shortcomings.

Alvan, C. and Robert, O. (2024) assesses how international election observers perceived Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study found that, despite the active participation of both domestic and international observers highlighted a widespread irregularity, logistical shortcomings, and questioned the credibility of the electoral process, even as some global leaders issued congratulatory statements. The study recommends that the international community should jointly investigate elections rated poorly by observers and impose sanctions on those responsible, thereby ensuring that election observation leads to meaningful accountability rather than symbolic gestures.

Furthermore, Mohammed (2023) report of Benin parliamentary elections demonstrated a mature political culture, where the motivation to serve outweighed personal gain, resulting in a peaceful process free from the intense, often acrimonious competition seen in Nigeria. Unlike

Nigeria-where high political stakes fuel blackmail, voter card manipulation, and the presence of party thugs at polling stations-Benin's elections were orderly, with voters leaving immediately after casting their ballots and only party agents, officials, and observers remaining for the count. Disputes over results were virtually nonexistent. Additionally, the active participation of local and international observers further reinforced electoral integrity, and citizens showed strong commitment to safeguarding their democracy. While the election started late in some areas, logistics were generally smooth, and both public and private buildings served as polling units-a notable difference from Nigeria. However, like Nigeria, Benin lacked tactile ballots for voters with disabilities, highlighting a persistent gap in electoral inclusivity across much of Africa.

More so, African Union Commission Report on Election Observation Mission to Nigeria's 2023. Findings of the report revealed that the 2022 Electoral Act reforms improves the entire electoral process of the Nigeria especially on the issue of early party primaries and technological innovations (BVAS, IREV), INEC made notable efforts to include marginalized groups such as the elderly and persons with disabilities. Persistent underrepresentation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities remained a concern. There were no special voting provisions for election staff and security personnel. The report also identified challenges such as insecurity, economic pressures, disinformation, and low voter turnout. The report recommended that further reforms should address inclusivity, logistics, and voter accessibility.

The 2023 European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) report on Liberia found that the elections were highly competitive, with Joseph Boakai narrowly defeating incumbent George Weah in the presidential run-off and no major party achieving a legislative majority. The campaign period was vibrant and generally peaceful, though less active ahead of the run-off, and political freedoms were largely respected. However, the EU EOM raised significant concerns, including the misuse of state resources, weak enforcement of campaign finance laws,

and several legal and logistical shortcomings such as ambiguous candidate registration criteria, unequal voter distribution, and procedural flaws in both voter registration and dispute resolution. Despite these challenges, the National Elections Commission (NEC) managed the process efficiently, and the incumbent's swift concession ensured a peaceful transition of power. The report also highlighted ongoing barriers to women's political participation, media self-censorship, and the need for improved data protection and anti-corruption efforts. To further strengthen Liberia's democracy, the EU EOM recommended comprehensive legal reforms, timely and adequate NEC funding, and the decentralization of voter registration to improve accessibility and electoral integrity in future elections.

2.2.1 Gaps in Literature

Despite the European Union Election Observation Mission's (EU EOM) longstanding engagement in Nigeria's electoral processes, including its comprehensive monitoring and reporting on the 2023 general elections, there remains a significant literature gap concerning the specific impact and effectiveness of the EU EOM's interventions on Nigeria's electoral reforms and democratic consolidation. While existing reports highlight systemic weaknesses exposed by the 2023 elections, the need for further legal and operational reforms, and the issuance of 23 recommendations by the EU EOM, scholarly analysis is limited regarding how these recommendations are received, implemented, or influence subsequent policy and institutional changes within Nigeria's electoral framework. Furthermore, there is insufficient research on the extent to which the EU EOM's presence contributes to increased transparency, inclusiveness, and public trust in the electoral process, particularly in the context of persistent security challenges and evolving electoral technologies. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the real-world efficacy of international election observation missions in strengthening democratic institutions in Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical Review

Several theories have significantly shaped understanding of the role played by the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Nigeria's 2023 General Election.

2.3.1 Legitimization Theory

Legitimization theory, widely associated with Thomas Carothers' influential 1997 work, asserts that international election observation missions enhance the legitimacy of electoral processes by providing independent and credible evaluations. Carothers argued that the presence of foreign observers reassures both domestic and international audiences that elections conform to accepted democratic standards, thereby boosting public confidence in electoral outcomes. The theory is grounded in the belief that external validation from impartial observers can increase acceptance of results and reinforce democratic institutions, especially in countries undergoing political transitions.

The core assumptions of legitimization theory is that election observers are viewed as neutral actors whose assessments carry significant influence over public opinion and political discourse. The theory suggests that the endorsement or critique by reputable international organizations shapes perceptions of electoral fairness and transparency, directly affecting the legitimacy of elected governments. This mechanism is critical in the contexts where trust in domestic electoral authorities is weak or contested, as it introduces an external layer of accountability and normative pressure.

The theory is relevant in understanding the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) during Nigeria's 2023 general election, legitimization theory illuminates the mission's role in bolstering electoral credibility. Given Nigeria's electoral history riddled with irregularities and public skepticism, independent scrutiny was crucial in restoring confidence among voters and political stakeholders. The EU EOM's assessment of the electoral process signaled to both national and international audiences whether democratic norms were upheld.

Such validation played a vital role in legitimizing election outcomes and supporting Nigeria's democratic consolidation at a pivotal moment.

Nonetheless, legitimization theory has been criticized for acknowledging that international observation missions often face significant challenges in detecting sophisticated forms of electoral fraud or systemic problems due to limited access and constrained observation time. Consequently, legitimization through observation can occasionally lead to the unintentional endorsement of flawed elections, especially if evaluations concentrate narrowly on election day rather than the entire electoral cycle. Furthermore, the impact of observer reports depends heavily on political will and public perception; where findings clash with entrenched political interests or narratives, their legitimizing power may be diminished.

However, legitimization theory provides an important framework for understanding the EU EOM's influence on Nigeria's 2023 elections by emphasizing how international observation can strengthen electoral credibility and public trust. It highlights the importance of independent validation in democratizing contexts with fragile institutions. However, its explanatory strength is moderated by practical challenges in observer capacity and the complex, often contested nature of political legitimacy, calling for careful interpretation of election observation outcomes.

2.3.2 Deterrence/ Detection Theory

Deterrence/Detection theory in the context of election observation is largely developed from the work of scholars like Susan Hyde (2007) and Eric Bjornlund (2004), building on the evolution of election observation pioneered by organizations such as The Carter Center since 1989. The central argument of this theory is that the physical presence of impartial international observers serves as a deterrent against fraudulent and manipulative practices during elections by increasing the risks and costs associated with such behavior. In essence, electoral actors are

less likely to engage in vote rigging, intimidation, or other illegal activities when they know they are being closely monitored by credible international observers.

This theory assumes that electoral fraud is a calculated behavior; political actors weigh the risk of being caught and sanctioned and adjust their actions to minimize detection. Observation missions enhance transparency by exposing irregularities and electoral malpractices, thereby reducing fraud on Election Day, fostering fair competition, and reinforcing the integrity of the electoral process. In Nigeria's 2023 general election, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) functioned as a clear deterrent, signaling to all participants that the election would undergo thorough external scrutiny and discouraging manipulation attempts.

The relevance of Deterrence/Detection theory to the EU EOM's role in Nigeria is underscored by the country's history of electoral challenges, including violence, logistical shortcomings, and allegations of fraud. By positioning observers at polling stations and key locations, the EU EOM heightened the probability that electoral violations would be identified and publicly condemned. Evidence from elections in countries like Ghana and Ukraine demonstrates the effectiveness of international observers in deterring misconduct, lending support to the idea that the EU EOM's presence helped minimize irregularities and improve transparency during Nigeria's elections.

Nonetheless, the theory has certain limitations. The theory is criticized of been reliant on "substitution effect," where fraudulent tactics are not eradicated but merely shifted to subtler or less observable forms that escape detection. Furthermore, observation missions face constraints in terms of personnel, resources, and time, limiting their capacity to monitor all electoral activities comprehensively. Therefore, sophisticated or systemic manipulations may go unnoticed, reducing the overall deterrent effect. Additionally, political actors may choose

to ignore observer reports if these reports threaten their interests, weakening the practical impact of deterrence.

Deterrence/Detection theory provides a useful framework for understanding how the EU EOM influenced Nigeria's 2023 general elections by deterring electoral misconduct and fostering greater transparency. It highlights the critical role played by observation missions in safeguarding election integrity, especially in fragile democratic contexts. However, the theory's explanatory power is limited by factors like the substitution effect and restricted observation capacity, emphasizing the importance of complementary electoral reforms to ensure genuinely free, fair, and credible elections.

2.3.3 World Polity Theory

World Polity theory, was founded by John W. Meyer in (1970), the theory states that organizations, and actors function within a global cultural system termed the "world polity" that provides universally accepted norms, models, and scripts guiding their behavior. Meyer, along with collaborators like John Boli and George Thomas, argues that this world polity shapes how actors define their objectives, identities, and rationalities, leading to institutional similarity, or isomorphism, across different contexts.

The theory assumes that global cultural standards concerning democracy, human rights, and good governance spread through international organizations, treaties, and transnational networks, influencing state behavior beyond mere strategic or material considerations. In this framework, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) serves as an agent that transmits and enforces these global norms by assessing elections based on internationally recognized democratic criteria. This diffusion mechanism encourages countries like Nigeria to align their electoral processes with global expectations of transparency and fairness, thereby

integrating local practices into the wider world polity and enhancing their international legitimacy.

In the context of EU EOM's role in Nigeria's 2023 general election, the theory highlights the mission's function as a vehicle for spreading global democratic norms. Nigeria, as part of the international community, is bound by shared standards that define free and fair elections. Through its observation, reporting, and recommendations, the EU EOM translates these universal democratic principles into practice, urging Nigerian institutions to conform to prevailing global electoral standards. The mission's involvement helps embed democratic norms within Nigeria's political system, contributing to the nation's democratic progress in accordance with the world polity's cultural framework.

However, World Polity theory also faces criticisms in the context of election observation. The theory argues that its emphasis on universal norms may neglect the importance of local contexts, political intricacies, and cultural specificities that shape how democratic principles are adopted or modified. The theory's assumption of homogenization can underestimate the degree of resistance, selective adaptation, or blending of global norms, implying that Nigeria's acceptance of EU-driven democratic frameworks might be partial, contested, or symbolic rather than fully transformative. Furthermore, the theory's focus on cultural norms often underplays critical material factors such as security concerns and political power struggles that profoundly influence election conduct and outcomes.

Ultimately, the World Polity theory provides a valuable sociological perspective for understanding the EU Election Observation Mission's influence in Nigeria's 2023 elections by emphasizing how global cultural norms shape electoral standards and behaviors. It portrays the EU EOM as a key facilitator in integrating Nigeria into the global democratic community through the promotion of universal democratic ideals. Yet, its explanatory capacity is limited

by a tendency to overlook local complexities and power dynamics, underscoring the need to complement this theory with approaches that address the specific political and social realities of electoral processes.

2.3.4 Diffusion Network Theory

Diffusion Network Theory was popularized by Everett Rogers in his influential book in (1962), *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers synthesized research from sociology, communication studies, and rural sociology to explain how new ideas, technologies, or practices disseminate through populations over time. The central tenet of the theory is that innovations are not adopted randomly but spread through social networks, communication channels, and a series of stages involving distinct categories of adopters, including innovators, early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and laggards. The theory emphasizes the critical role of interpersonal influence and network structures in either facilitating or impeding the diffusion process.

The theory posits that individuals and organizations are significantly influenced by their social environment and peers, making the adoption of innovations a socially mediated process rather than a purely individual decision. It also assumes that innovations spread via communication within a social system over a specific timeframe, and that certain characteristics of the innovation such as its perceived advantage, compatibility with existing values, and ease of use accelerate its adoption. Within these networked contexts, actors who occupy key social positions or are early adopters exert a disproportionate influence on the trajectory of diffusion.

In the context of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, Diffusion Network Theory helps elucidate how democratic norms and best electoral practices propagate through the interactions among international bodies, domestic institutions, civil society organizations, and political actors. The EU EOM functions

as a critical node within the global diffusion network, transmitting democratic standards and practices to Nigeria. Through its observations, reports, and engagement with key stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and local observer groups the mission facilitates the transfer and adaptation of electoral norms, thereby encouraging Nigeria to align its electoral processes with international democratic principles.

The theory's relevance lies in its capacity to underscore the importance of networks and communication channels in driving democratic reforms. Nigeria's electoral ecosystem is inherently connected to regional, international, and transnational networks that shape behavior and policy. The EU EOM, acting as both an observer and a normative actor, strengthens these networks by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and incentives for adopting transparent and credible electoral practices. This interconnectedness aligns with Diffusion Network Theory's central idea that social learning and peer influence within networks are primary drivers for the adoption of innovations, including those pertaining to democratic governance.

Yet, Diffusion Network Theory has limitations in fully capturing the complex impacts of election observation. While it effectively highlights information flow and normative influence, the theory may underestimate the impact of local political realities, power struggles, and inherent resistance that affect how international norms are received or implemented. Nigerian actors may selectively adopt, modify, or even resist external norms based on their domestic interests or cultural context. Additionally, diffusion processes can be uneven or slow, with some actors remaining isolated from influential networks. Therefore, while the theory illuminates the importance of networks, it requires supplementation with approaches that account for power dynamics, political will, and context-specific challenges in electoral reform.

2.3.5 Theoretical framework

The workings of observation missions like the European Union Observation Mission can be explained through the lenses of institutionalism. Institutionalism is an approach that seeks to explain institutions as the fulcrum of study in a political analysis. The approach seeks to show that the institution is the primary while its components like actors are secondary and they depend on the institution. According to North (1990), institutions constrain the behaviors of actors and according to Paul (1994), institutions help to coordinate the actions of different actors and also limit what actors can do and they practically determine the actions of individuals (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Friel (2017) believes that neo-institutionalism has played an important role in making academics focus attention on the role of institutions in the coordination of activities between the actors in an institution. He noted that the approach reiterates the important role of institutions in coordinating the activities of actors.

Observers who work for international groups have their conduct and action in election duty regulated by the group they represent. Even when they voice opinions on the conduct of elections, some organizations can still override it when they make their reports public. For instance, some scholars have proffered answers to the question of why some observation groups publish statements that are materially different from what happened in the election. Kelly (2017) believes that it is due to what she tagged as biases. According to her, there are four such biases: The first one is subtlety bias which represents the assumption that observation groups are likely to accept elections that have minor irregularities. The second bias is special relationship bias, which she reckons, comes as a result of particularly "strong political pressure to be lenient toward countries with which they or their sponsors have a special relationship". She also mentioned progress bias, which comes when observers approve an election that falls short of the standard to encourage consolidation of the democratic process, and the fourth bias

is stability bias, which is when the observation group endorses elections which they reckon, if they do otherwise, will lead to instability in a country.

In the context of the European Union Observation Mission, despite its prior use of progress bias, such as noted in its 1997 report concerning the Kenyan Presidential election (Foeken & Dietz, 1997), the EU is generally not recognized for modifying its Mission reports to align with its narrative; however, it can readily disavow the findings of its Observation Missions. It typically includes a disclaimer in every report produced by its Mission. For example, in the report on the 2023 Nigerian general election, the European Union remarked that "The Election Observation Missions are independent from the institutions of the European Union. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy and position of the European Union" (European Union, 2023). This is in spite of the Mission essentially functioning as an extension of the EU in terms of structure and functioning. The EU finances the Mission, recruits its staff, and establishes its rules and guidelines. At the invitation of the host nations, the EU deploys its election observation framework through comprehensive Election Observation Missions (EOMs), Election Experts Missions (EEMs), and Election Follow-up Missions (EFMs). The EU Election Observation Missions "provide a thorough, independent, and unbiased evaluation of an electoral process according to international and regional standards for democratic elections," whereas the EU Election Experts Missions (EEMs) operate discreetly without engaging in extensive observation. They assess the conduct of elections to determine if they adhere to international, regional, and national obligations concerning electoral practices, while the EU Election Follow-up Missions (EFMs) monitor the recommendations made by EOMs following each observation mission. The EU Election Observation Mission is typically led by a Chief Observer, with the team including a Deputy Chief Observer, various electoral specialists, and both short-term and long-term observers (European Union, 2023).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the scientific methodology adopted for collecting the data required for this study. It discusses the research approach and design, the study population, sampling methods and sample size, participant selection criteria, data collection procedures, and the techniques used for data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

According to John Creswell (1998), a case study research design is a qualitative research method that provides an in-depth examination of a single entity such as an organization, program, event, or individual within its real-world context. Creswell emphasizes that the case is a "bounded system," meaning the researcher clearly defines the focus and boundaries of the case in terms of time and place. It aims to gain a comprehensive, contextualized understanding of the complexities, dynamics, and unique characteristics of the case under investigation

Therefore, case study design is the most effective qualitative research approach to capture the European Union Election Observation Mission's (EU EOM) role on Nigeria's 2023 general elections. This design allows for an in-depth, contextualized examination of the EU mission's role, processes, and influence within the specific political and social environment of Nigeria's elections. It enables researchers to explore complex interactions between the EU observers, Nigerian electoral institutions, political actors, and civil society, providing rich, detailed insights of the phenomenon under study.

3.2 Population of the Study

Population means the group of people, things, places or events which a researcher study (Roger, 2008). Therefore, the population of this study consists of the following key stakeholders in the electoral process:

Table 3.1: Proportionate Population of the study

S/No	Category	Population
1.	INEC staff	30
2.	Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	20
3.	Observer Groups	10
4.	Academia.	20
Total=	4	80

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

The justification for considering this population is because of their relevance and knowledge related to the strengthening electoral process in Nigeria.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Size

Purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants of the study. This method involves the deliberate selection of individuals or cases based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling was chosen to capture the informed perspectives of INEC staff, observer groups, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academia, given their expertise and experience related to the phenomenon under study.

In qualitative research, determining the sample size is guided by the principle of data saturation. The number of participants may increase or decrease depending on when saturation is reached. According to Saunders (2018), data saturation occurs when the researcher begins to encounter repetitive information and no new insights emerge from additional interviews. At this point, data collection can be concluded.

3.4 Sources of Data Collection

This study utilized data from both primary and secondary sources to comprehensively address the objectives outlined in the introductory section. Secondary data were obtained from a variety of unpublished official and unofficial documents, journal articles, textbooks, newspapers,

magazines, archival materials, bulletins, periodicals, and online resources. Primary data were collected through key informant interviews (KII) conducted during the course of the study.

3.5 Instrument of Data Collection

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Interview entails an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee aimed at extracting information regarding socio-political and/or economic situation based on the interviewee's experience or perceptions. In this case, these instruments were used to determine the views of Nigerians on the nexus between election observer reports and electoral reforms in Nigeria with key actors such as the INEC staff, Observer Groups, CSOs, and academia for in-depth exploration of their experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes.

For the purpose of this study semi structured interview design was employed during the data collection. The semi structured interview was conducted with participants through face-to-face interactions. Bogdan and Bickley (1998) said that semi-structured interview implies that the researcher uses a completed interview guide with specific themes or predetermined questions. This method uses open ended questions that gave chance to the participants to elaborate on other aspects as well as provided details of answers. The interviews will provide a significance understanding of the power dynamics, interests, and policy preferences of individual actors within the election process and electoral reforms channel. These respondents are chosen because of the specialized and key information they possess on the subject matter and these respondents would have interacted with certain information needed for in-depth analysis of the objectives of this study

Documentary

Using documentary sources is crucial for authenticity, accuracy, historical context, comprehensive coverage, legal compliance, independent analysis, transparency, and public access. These sources provide a sound basis/ footing for research, analysis, and public scrutiny, ultimately contributing to improved literature and sanitizing the nation's electoral process and strengthening Nigeria's democracy. Data that fall in this category include YIAGA Africa Initiative, Civil Society Organization, International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute (IRI-NDI), African Union, ECOWAS and Commonwealth of Nations.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as the method of data analysis, appropriate for qualitative research that seeks to explore participants lived experiences and perspectives. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006). It offers a flexible yet systematic approach to examining rich, descriptive data obtained from semi- structured interviews.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarity and immersion in the data. Significant statements and features of the data were systematically coded which are directly related to the research questions and objectives, focusing on aspects such as electoral credibility, institutional reforms, the role of the EU EOM, and stakeholders' perspectives.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter of the study presents the profile of the fifteen informants selected from the sampled of the study on the Role of European Union Election Observation Mission in Nigeria's 2023 General Election. The informants were drawn from the INEC officials, CSO, and Academicians. In view of this, each of the informant was identified in the analysis by code as names were ignored as shown below:

Data Presentation

Table 4.0: Demographic Characteristic of the Informants

S/N	Informants ID	Category	Gender	Age	Education
1.	Informant	INEC	Male	40years	MSc
2.	Informant	INEC	Male	37years	BSc
3.	Informant	INEC	Male	39years	BSc
4.	Informant	INEC	Male	44years	MSc
5.	Informant	INEC	Male	38years	BSc
6.	Informant	INEC	Male	36years	BSc
7.	Informant	INEC	Female	45years	BSc
8.	Informant	INEC	Male	47years	PhD
9.	Informant	INEC	Male	35years	BSc
10.	Informant	INEC	Male	38years	MSc
11.	Informant	CSO	Female	46years	HND
12.	Informant	CSO	Male	39years	BSc
13.	Informant	CSO	Female	28years	BSc
14.	Informant	CSO	Male	42years	BSc
15.	Informant	CSO	Male	34years	BSc
16.	Informant	ACAD	Male	45years	PhD
17.	Informant	ACAD	Male	43years	PhD
18.	Informant	ACAD	Male	37years	MSc
19.	Informant	ACAD	Female	30years	BSc
20.	Informant	ACAD	Male	38years	MSc

Source: Field Survey April, 2025

Consequently, the table above presents the profile of the twenty (20) informants involved in the in-depth interviews conducted with INEC staff, Civil Society Organizations, and Academicians who have participated in the election exercise. The table further shows the

gender distribution of the informants which comprises four (4) females and sixteen (16) males. Their age ranges as follows: 20–30 years (2 participants), 31–40 years (10 participants), and 41–50 years (8 participants). Regarding educational qualifications, the informants hold the following credentials: three (3) Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), five (5) Master’s degrees (M.Sc.), eleven (11) Bachelor’s degrees (B.Sc.), one (1) Higher National Diplomas (HND).

I gave the thematic presentation of the results which were used to answer the two stated research questions, thereby accomplishing the specified objectives of the study.

In answering the research questions, a recap of all the questions stated that: How does the EU promote democracy amid challenging domestic issues in Nigeria? The second research question stated: How does the EU observation mission impact the 2023 Nigerian general election?

Therefore, the discussion revealed the following:

4.1 How does the European Union promote democracy amid challenging domestic issues in Nigeria?

The European Union promotes democracy in Nigeria through targeted partnerships and the EU Support to Democratic Governance (EU-SDGN) program, which strengthens institutions like the electoral commission, National Assembly, political parties, civil society, and media. It provides technical and financial aid, encourages inclusive participation especially of women and youth and supports transparency, electoral reforms, and human rights. Despite challenges like insecurity and institutional weaknesses, the EU fosters dialogue, election monitoring, and reforms to build democratic resilience and advance accountable governance.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Data

The responses from the KII were analyzed using thematic approach, thus, the views of respondents are presented as follows:

4.3 Theme 1: Electoral Process Monitoring and Assessment

Electoral process monitoring and assessment serve as critical themes in ensuring the integrity, transparency, and credibility of democratic elections. These activities encompass the systematic observation, evaluation, and, where appropriate, intervention across all phases of the electoral cycle pre-election, election, and post-election to detect and deter fraud, build public confidence, and verify that legal and human rights standards are upheld. Monitoring involves not only gathering information but also the authority to highlight and address violations, while assessment provides on-the-spot evaluations of electoral conditions and processes. The presence of independent observers and monitors, both domestic and international, enhances trust in the electoral process, encourages greater political participation, and helps to ensure the acceptance of election results, thereby supporting peaceful and legitimate democratic transitions

4.4.1 Sub-theme: Observation of voting, counting, and tabulation procedures across Nigeria

The EU EOM's systematic observation was designed to promote transparency, prevent irregularities, and uphold the credibility of the electoral process, extending its monitoring through the complaints and appeals stages to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the elections. This rigorous oversight played a vital role in strengthening public confidence and advancing democratic principles throughout Nigeria's presidential election.

Informant II, IV and VI reveal that:

The EU EOM deployed around 100 observers across Nigeria who closely monitored the entire electoral process, including voting, counting, and tabulation on election days. EU Observers visited over 240 polling units in 24 states and the Federal Capital Territory to assess whether procedures were conducted transparently and in accordance with the law. Furthermore, the EU observers were able to monitor critical stages of the election first-hand from voter participation at polling stations to the accuracy and transparency of vote counting and result tabulation (Informant IX).

Accordingly, informant I and VII stressed that:

EU observers' mission was to assess the voting process as scheduled, but they witnessed challenges such as overcrowding, disorganization, and delays at polling stations and collation centers. In some areas, collation officers were absent, and essential election materials were not properly handled, which raised concerns about the integrity of the result-management process.

Another informant (VI, VIII & X agreed that:

The EU's mission on the Election Day was to assess the effectiveness of the dedicated Election Technology Analyst who evaluated the deployment of biometric verification systems and the electronic transmission of results. Although technological tools were utilized for voter verification and result upload, technical glitches and delays-particularly in uploading presidential results to the official portal-undermined transparency and timely access to election outcomes.

Informant X and XII underscored that:

The EU EOM extended its presence beyond Election Day to observe the tabulation of results at various levels and to monitor the handling of complaints and appeals. This comprehensive observation was vital for providing an informed assessment of the electoral process's credibility and for offering recommendations to enhance future elections.

Informant V and VII disclosed that:

The EU EOM was able to closely monitor critical phases of the election-from voter participation at polling stations to the accuracy and transparency of vote counting and result tabulation. The broad geographic coverage to collect detailed insights into the implementation of electoral procedures across diverse settings, which was vital for assessing the overall credibility and fairness of the elections. This comprehensive observation strategy empowered the EU EOM to deliver

an informed and balanced assessment of the electoral process, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement to support the advancement of Nigeria's democratic development. Additionally, during the collation of results, EU observers noted challenges such as delays, incomplete forms, and logistical issues at collation centers, especially in some regions where ward-level collation centers were not opened, which informed our assessment of operational weaknesses in the tabulation process (Informant IV, V and XII).

Informant V, IX, and XV piloted that:

The EU Election Mission conducted a comprehensive assessment of Nigeria's electoral process by evaluating it against both the country's domestic electoral laws and its international democratic obligations, including those outlined in the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. These frameworks enabled the EU observers to identify areas where Nigeria fulfilled its commitments and where gaps persisted.

Informant III, IV, and XV underscored that:

EU observers acknowledged that Nigeria has made notable legal reforms, such as the enactment of the 2022 Electoral Act; however, ambiguities and operational challenges remained that hindered its full compliance. For instance, delays and a lack of transparency in the publication of results negatively impacted the credibility of the electoral process, contravening both Nigerian laws and international best practices.

Informant I, VI, and X agreed that:

The Mission identified that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) encountered difficulties in fully implementing electoral laws, particularly in logistics and the deployment of technology. These challenges, combined with insufficient accountability for electoral officials' shortcomings, eroded public trust and underscored the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Informant II and III added that:

In line with international commitments democratic standard, the EU EOM stressed the importance of inclusiveness and equal representation. Nevertheless, ongoing discrimination against women and marginalized groups was a significant concern, highlighting the urgent need for targeted reforms and political commitment to advance Nigeria's adherence to democratic principles.

4.4.2 Sub-theme: Use of technology in elections, including voter verification and results transmission

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election featured the deployment of advanced technology, particularly the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which integrated fingerprint and facial recognition functions to authenticate voter identities and curb electoral fraud. BVAS also incorporated a built-in camera to capture and electronically transmit polling units' results to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), providing real-time public access to election data and enhancing transparency. Although these technological innovations were designed to minimize electoral malpractices, such as multiple voting and result manipulation, and to improve efficiency, their implementation encountered notable challenges on Election Day, impacting the overall credibility of the process. Nevertheless, the adoption of such technology represented a significant advancement in modernizing Nigeria's electoral system and aligning it with international standards of transparency and accountability.

Informant IV, V, and VIII disclosed that:

The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) represented a significant advancement in the digitization of Nigeria's electoral process. The EU Election Observation Mission observed that BVAS effectively verified voter identities through fingerprint and facial recognition technologies, reducing instances of impersonation and multiple voting, thereby enhancing the credibility of the accreditation process.

Informant I, II, and XII indicates that:

Although BVAS was designed to transmit results directly from polling units to the INEC Results Viewing Portal in real time, the EU EOM noted that technical glitches and connectivity challenges in certain areas caused delays in result transmission, impacting the overall efficiency of the system.

Informant III, IX, and XV emphasized that:

The EU EOM recognized that the technology deployed contributed to greater transparency by minimizing human interference during result collation. However, observers also reported issues such as device malfunctions and delays in voter accreditation, particularly in remote locations, which occasionally resulted in longer queues and voter frustration.

Informant V and VIII stressed that:

The EU EOM observed that while the deployment of BVAS and related technologies marked a positive step toward strengthening electoral integrity, further investment in infrastructure, comprehensive training, and robust contingency planning is essential to address technical failures and ensure smoother operations in future elections.

Informant II, V and VIII emphasized that:

The EU Election Observation Mission deployed specialized media and social media analysts who continuously monitored national broadcasters, newspapers, and digital platforms to evaluate the tone, fairness, and balance of election coverage throughout the campaign and election periods.

Informant III, VI, and X revealed that:

The EU EOM monitoring of social media uncovered a substantial presence of false and misleading content, including fabricated reports about candidate withdrawals and endorsements. The Mission closely tracked these narratives to assess their impact on voter perceptions and the overall integrity of the electoral process. Accordingly, traditional media played a vital role in holding the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) accountable, particularly following the initial February elections, by highlighting shortcomings and demanding transparency, thereby shaping public discourse (Informant II and IX).

Informant IV, V and VIII agreed that:

The Mission also noted the widespread use of social media by political actors to disseminate both verified information and disinformation, including ethnic-based hate speech. This complex information environment posed significant challenges to voters' ability to make informed decisions.

4.5 Theme 2: Enhancing Transparency, Inclusiveness, and Accountability

Enhancing transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in Nigeria's 2023 elections posed a significant issue, as underscored by the EU Election Observation Mission's report, which identified notable deficiencies that eroded public trust and electoral credibility. Although technological advancements such as electronic voter verification and results transmission were introduced to bolster transparency, operational setbacks and delays in announcing results undermined confidence in the process. Inclusiveness was constrained, with marginalized groups remaining underrepresented and instances of voter suppression reported, while accountability was weakened by the partiality of electoral institutions and inadequate enforcement of electoral laws.

Informant I, IV and XII accented that:

The EU Election Observation Mission identified that ambiguities within Nigeria's electoral laws created loopholes that significantly undermined transparency and accountability. These legal gaps hindered the consistent enforcement of standards across different states, resulting in varied interpretations that compromised the overall fairness of the elections.

Informant III and X point out that:

Operational shortcomings within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has affected the conduct of election due to delays in publishing results and the absence of real-time data accessibility, eroded public confidence and impeded transparency throughout the electoral process. The Mission noted persistent discrimination against women and marginalized groups, who faced considerable obstacles such as limited candidacy opportunities and financial as well as social barriers. These challenges substantially restricted the inclusiveness and representativeness of the elections (Informant II, V and VIII).

Informant IX and XV underscores that:

A critical systemic challenge identified was the widespread impunity for electoral offenses, where perpetrators frequently evaded consequences.

This lack of accountability weakened the integrity of the electoral process and discouraged genuine political competition.

Informant II, V and VIII noted that:

The EU Election Observation Mission strongly urged Nigeria's electoral authorities to implement real-time publication of election results as a critical measure to enhance transparency and foster public trust. Prompt and accessible dissemination of results at all levels is essential to prevent misinformation and mitigate electoral tensions.

Informant III, V, and X agreed that:

One of the fundamental recommendations was the development and deployment of robust systems that enable the public and key stakeholders to access election results instantaneously. Such transparency would significantly improve accountability by making the electoral process more open, verifiable, and credible. The Mission further highlighted the urgent need for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to modernize its technological infrastructure and strengthen operational capacities to ensure the timely and accurate transmission of results. Without dependable real-time reporting mechanisms, delays and skepticism regarding the integrity of results are likely to continue (VII and XV).

Informant II, V and VIII emphasized that:

The EU EOM called for comprehensive legal and procedural reforms mandating transparency in the publication of election results. This includes ensuring that results are promptly and publicly accessible at polling stations, collation centers, and through online platforms-measures vital for fostering an inclusive and credible electoral process.

4.5.1 Sub-theme: Addressing discrimination against women and marginalized groups in political participation

Addressing discrimination against women and marginalized groups in Nigerian political participation necessitates confronting deeply rooted socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. Prevailing cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes frequently confine women to traditional domestic roles, restricting their political aspirations and access to leadership

positions. Additionally, religious beliefs and male-dominated party structures further limit women's opportunities, while financial challenges and a lack of mentorship impede their ability to compete effectively. Similarly, marginalized groups experience exclusion due to systemic inequalities and restricted access to essential resources.

Informant II, V and VIII agreed that:

The EU Mission observed that women encountered significant barriers throughout the electoral process, including limited opportunities within political parties to run as candidates and insufficient financial support for their campaigns. These challenges not only curtailed women's political participation but also conflicted with Nigeria's international obligations to eliminate discrimination against women.

Informant II, IV and XI disclosed that:

Internally displaced persons, particularly women, were disproportionately affected by difficulties in obtaining Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), which restricted their ability to vote. The Mission emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive and auditable framework to guarantee that displaced populations can effectively exercise their voting rights.

Informant VII and XX revealed that:

The EU EOM noted that women voters, especially those in economically disadvantaged circumstances, were vulnerable to inducements from political contestants, undermining the free expression of their electoral choice. Addressing such practices is vital to ensuring inclusiveness and protecting voter autonomy.

Informant II, V and VIII pointed out that:

Despite these challenges, the Mission recognized an increased engagement of women in the electoral process and stressed the importance of sustained efforts to promote gender equality in political participation. The EU called for urgent affirmative actions and capacity-building initiatives to support women and marginalized groups in Nigerian politics.

Informant V and VIII discovered that:

The EU Election Observation Mission underscored the urgent necessity for Nigeria to establish a comprehensive operational framework dedicated to safeguarding media practitioners. This framework should

mandate the swift investigation and prosecution of all incidents involving attacks, intimidation, and harassment of journalists to uphold the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

Informant VIII, IX and X stressed that:

The Mission drew attention to the pervasive issue of impunity in attacks against journalists, highlighting that law enforcement agencies frequently fail to hold perpetrators accountable. It recommended reinforcing legal and institutional structures to ensure the protection of media personnel and to foster an environment conducive to independent journalism.

Informant III, V and XV affirmed that:

The EU EOM advocated for reforms aimed at enhancing the independence, transparency, and accountability of regulatory bodies such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which currently suffers from a lack of public trust due to opaque decision-making processes and disproportionate sanctions against critical media outlets. Furthermore, the EU EOM emphasized the critical need to transform state-owned media into authentic public service broadcasters endowed with editorial independence and financial autonomy, thereby enabling them to operate free from government interference and deliver fair, impartial election coverage.

Informant I, V and X pointed out that:

The EU Election Observation Mission identified significant ambiguities and inconsistencies within Nigeria's electoral laws that create loopholes, thereby undermining transparency and accountability. These legal gaps often result in divergent interpretations across states, complicating the uniform implementation of electoral processes and compromising the overall fairness of elections.

Informant IV, V and VII disclosed that:

A primary recommendation from the Mission was to address these ambiguities through a comprehensive review and clarification of electoral legislation. Establishing clear and consistent rules would enable all stakeholders to understand and adhere to the legal framework, thereby reinforcing the foundation for credible and transparent elections. The Mission further emphasized the importance of an inclusive and transparent reform process, advocating for broad consultations with political parties, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. Such engagement ensures that the revised legal framework reflects diverse perspectives and promotes greater inclusiveness. Beyond legal clarity, the EU EOM recommended enhancing institutional accountability by instituting a publicly transparent and merit-based selection process for members of the Independent National Electoral

Commission (INEC). This measure would build public trust in electoral administration and guarantee that key officials are appointed through fair and accountable procedures (XV and XX).

Informant IX and XVA agreed that:

The EU Election Observation Mission underscored that establishing a transparent and accountable process for selecting members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is essential for fostering public trust in the electoral system. In the absence of such transparency, concerns regarding the commission's impartiality and independence are likely to persist.

Informant II, III and V revealed that:

The Mission emphasized that a publicly accountable selection mechanism guarantees that INEC officials are appointed based on merit and integrity rather than political considerations, which is vital for upholding the credibility and professionalism of the electoral body.

Informant VI, VIII and X viewed that:

The EU EOM highlighted that transparent appointment procedures enhance institutional accountability by subjecting the selection process to scrutiny from civil society, political parties, and the general public, thereby strengthening confidence in the commission's capacity to administer free and fair elections. Furthermore, the Mission recommended reforms aimed at making the selection process more inclusive and merit-based, incorporating broad consultations and clearly defined criteria to reinforce INEC's independence and protect Nigeria's democratic processes from undue political interference.

Informant X and XII describe that:

The EU Election Observation Mission found that, although Nigeria's courts play a vital role in resolving electoral disputes, the effectiveness of the process was undermined by inconsistencies in judicial decisions and procedural complexities. These challenges eroded public confidence in the system and underscored the need for more consistent and transparent legal interpretations.

Informant II, V and IX reveals that:

The Mission observed that the protracted and multi-tiered appeals process frequently delayed the final resolution of election petitions, in some cases even after elected officials had assumed office. The EU EOM recommended streamlining procedures and reducing the number of appeal stages to ensure the timely delivery of justice and to uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

Informant X and XV identified that:

A significant concern identified by the EU EOM was the lack of accountability for non-compliance with court orders, as well as the inconsistent provision of documents by INEC during litigation. The Mission called for stricter enforcement of judicial decisions and clearer obligations for all parties involved in the dispute resolution process. In addition, the EU EOM stressed the importance of safeguarding judicial independence and enhancing the training of both judges and political party agents engaged in electoral disputes. The Mission advocated for reforms aimed at promoting greater consistency in legal interpretations and strengthening overall confidence in the electoral justice system.

Informant V, VII and XIII stressed that:

The EU EOM actively monitored the implementation of the 2022 Electoral Act, recognizing it as a significant legal advancement that introduced clearer timelines for elections and a stronger legal basis for the use of technology. Our mission included experts specifically tasked with assessing how these provisions were put into practice, particularly regarding voter verification and results transmission.

Informant X and XII describe that:

The EU EOM Worked closely with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders to observe the operationalization of the new law's measures. This included evaluating INEC's reforms, such as the uploading of polling unit results forms, which are critical for transparency and accountability in the electoral process. Equally, the Mission also emphasized the importance of supporting INEC's institutional independence and capacity, urging prompt appointments to key positions like Resident Electoral Commissioners to ensure effective implementation of the Electoral Act's provisions ahead of the elections. Beyond monitoring, the EU EOM recommended that INEC conduct comprehensive lessons-learned exercises and independent evaluations to address challenges, particularly those related to the use of biometric verification technology (BVAS). These steps are essential to fully realize the ambitions of the 2022 Electoral Act and strengthen democratic rights in Nigeria (VI and XX).

Informant I, II and XII describe that:

The EU Election Observation Mission closely monitored the implementation of the 2022 Electoral Act, recognizing it as a pivotal legal reform that established clearer election timelines and reinforced the legal framework for the use of technology. Our team included specialists

dedicated to evaluating how these provisions were operationalized, with particular focus on voter verification and the transmission of results.

Informant IV, V and X agreed that:

EU collaborated extensively with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other key stakeholders to observe the practical application of the new law's measures. This involved assessing INEC's reforms, such as the digital uploading of polling unit results forms, which are vital for enhancing transparency and accountability throughout the electoral process.

Informant VII and XV disclosed that:

The Mission also underscored the critical importance of bolstering INEC's institutional independence and capacity, advocating for the timely appointment of key officials, including Resident Electoral Commissioners, to ensure the effective enforcement of the Electoral Act's provisions in the lead-up to the elections.

Informant V, VIII and XIV describe that:

Beyond observation, the EU EOM recommended that INEC undertake comprehensive lessons-learned exercises and independent evaluations, particularly addressing challenges related to the deployment of biometric verification technology (BVAS). These initiatives are essential to fully realize the objectives of the 2022 Electoral Act and to strengthen democratic governance in Nigeria.

Informant IV, V and XII argued that:

The EU EOM consistently urged Nigerian authorities, political parties, and candidates to commit to peaceful elections, emphasizing dialogue and cooperation as essential tools to prevent violence and intimidation throughout the electoral process.

Informant II, III and XII discovers that:

Regular engagement and communication between key stakeholders-including INEC, political parties, civil society, and security agencies-to promote mutual understanding and coordinated efforts aimed at maintaining peace and security during the elections. Furthermore, supported and collaborated with the National Peace Committee and other local actors dedicated to conflict prevention, encouraging inclusive participation and early warning mechanisms to address tensions before they escalated into violence (Informant VII).

Informant X and XII stressed that:

The EU EOM highlighted the importance of respecting the rule of law and electoral regulations, urging all parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and acts that could intimidate voters or disrupt the electoral process.

Informant X and XII emphasized that:

Establishing a genuine level playing field is fundamental to democratic elections. It highlighted that the protection of freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, alongside a neutral and independent election management body, are vital to ensuring fairness among candidates and political parties.

Informant X and XII discover that:

Misuse of incumbency by political officeholders skewed the electoral playing field, granting undue advantages to certain candidates and undermining the principle of equal opportunity for all contestants. Accordingly, widespread vote buying and the deployment of financial inducements were identified as significant factors that compromised the fairness of the electoral competition, impeding voters' free choice and placing candidates with limited resources at a disadvantage (Informant I and IV).

Informant X and XII pointed out that:

Despite these challenges, the EU EOM recognized the strong commitment of Nigerian citizens to the democratic process but underscored the urgent need for further legal and operational reforms to enhance transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability, thereby fostering a more equitable environment for all political actors.

Informant V and VII describe that:

Despite efforts to create a safe voting environment, incidents of violence, intimidation, and organized thuggery significantly restricted voters' ability to freely exercise their rights. These challenges compromised the overall integrity of the electoral process and underscored the urgent need for enhanced protection measures.

Informant X and XII that:

Observers reported that internally displaced persons, especially women, encountered substantial barriers to voting, including difficulties in obtaining Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and inconsistent voter education. These obstacles undermined both inclusiveness and the right to a secure and accessible voting environment.

Informant II, III and VI pointed out that:

The widespread circulation of misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric on social media, which posed risks of inciting ethnic tensions and voter intimidation. Nonetheless, fact-checking initiatives and civil society interventions played a constructive role in countering false narratives and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral space.

Informant IV, V and XII disclosed that:

While commending the strong commitment of Nigerian citizens to participate in the democratic process, the EU EOM emphasized the critical need for comprehensive reforms to strengthen voter protection. This includes improving security arrangements at polling stations and implementing more effective mechanisms to prevent violence and intimidation during elections.

Informant VII and XII submitted that:

The EU Election Observation Mission engaged proactively with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, civil society organizations, and media representatives. These engagements were instrumental in fostering dialogue, enhancing transparency, and promoting cooperation to strengthen the integrity of the electoral process.

Informant X and XII identified that:

Communication and coordination among electoral stakeholders was the instrument for the reinforcement adherence to democratic principles such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association. They further underscored the critical importance of a neutral and independent election management body and called on all parties to commit to conducting peaceful and fair elections. Additionally, Informant X and XII revealed that through public statements, press briefings, and direct outreach, the EU EOM consistently urged government institutions, political actors, and civil society to uphold the rule of law, respect electoral regulations, and collaborate effectively to prevent violence and intimidation, thereby safeguarding the democratic process.

Informant I, III and VII argued that:

EU election Observers worked closely with media professionals and civil society actors to evaluate and support their efforts in delivering accurate information and countering misinformation. The mission's dedicated media and social media analysts continuously monitored the electoral environment to promote a transparent and well-informed public discourse.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

This section of the study discusses the results collated from the fifteen (20) informants comprising the INEC Staff, Civil Society Organization, Observer Groups, and Academician. In the previous section, the views of the interviewees were analyzed using thematic method. The researcher gave the thematic presentation of the results which were used to answer the two stated research questions, thereby accomplishing the specified objectives of the study.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) found that while Nigerian citizens demonstrated a strong commitment to democracy during the 2023 general elections, the process itself exposed persistent systemic weaknesses. These weaknesses include lack of clear legal frameworks and electoral administration, undermined the transparency, inclusiveness, and credibility of the elections, ultimately damaging public trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This aligns with earlier study conducted by Derek and Daniel (2019) findings that shortcomings in the law and the administration of the elections hindered the conduct of well-run and inclusive polls, and operational failures, such as the lack of real-time publication of results and ambiguities in legal provisions, contributed to widespread dissatisfaction and calls for reform.

Further findings from the study proposes several ways of addressing these challenges, among others are: removing ambiguities in electoral law, establishing a transparent and accountable process for selecting INEC members, ensuring real-time access to election results, providing greater protection for media practitioners, addressing discrimination against women in politics, and combating impunity for electoral offenses. Accordingly, Gafar, (2015) Findings that, although election observation is internationally acknowledged for boosting public confidence and exposing irregularities, its tangible impact in Nigeria has been limited due to persistent electoral corruption characterized the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections, often

occurring outside observers' view or in contexts where observer neutrality was compromised. Additionally, finding from the study showed that Misuse of incumbency by political officeholders skewed the electoral playing field, granting undue advantages to certain candidates and undermining the principle of equal opportunity for all contestants. Accordingly, widespread vote buying and the deployment of financial inducements were identified as significant factors that compromised the fairness of the electoral competition, and impeding voters' free choice.

The European Union employs a variety of instruments to promote democracy in Nigeria, including funding, technical assistance, and targeted programs such as the EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN). These initiatives demonstrate that EU-Nigeria relations encompass political, economic, diplomatic, and social engagement, reflecting a multifaceted partnership aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and processes in the country.

On the political front, the EU employs a dual strategy, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches through working with civil society to encourage reciprocal accountability and to improve dialogue with the Nigerian government to advance political ideals such as democracy, human rights, and good governance. Additionally, it places significant emphasis on human rights as the foundational cornerstone in the EU's effort to promote democracy, validating the conclusion of scholarly research based on the kinds of instruments the EU currently utilizes since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 (Youngs, 2002).

Despite the longstanding diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the EU, there have been instances of political instability and human rights abuses, particularly during General Sani Abacha's rule. These events resulted in strained diplomatic relations and sanctions imposed on Nigeria by the EU. However, it is worth noting that these measures primarily affected political

ties between the EU and Nigeria rather than the former's economic interests (Kenyon, 2018). To resolve this, after Nigeria's return to civilian government, the EU has implemented a range of measures to improve the current democratic dispensation in the country. These policies include establishing EU-wide standard bilateral policies, international agreements, platforms for discussion, strengthening democratic institutions through joint programs, support to CSOs, election observation, and development cooperation.

Nevertheless, election observation missions have become crucial for the EU to assess the gradual advancement of democracy in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is essential to endorse the EU's inclination towards funding CSOs that advocate for civil and political rights, as this strengthens the undeniable connection between human rights, democracy, and governance (Youngs, 2002; Donnelly, 1999). The next section will examine the EU and Nigeria relations and subsequently explore the EU's efforts to promote democracy in Nigeria and the strategies it takes to do so.

The EU's engagement with Africa can be traced back to institutional frameworks like the 1957 Treaty of Rome, particularly the Association Agreement clause that outlines the European Communities (EC) relations with African territories. These mechanisms were established to align with the EC's goals of fostering development in African countries, particularly those with French as their primary language (Raimundo, 2021). The negotiations for the renewal of the convention between the Member States of the EC and the Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM) concluded on 20 July 1963 with the signing of the Yaoundé Convention. This convention established an association between 18 AASM countries and the EC. Nigeria, an important geopolitical actor in Africa (Nwachukwu, 1998), did not join the Yaounde Convention because the government viewed it with a suspicion of neocolonial intent from the EC members (Adetula, 2008). Also, it faced other obstacles in joining any form of association with the EC immediately after gaining independence, of which the most notable reason was Nigeria's membership in the British Commonwealth, which granted the country favorable trade

terms with the UK, a non-EC member at the time. As the UK initiated plans to join the EC and Nigeria's trade with EC member states grew, the Nigerian government deemed it necessary to engage in negotiations and sign an intermediary agreement, referred to as the Lagos Convention, on 16 July 1966. This agreement did not fall into the categories of being associated or non-associated, as it had its unique nature (Rivkin, 1967). Nevertheless, this agreement did not come into practical operation due to the failure of France and Luxembourg to ratify it (Adetula, 2008). The Lagos Convention shaped Nigeria's relations with the EC member states and enhanced its cooperation with African states that have partnered with the EC since the 1957 Association Agreement to build a regional economic community such as ECOWAS.

The literature on EU-African relations extensively discusses the EU and Nigeria relations (Haastrup *et al.*, 2020; Citian, 2020; Oloruntoba, 2015; Mattheis & Kostopoulos, 2020). To understand the origins of contemporary EU-Nigeria relations, it is necessary to understand the broader EU-Africa relations, which include its political and development aspects. Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the EU transformed in the 1970s when it spearheaded a coalition of forty-six African, Caribbean, and Pacific states (ACP) in negotiations with the EC (Adetula, 2008; Bakare, 2019). These negotiations resulted in the creation of the 1975 Lomé Convention. As a bilateral agreement between interregional entities, the purpose of the EC and ACP countries was to establish a cooperative framework and enhance financial assistance and investment opportunities in the ACP countries.

The 1975 Lomé Convention, which aimed to promote economic development and foster a sense of solidarity between the North and South, established a platform for dialogue and cooperation between the EC and ACP countries (Bakare, 2019). However, the agreement was only partially implemented and was a source of controversy and disagreement (Whiteman, 2012). The Cotonou Agreement, signed after Lomé, is the most extensive between the EU and African countries since it includes the clause of democratic governance and human rights. The

expiration of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020 provides an opportunity to rejuvenate and strengthen our relationship with ACP countries under the auspices of the newly formed Organization for African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) while considering the new realities and global challenges.

Specifically, diplomatic relations between the EU and Nigeria entered a new phase in 2008 with the Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward, guided by the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement, which provided a guideline through which the fundamental principles of ownership and joint responsibility, respect for human rights, good governance, democratic principles, and the rule of law would be understood, and resources channeled to tackle any challenges that might erupt from addressing them. According to the 2008 Nigeria-EU Joint Way forward, “both parties are committed to advancing these values globally. Nigeria and the EU consider each other as natural and strong partners. Nigeria and the EU share common values and ideals, believing in peace and security, equality, democracy, and tolerance as ways of developing prosperous and generous societies” (Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward, 2008). Both sides agreed to have a joint way forward to strengthen the democratic consolidation of the Nigerian democracy through dialogue and cooperation on the wider platform of the EU relations with the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states (Haruna, 2023). The agreement embodies the component of dialogue modeled based on Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Although the Cotonou Agreement establishes a broad framework for EU-Nigeria relations, encompassing various aspects of political, economic, and development cooperation (Bakare, 2019), the 2023 Samoa agreement has brought new priorities such as climate change and migration. These issues concern the EU greatly, particularly considering the 2015 migration crisis in the EU's southern borders (European Council, 2023).

The historical trajectory of the EU and Nigeria's relations has been defined by a multifaceted and dynamic relationship characterized by recent political, economic, diplomatic, and social interactions. The relations have been characterized by partnership and cooperation, which foster stability, progress, and shared benefits. As Khaki (2007) explains, the relationship between the EU-Nigeria is that of two unequal giants- asymmetric in nature- recognizing Nigeria as the weaker party. Although the EU recognizes Nigeria's strategic importance as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy and aims to enhance growth and stability to achieve social equity in Nigeria and Africa (EU Delegation to Nigeria, 2021), it is evidently clear that policymakers in Brussels need to revise the whims to maintain colonial perspective on Africa looking at Nigeria's growing expertise and the demand not to be a passive receiver of any foreign interest (Oloruntoba, 2015). The Niger incident and its strong pro-democracy stance in ECOWAS suggests that Nigeria wants to exert its influence on democracy promotion in other countries while being a receiver itself.

Though academic literature on Africa-EU relations tends to define such relations as being asymmetrical (Khaki, 2007), the politics around the negotiations of large-scale Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with regional economic communities in Africa, such as ECOWAS, through postcolonial lenses, reveals contestations around the assumptions of such asymmetries, asserting agency through diplomacy by regional and state actors and the actions of civil society (Sebhatu, 2021; Eze Menaka, 2019; Mattheis & Kostopoulos, 2020).

The EU has played a crucial role in Nigeria by offering substantial financial assistance, expert knowledge, and assistance in various areas, including agriculture, education, healthcare, security, governance, and infrastructure development. Because of Nigeria's demographic trends and the implications for its strategic security and foreign policy behavior, the EU is actively strengthening its relations with Nigeria on new issues of mutual interest. The interests encompass the management of irregular migration to the Southern borders of Europe and

providing support for Nigeria's development, focusing on maintaining security in the volatile areas of the north. Migration represents one of the EU's strategic interests in Nigeria. In 2017, the EU provided a total of EUR 15.5 million specifically to address the issue of migration (European External Action Services, 2019). During the EU-Nigeria strategic summit 2023, Utta Utpalini, the European Commissioner for International Partnership, discussed Nigeria's portion of the Global Gateway package, encompassing migration-related matters. The migration governance in Nigeria program aims to enhance Nigeria's governance systems for managing mobility and migration at federal, state, and local levels. To support this program, there has been a significant increase of 83.2 percent from the 2017 figures, reaching €28.4 million (Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 2023). The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa funded the project, which lasted 36 months. The project aimed to reintegrate 3,800 returning migrants, sensitize 20000 migrants, and assist 200 communities with high return migration. Beneficiaries also included national institutions involved in reintegration activities, civil society organizations, and the media, reinforcing the conclusion that the EU is more interested in human rights issues over democratic concerns (Youngs, 2001).

Richard Young suggests that the EU's interest in democratization processes in sub-Saharan Africa is expanding. Still, it only provides a relatively small amount of political aid to countries trying to democratize (Youngs, 2001). The Nigerian package of the Global Gateway prioritizes human rights, support for small-scale businesses, climate change, and food security over the development of direct democracy (Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 2023). The prevailing view among European policymakers that the strong emphasis on human rights aligns well with promoting democracy could also be challenged as overly simplistic. The scholarly literature has consistently recognized the significance of the correlation between human rights advancements and democracy (Landman, 2018). However, it is important to avoid automatically equating these two concepts without considering that the overall progress

in democratic processes can be seen as a foundation for ensuring fundamental human rights rather than solely encompassed within human rights policies themselves (Youngs, 2001). Democracy in Nigeria should be the basis for achieving other fundamental norms that serve as political conditionality in the Cotonou Agreement. Furthermore, although there has been an increase in the use of persuasive rhetoric to advocate for democracy and human rights by the EU in a developing country such as Nigeria, there has been no action taken to fully enforce measures, particularly in severe political rights violations in recent Nigeria as it is considered that Nigeria is at the nascent stage of the development of democracy. This phenomenon might be attributed to the persistent and uninterrupted diplomatic ties between the EU and Nigeria, even when electoral fraud has occurred, like the 2023 Nigeria general elections. The EU also preferred to protect its geostrategic economic interest over democracy (Bakare, 2019). However, the preference for economic and trade interests and human rights over the development governance in Nigeria can be argued to be a continuity to the 'associationist' dimension of the EC-African relations that favoured preferential market access and development assistance over political issues (Raimundo, 2021). Nevertheless, it should be noted that while democracy may not be explicitly discussed in the connections between both sides, it is indirectly shown by the support provided to CSOs that work in the field of human rights, which invariably includes civil and political rights. Thus, it suffices to say that the EU is interested in the minimalist electoral democracy in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Nigeria is expected to gain from the Global Gateway, a major development instrument developed by the EU. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has characterized it as a "template" for enhancing Europe's robust global relationships (European Commission, 2023). The EC views it as consistent with the G7 leaders' promise in June 2021 to establish a values-based, high-quality, and transparent infrastructure partnership to address global infrastructure development requirements. Jutta Urpilainen, the EU

commissioner for international partnerships, stated during her visit to Abuja in October 2023, before the first Global Gateway Forum, that the EU would provide aid to Nigeria in achieving improved infrastructure connectivity, encompassing transportation, energy, and digital networks. Additionally, the EU would offer support in agriculture, economic growth, health, and education that ensure governance delivers positively to the people.

The vast majority of EU development cooperation is directed through the European Development Fund (EDF), which serves as the primary financial instrument for the development cooperation agreement between the EU and ACP, commonly called the Cotonou Agreement (D'Alfonso, 2014). The National Indicative Programs (NIP) for ACP countries, which are planned for a multiannual financial period of either six or seven years in accordance with the provisions of Articles 2 and 4 of Annex IV of the Cotonou Agreement, are funded by the EU as essential EU development assistance to ACP countries, including Nigeria. Prior to the suspension of EDF aid to Nigeria in 1995 due to democratic and human rights abuses during General Sani Abacha's regime, the allocated funds between 1992 and 1995 amounted to €210.2 million and significantly reduced afterward (European Commission, 2008). Upon the restoration of democratic governance in 1999, the NIP funding experienced significant growth over the years. In the ninth EDF, the amount reached €361 million between 2000 and 2007. Subsequently, in the tenth EDF, the NIP funding increased to €677 million between 2008 and 2013. However, in the eleventh EDF, covering the period from 2014 to 2020, the amount decreased to €512 million, with a specific allocation of 17.6% (€90 million) for issues related to the rule of law, governance, and democracy in Nigeria (European Commission, 2002; 2008; 2014). The EU's restructuring of the EDF has allowed Nigeria to participate in a new special funding program known as the Multiannual Indicative Program (MIP) between 2021 and 2024. This program, worth €508 million, aims to support initiatives that enhance bilateral relations between Nigeria and the EU in three key areas: green and digital economy, governance, peace,

migration, and human development (European External Affairs Service, 2021). In 2021, a substantial amount of €39 million was allocated to support democratic participation and the 2023 general election in Nigeria.

4.2 How does the EU observation mission impact the 2023 Nigerian general election?

4.2.1 Documentary Analysis

To answer question two, I engaged in documentary analysis of the EU election observation mission report which is presented below.

4.2.2 Role of EU mission on election observation

The creation of election observation missions has been a major EU endeavor to promote democracy in Nigeria (Khaki, 2007). The EU now uses these observation missions as a vital instrument to monitor and evaluate Nigeria's slow but steady democracy process. Since the start of the Fourth Republic, the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and numerous other international and local monitoring groups have been closely observing Nigeria's electoral processes. Both before and after elections, these groups offer prescriptive advice to enhance electoral procedures. The EOM has conducted 180 missions in more than 65 independent countries since 2000, including Nigeria (European External Action Service, 2023). The main goal of these missions is to offer recommendations aimed at enhancing the path toward democratization. The EU sent its first mission to Nigeria ahead of the 2003 and 2007 elections, following Nigeria's return to civilian governance in 1999, covering presidential, gubernatorial, national, and state assembly elections (Khaki, 2007). The EU's evaluation of the 2003 elections was significantly negative, and a similar level of critique was directed at the elections of 2019 and 2023, indicating major areas needing improvement.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), in its concluding report on the Nigerian general elections of 2023, identified six key focus areas. Barry Andrews, the Chief Observer of the mission, presented the report, which contained 25 recommendations, at a press conference held in Abuja. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria oversaw the presidential and National Assembly elections on February 25, with the governorship and state assembly elections occurring on March 18. The mission accredited a total of 110 observers representing 25 EU Member States, as well as Norway, Switzerland, and Canada.

While presenting the report, Mr. Andrews stated: “We are particularly troubled by the necessity for reform in six areas that we have pinpointed as priority recommendations, which we believe could facilitate improvements in the conduct of elections if acted upon.” These areas include clarifying ambiguities in the law; creating a publicly transparent selection process for INEC members, and ensuring immediate publication and access to election results. Additionally, these priorities encompass offering better protection for media professionals, tackling discrimination against women in politics, and addressing impunity concerning electoral violations (Premium Times, 27th June, 2023).

From the above analysis, it is clear that elections in Nigeria since 1999 have encountered numerous shortcomings, as indicated by reports from both domestic and international observers. In these reports, aside from highlighting instances of violations and electoral misconduct, suggestions were made to enhance the quality of future elections in the country, aligning with international best practices. Thus, election observations have significantly contributed to bringing about electoral reforms and revisions of various electoral laws since the advent of the current political climate.

This EU EOM reports on Nigeria's 2023 general election have elicited a range of reactions among the population and State officials over the EUEOM's position on the management of elections by the country's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Eze Amalu, 2023).

The relationship between democracy and good governance is firmly established (Gyeong, 2014), with the notion of achieving good governance through democratization being of utmost importance in the EU's development goal in Africa. The EU decision-makers prioritize transparency, openness, and active civil society participation in promoting democracy in Nigeria. The EU has adopted the term 'democratic governance' to encompass a range of principles and practices, including human rights, democratization processes, the rule of law, information access, transparency, accountability, human security, migration management, and economic growth in its relations with developing countries (Manners, 2008; Del Biondo, 2011). This explains the significant support provided by the EU to CSOs and other institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), that focus on ensuring the proper function of the mechanism, such as election management that is relevant to protecting civil and political rights which is very crucial to democracy.

4.2.3 EU instruments and Strategies of Democracy Promotion in Nigeria

The most crucial instrument for EU democracy promotion in Nigeria is establishing and instrumentalizing common foreign policy and international agreements. The Lome Convention was the initial agreement to establish a standard for development cooperation. Nonetheless, the Cotonou Convention Agreement established a framework that included a political dimension through the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law clauses—basic governance components in Article 9 of the agreement (The Cotonou Agreement, 2012). This convention also established institutions like the joint ACP-EU parliamentary assembly, a

consultative body of equal EU and ACP representatives. The assembly's role is to promote democratic processes and foster better understanding between the people of the EU and the ACP states (Luxembourg Center for Contemporary and Digital History, n.d.).

In its Joint communication with the European Parliament (EP) and the Council, titled "Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa," the European Commission acknowledges that conflicts and governance challenges have hindered growth and development in various regions of Africa (Council of the European Union, 2007). The institutionalization of the African Union (AU) as a significant actor within EU-Africa relations, particularly through the implementation and monitoring of the 2007 EU-Africa joint strategy, signifies the recognition of the AU and its member states, including Nigeria, as key proponents of democratic governance and human rights reforms (Council of the European Union, 2007). This strengthens the idea of shared responsibility between the AU and EU while allowing the EU to use its position to wield influence on political conditionality for development cooperation by withholding a €2.7 billion aid allocation from the 10th EDF, known as the "Incentive Tranche," for all ACP countries (Haidara *et al.*, 2008). This aid is contingent upon the ACP countries' commitment to meeting a set of good governance criteria defined solely by the EU (Council of the European Union, 2007). Although the EU's political conditionality on democratic governance and human rights encourages Africans like Nigeria to take more action on governance, it poses potential risks to sovereignty and autonomy. It may weaken domestic accountability, contribute to political instability, and divert resources from essential services and development projects as governments prioritize meeting donor conditions. Haidara *et al.* (2008) argue that the EU's use of aid pledged to ACP countries to protect its geostrategic interests while expecting improvements in governance may have unintended negative consequences.

During a Ministerial Troika meeting in Ljubljana on 20th May 2008, Nigeria and the EU reached a mutual understanding to enhance their relationship through open dialogue and

collaborative efforts based on Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement. Both parties strongly reiterated their dedication to these agreements and crafted a political framework, known as the "Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward," to further strengthen their collaboration. The Joint-Way Forward initiative, which was one of the most comprehensive agreements since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 following some sort of sanctions within military cooperation in 1993 following the annulment of the Nigerian election by General Sani Abacha and the death of environmental rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the EU hoped to use this arrangement as a platform of dialogue to wield more political presence within the domestic development in Nigeria. Guided by the principles from Articles 8 to 13 of the Cotonou agreement, the Joint Way Forward created a kind of political dialogue between the EU and Nigeria that recognized the connection between democracy, human rights, security, and migration (Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward, 2008), reaffirming the observation in the scholarly research (Huber *et al.*, 1993). While democracy remains an important issue, it is important to point out that migration is one of the most crucial topics in the frequent political dialogue, which ends the joint programming after the seventh dialogue in 2020. For example, the ministerial troika meeting between both partners in Prague on 9 June 2009 placed a premium on the issues of insecurity and civil unrest in Africa, including the Niger Delta crisis that affected southern Nigeria (Relief Web, 2009). The agenda of this is based on the EU's strategic interest to curb security-necessitated migration to its Southern borders, as Nigerians are among the highest irregular migrants that frequent its borders, as has been shown in other subsequent ministerial meetings and reinforced by the 2015 migration crisis (Irabor, 2023; European External Action Service, 2020).

The European Commission (2020), through a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joseph Borrel, suggested that the EU and Africa collaborate to take advantage of opportunities and tackle challenges. It proposed the development of strategies to promote stability, peace, security, human rights, democracy, gender equality,

sustainable livelihoods, sustainable economic growth rooted in healthy ecosystems, social cohesion, and good governance. Although the document did not explicitly mention Nigeria as an established African leader, it is reasonable to agree with Khakee (2007) that Nigeria, despite its geopolitical significance in African politics, is an "evident patient for anyone aiming to eradicate the ills of inadequate governance in Africa."

4.2.4 Support for CSO

The EU not only focuses on traditional foreign policy positions and existing agreements and platforms that prioritize strengthening democratic institutions but also actively supports civil society in improving electoral procedures, increasing political inclusivity, and addressing issues related to corruption and human rights abuses. The centrality of elections in liberal democracy and the inadequacy of the formal institutions responsible for managing elections in Nigeria has led to a growing participation of civil society in the electoral process (Orji & Ikelegbe, 2014). The EU promotes democratic norms in Nigeria by supporting Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in implementing various programs and projects, employing practical tools and strategies. As Youngs (2001) pointed out, the EU democracy promotion prioritizes NGOs that contribute to the subject of human rights. From 2019 to 2024, the EU, through its Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation Program (ACT), which the British Council executes in 10 states, despite Brexit and through a partnership between the EU and the UK, has provided support to a total of 273 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria (Onwuzoo, 2024). This empowerment has prioritized offering capacity-building assistance to improve the efficiency and efficacy of their operations. Although some CSOs were encouraged to practice reciprocal accountability, they did not explicitly address democracy. Instead, their attention was directed towards important societal issues such as security and human rights, a domain where civil and political liberties reverberate, and the development of CSOs to enhance their credibility and

transparency as agents of sustainable development in Nigeria. This has the potential to influence governance and political participation.

The nexus between democracy and the rule creates a complementary approach toward building a stronger democratic society since democracy can be enshrined within statutory laws that guide the conduct of governance and democratic institutions within a state. At the minimalist level of democracy in Nigeria, packed with pre- and post-electoral litigations, strengthening the judiciary is vital as distrust in the legal system continues to rise. A survey conducted by NOI polls has indicated that only 23% of Nigerians have confidence in INEC. In comparison, 78% have little or no faith in it (Thompson *et al.*, 2023). The level of trust in INEC witnessed a 12% decline in 2017, reducing the voter turnout for the presidential election. A different survey in 2020 concluded that 88% of Nigerians believe that corruption is widespread in the Nigerian judicial system (NOI Poll, 2020). The lack of confidence in the judiciary and the electoral body has led to the recent decline in the number of voters in the 2023 election. President Tinubu garnered the lowest number of votes in a presidential election since 1999 (Thompson *et al.*, 2023). The Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Program, costing €30 million, which is funded by the EU and implemented by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, aims to ensure that performance, quality, and oversight of the criminal justice system and justice service delivery by supporting strategic and operational initiatives and improving coordination in the criminal justice sector.

Due to the nature of electoral contests in Nigeria involving widespread irregularities, several CSOs requested the reform of the outdated 2010 Nigerian electoral law to include new regulations, including the use of technology in the conduct of the election, which resulted in the use of IREV and BIVAS. Some of these NGOs, including Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), CLEEN Foundation, Action Aid Nigeria, Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Centre for Citizens with

Disabilities (CCD) etc., take a reformist approach toward elections in Nigeria have been funded in one way or another.

4.2.5 Initiatives, programs, and project

The EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) program, managed by the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), is one of the main programs focused on supporting democratic and good governance in Nigeria following the recommendations of the EU Election Observation Mission's (EOM) report of the 2015 General Elections. The program was now divided into two phases: Phase I, spanning from 2016 to 2021, and Phase II, spanning from 2022 to 2027. The phase I project (2016-2021) was developed in collaboration with all pertinent stakeholders in Nigeria and foreign NGOs, considering the findings and recommendations of the EU EOM mission over different electoral cycles since Nigeria's return to democracy. The 2015 mission consisted of more than 90 observers from 25 EU Member States, Norway, and Switzerland, along with a delegation of seven Members of the European Parliament led by Javier Nart from Spain. Additionally, the project was to consider the internal review by INEC and the report on the 2015 general elections by the EU EOM in preparation for the 2019 general elections (EU-SDGN Nigeria, no date, para. 1). The objective of this program is to strengthen democracy in Nigeria through the provision of technical expertise, training, capacity enhancement, and material assistance in five key thematic areas and to important institutions such as the supporting the capacity of INEC, the National Assembly, political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the media.

Following the result of the 2019 General elections in Nigeria, the EU EOM team reported violence, harassment of journalists, and other irregularities that marred the elections. Approximately 150 individuals lost their lives due to violence associated with the election process, and INEC documented incidents of office attacks, killings, abductions, and sexual

assault against its officials (Sanni, 2019). This prompted the newly appointed Ambassador of the EU in Nigeria, Ms. Samuela Isopi, who has a swathe of experience gained from decades of working with the foreign service of her home country, Italy, and that of the EU, to rally efforts by the EU to extend the EU-SDGN into the second phase. While maintaining key stakeholders as in phase I, new implementing partners were brought on board, including more public agencies in Nigeria, to facilitate implementing the 2022 electoral reforms ahead of the 2023 and 2027 General elections. One major component was added to the original five: the support for increasing the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. While doubt remains regarding the effectiveness of democracy promotion at the government level since similar issues arise every electoral cycle due to failure to fully implement electoral laws (Bargiacchi & Florinder, 2018), such an effort at boosting inclusivity and pluralism of the democratic process gives credence and relevance to the EU democracy promotion agenda in Nigeria among Nigerian marginalized groups.

4.2.6 Summits, dialogue, and meetings

The EU has persistently advocated establishing and maintaining democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa through a series of EU-Africa summits held in Africa and Europe. The EU utilizes international platforms like summits and other meetings to promote democracy. The EU's approach demonstrates its dual strategy of engaging in top-down interactions through government-to-government communication and bottom-up interactions through the support given to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are essential as they have direct access to the public and the Nigerian government. By utilizing this dual approach, the EU aims to foster democratic practices at multiple levels. Government-to-government engagements aim to develop official agreements and platforms, while support for CSOs facilitates grassroots involvement and empowers civil society actors to advocate for democratic ideals.

The Africa-EU partnership is a longstanding form of collaboration that has evolved over time. The summit provides a platform for political dialogue, evaluation, and the reaffirmation of bilateral agreements. Among other ways, through this summit, Nigeria sought inspiration and received support from the EU for democracy. It is worth noting that the series of summits started with the inaugural Africa-EU Summit in Cairo, Egypt, in 2000. This was followed by the 2nd Summit held in Lisbon, Portugal, in December 2007, where the Africa-EU Joint Strategy (JAES) and its Action Plan were adopted. The third AU-EU Summit occurred in Tripoli, Libya, in November 2010 (African Union, n.d.). The 4th EU–African Union Summit, which followed previous summits in 2000, 2007, and 2010, showcased the growing institutionalized relations between the EU and AU. It was held in Brussels on 2 and 3 April 2014, emphasizing the significance of a results-oriented approach in key areas such as democracy, good governance, and human rights. The summit emphasizes promoting democratic governance as a key aspect of our partnership. This includes working together to combat corruption and money laundering, observing elections, engaging in dialogue on civil and political rights, and strengthening public sector institutions. Both parties also aim to uphold the rule of law and ensure responsible governance of natural resources, including taking measures to prevent illegal exploitation. The sixth EU-AU summit, themed "Two Unions, a Joint Vision," gathered heads of governments and other important players from both continents to discuss practical issues affecting the two continents (European Council, 2022). These summits aim to facilitate collaboration between major stakeholders from Africa, including Nigeria, and the EU, to advance mutual objectives, uphold shared principles, adhere to international regulations, and safeguard common interests and public resources.

In the context of the sixth EU-AU summit and at a time when governments are fixated on the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian government has articulated a strategic objective to propel economic reform initiatives within the ambit of EU-Africa

relations (Agbakwuru, 2022). This intent has been cogently evidenced by the deliberate association of these reform efforts with migration dynamics, which occupies a critical position on the EU policy agenda. However, the EU sees summits as an occasion to discuss economic and diplomatic relations, human rights, good governance, and democracy. These topics are of utmost importance to the EU since it holds significant authority in power relations and hosts the event, giving it enough sway over the agenda of the meeting (Prinsen, 2007). As Lorenz (2011) avers, the EU uses summits to raise more general awareness and concern to promote dialogue on election processes, governance, human rights, and the rule of law, reinforcing a case for political conditionality. The democratic governance perspective has been the basis of formulating a new strategy to promote governance in ACP countries through dialogue and positive conditionality (Del Biondo, 2011). The formulation of a novel approach that fosters governance in ACP countries like Nigeria through dialogue and conditionality has been underpinned by the EU's democratic governance perspective (Del Biondo, 2011). This perspective is a fundamental framework for designing and implementing initiatives that strengthen governance structures and processes. By emphasizing the principles of democratic governance, this strategy endeavors to engender meaningful dialogue and constructive engagement while leveraging positive incentives to promote effective governance outcomes. This approach aims to enhance the overall governance landscape in ACP countries, fostering accountability, transparency, and participatory decision-making.

Amidst escalating ambiguities, such summits have underscored the international imperative to maintain the integrity of democratic institutions. Concurrently, they have served as a clarion call to Nigerian governmental authorities, admonishing them to eschew involvement in human rights violations, encompassing those related to political freedoms. Non-compliance with these democratic tenets is posited to precipitate grave repercussions for the nation, potentially culminating in the severance of diplomatic ties and the forfeiture of advantages concomitant

with upholding a democratic ethos (Hyde, 2011). Despite the EU's assiduous efforts to foster democracy in Nigeria, the advancement of such political reforms persistently confronts two principal challenges. The first pertains to Nigeria's intricate socio-political and economic landscape, characterized by entrenched corruption and societal cleavages (Ogundiya, 2010; Unegbu, 2003). The second challenge arises from the reticence of EU institutions to impose sanction regimes on the Nigerian government in instances of democratic reform failure, which are contingent upon the EU's stipulations and international legal frameworks (Del Biondo, 2011). This hesitation is primarily attributed to apprehensions regarding the potential repercussions on the strategic economic relations between the EU and Nigeria.

4.2.7 The EU 2023 general election observation methodology

Election observation is an essential component of European Union activities to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide. Election observation can contribute to strengthening democratic institutions, build public confidence in electoral processes and help deter fraud, intimidation and violence. Election observation also serves to reinforce other key European Union foreign policy objectives, notably peace-building. With these objectives in mind, the European Union has become a leading force in international election observation.

In the past 20 years, the EU deployed over 200 Election Observation Missions (EU EOMs) in around 75 countries. The EU deploys observation missions in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, while the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observes within its participating States, including in Europe, North America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, regions which are not covered by the EU.

EU EOMs employ a long-term observation methodology in order to assess election processes against international standards and best practices for genuine democratic elections. The international obligations established by international and regional treaties to which the host

country has agreed to be bound to include universal principles that apply to the conduct of elections, such as fundamental freedoms and political rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The EU EOM methodology for long-term observation was established on the basis of the content of the Commission Communication of 191 of 2000. This document, while reinforcing the EC commitment to provide technical and financial assistance to electoral processes, set the tone for a more coherent strategy on the overall notion of EU electoral support as guided by clear objectives and partnership principles with the host countries.

After the Communication 191/2000, the methodology has been refined over the years and described in the three successive versions of the Handbook for European Union Election Observation. The main principles are aligned with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

The EU observation methodology (described in the Handbook of European Union Election Observation, available [here](#)) is based on 7 main principles.

Consistency

To ensure a consistent approach to election observation, the EU applies the same methodology in all countries where it observes elections. This criterion ensures that accurate and verifiable information on the conduct of a given electoral process and other indicators of the wider democratic environment are gathered systematically by an EU EOM. The use of commitments and obligations for democratic elections deriving from international and regional human rights instruments, as well as good practices for democratic elections, ensures that information gathered is assessed through a standard and impartial approach that is relevant and applicable to all countries observed. The assessment of a given electoral process does not involve comparison between individual countries observed.

Comprehensive and long-term Observation

The observation methodology comprehensively focuses on all aspects and stages of an election process. In their reports, EU EOMs will cover the following twelve areas of assessment:

Political context

Legal framework (including electoral system)

Election administration

Voter registration

Party and candidate registration

Election campaign

Media

Complaints and appeals

Human rights (including participation of women and minorities)

Role of civil society

Election day

Results and the post-election

The assessment work of an EU EOM is undertaken through the direct observation of electoral events by EU observers and analysis of information obtained from relevant documents and meetings with a broad range of national and regional election stakeholders. Observers are deployed in the capital city and regional locations across the host country to ensure that there is a balance of coverage of different regions, and urban and rural areas. Ideally, EU observers – consisting of a core team based in the capital and long-term observers (LTOs) based in regions across the host country – will be present from the opening of the campaign to the announcement of final results and the conclusion of any election-related complaints. Where electoral events such as the registration of voters and candidates' takes place before EU observers are deployed, an assessment can still be made of relevant legal and procedural issues

and, from the information an EU EOM receives from election stakeholders and election-day observation, the extent to which the law and procedures were properly implemented.

Increased coverage on Election Day

On Election Day, an EU EOM increases its coverage to observe voting and counting at polling stations. EU observers are deployed in mobile (roving) teams throughout the host country, and each team visits a number of different polling stations (generally from 5 to 15 depending on the area) within its designated region.

Impartial and Independent assessment

EU election observers are obliged to be strictly impartial and not to show bias towards any side in an electoral process. They will base their findings only on accurate and verifiable information. The EU EOM will not accept offers of assistance or support that may compromise its independence or be perceived as partisanship. An EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions. Although there will be close cooperation with the EU institutions, an EU EOM will operate under a separate and distinct mandate from that of the European Union institutions involved and of its Delegation present in the country observed. An EU EOM will collaborate with other international election observers from organizations that have endorsed the Declaration of Principles but will only base its findings and conclusions on its own observations.

Non-interference in the Electoral processes

EU observers will not interfere in the election process. Where problems are observed, the EU EOM bring them to the attention of electoral authorities, but will not intervene to correct or otherwise directly influence the proceedings. EU observers will seek to have a courteous and constructive relationship with the electoral authorities and all electoral stakeholders. An EU EOM will report on the accuracy, transparency and timely delivery of election results only, not

on the political outcome of the results. In its final report, an EU EOM will offer recommendations for improving the integrity and effectiveness of future electoral processes and the wider process of democratization.

Cooperation with the Host Country

EU observers will respect the laws of the host country. An EU EOM will be deployed only after receipt of an invitation from the state and/or electoral authorities of the host country. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between the European Commission and the host country are generally signed to outline the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The MoUs will include reference to the EU EOM's mandate to act impartially and not to interfere in the electoral process. In return, the MOUs will guarantee that an EU EOM is able to enjoy the necessary conditions for effective and credible observation. These include:

1. Unimpeded access to all aspects of the electoral process and to all persons concerned with the election;
2. The freedom to operate without interference, including the freedom to issue public statements and reports;
3. The freedom of movement around the country and conditions that ensure the safety and security of EU observers;
4. The issuing of appropriate accreditation, which should be provided on a non-discriminatory basis;
5. Guarantees that there will be no adverse action against its national or foreign staff or others who assist the EU EOM with its work.

Openness in findings and visibility in work

EU observers issue a public preliminary statement presented by the Chief Observer shortly after Election Day (usually within two days) at a press conference. The Chief Observer will also answer to questions posed in that occasion. A comprehensive final report is issued within two months of the completion of the election process. In addition, the EU EOM undertakes public outreach activities during the course of its deployment to raise public awareness and understanding of its presence, mandate and role.

Election observation is a key component of the work of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law across Europe, Central Asia and North America spread to African nation. Democratic elections are celebrations of fundamental human rights and, more specifically, civil and political rights; election observation, therefore, contributes to their overall promotions and protection. A genuine election is a political competition that takes place in an environment characterized by political pluralism, confidence, transparency and accountability. It can lead to the correction of errors or weak practices, even while an election process is still under way. When observers can issue positive reports, it builds trust in the democratic process and enhances the legitimacy of the governments that emerge from the elections.

Observation takes on heightened importance in post- conflict countries, in which groups that have been contesting on the battlefield may harbor strong suspicious of the political system and the election process. In such cases, observation makes an important contribution to peace-building, since creating confidence in elections can help promote national reconciliation and sound democratic practices. Election observation by the United Nations or other intergovernmental organizations can be especially helpful when domestic observer organizations do not have sufficient strength or resources to organize effective monitoring efforts, or when the impartiality of domestic observers is in question, as may often be the case in post-conflict countries or new democracy.

Any election can be enhanced by observation, but comprehensive observation is particularly helpful in countries in which a significant proportion of the population may lack trust in the electoral system. Countries with weak human rights records, or countries with extremely strong executive powers and long-time rulers.

There are many practical issues to consider before deciding whether or not to observe and how to observe an election in a country:

1. Is the security situation of the country sufficiently good enough and stable to ensure the safety and well-being of the observers?
2. Does the country have enough well-trained expertise, available to observe or can be trained in time?
3. Does the country electoral laws make provision for observers? And will they be allowed to go to the polling unit and coalition centers to observe?
4. Will the election management body (EMB) or another authority provide accreditation?

If the answer to one of the above questions is no, then a credible observation may not be possible.

Further finding emphasized the critical need for comprehensive reforms to strengthen voter protection. This includes improving security arrangements at polling stations and implementing more effective mechanisms to prevent violence and intimidation during elections. Therefore, objective two has been achieved on the various ways of enhancing electoral credibility of the Nigerian democratic landscape.

4.2.8 Analysis of the European Union Observation Missions in Nigerian 2023 General Elections

The European Union deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to Nigeria for the 2023 general elections, covering the presidential, National Assembly, gubernatorial, and state assembly elections. The mission involved over 100 observers from 25 EU member states, Norway, Switzerland, and Canada. And their goal is to assess the elections against Nigeria's legal framework and international standards for democratic elections.

Key Findings by the EUOM

1. Enduring systemic weaknesses

- The EUOM concluded that deep legal and operational flaws undermined the elections, with the electoral process failing to meet both Nigeria's obligations and its own constitutional standards.
- Shortcomings included ambiguous electoral laws, a politicized appointment process for INEC officials, and insufficient enforcement of election related offences.

2. Operational and transparency issues

- On 25 February of the presidential poll day, the BVAS system and the result transmission (via IRev) suffered major disruptions. Large portions of results were missing or illegible, which damaged public confidence in INEC
- Election day logistical problems were numerous: vote buying, PVC manipulation, violence against INEC staff, and delayed voting due to material shortages.

3. Security, intimidation and interference

- The EU observed violent incidents, including attacks on INEC offices and election rallies, as well as voter and official intimidation that led to postponements in several areas.
- Factors like fuel scarcity and cash (naira) shortages further suppressed voter turnout.

4. Gender imbalance

- Participation by women was alarmingly low: no female presidential running mates, only a few female gubernatorial candidates, and women made up under 10% of all officeholders, despite policy targets of 35%

5. Media freedom under threat

- The EU recommended stronger protections for journalists, citing undue fines and regulatory actions that stifled media reporting during the election

Nigerian Government and INEC Response

The Federal government and INEC rejected the EU's final report, calling it “biased” and “unfounded” officials claimed the mission lacked comprehensive national coverage, noting that other observer groups (AU, ECOWAS, and Commonwealth) had favorable reviews. Also INEC acknowledged technical failures but denied that these compromised the credibility of the results.

Critical Analysis

Strengths of EU-EOM	Limitations
Comprehensive coverage and detailed reporting	Observers were present in limited polling units (around 100 out of 176,000)
Consistent with civil society and domestic reports	Report timing led some to call it “detached ‘from post- election realities
Constructive reform roadmap provided	Perceived western bias, leading to political rejection.

Source: Authors compilation

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

The observation missions like the European Union Observation Mission can be explained through the lenses of institutionalism. A study was conducted to evaluate the role of EU mission on 2023 general election observation. The 2023 general election did not ensure a well-run transparent, and inclusive democratic process as assured by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Public confidence and trust in INEC were severely damaged during the presidential poll and was not restored in state level elections, leading civil society to call for an independent audit of the entire process. The pre-poll environment was volatile and challenging, affected by economic crises.

The electoral legal framework lays an adequate foundation for the conduct of democratic elections, with key regional and international standard being rectified. However, gaps and ambiguities in national law enable circumvention, do not safeguard transparency, while also all undue restrictions to the rights to stands and to votes.

The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) was widely seen as an important step to ensure the integrity and credibility of the elections. In practice, many missteps and lack of transparency before the polls, compounded by severely delayed displayed of presidential results forms, dashed the public trust in election technologies used. INEC failed to give a timely and comprehensive explanation for the failures on the 25th February, hence the improved online display of results forms from the 18th state elections just fueled further speculations about what exactly caused the delays after the presidential polls.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), in its concluding report on the Nigerian general elections of 2023 recorded 101 violent incidents during campaign, including

at least 74 fatalities, Assassination attempts and killings increased closer to polls, creating a particularly insecure environment in the southern states. In several Northern states, systematic attacks by political thugs on rallies and political opponents was observed. Use of violence to obstruct campaign, disturbed the elections and suppressed voter participation.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on reports from EU observation missions, here are some recommendations:

However, as pointed out in this study, election is a process which starts with pre-election activities, dovetails into the Election Day activity and terminates with postelection activities like litigation. Unfortunately, the EU observation restrict their observation to Election Day activities mostly and on the basis of that they make pronouncements that border on the credibility of elections. The processes that lead up to the election such as voter registration/continuous registration, conduct of party primaries and candidates selection are hardly observed. These aspects that are neglected also constitute inputs into the electoral process. Even on the Election Day, there are certain inputs that are not observed. Collations of results are often tricky. Observers do not always witness what happens at all the stages of the collation process from ward level, through local government to State and national level. In some instances, as have been reported in this study, observers are denied access.

Firstly, the EU observers should expand the scope of their observation to cover pre-election and post-election activities. Focusing only on Election Day activities is limiting and the pronouncements made there from may not stand the test of time when subjected to integrity tests.

Secondly, the need for the review of the existing electoral laws to close loopholes and resolve inconsistencies that compromise the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.

Thirdly, the need to develop and implement a clear, open procedure for selecting members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to strengthen institutional independence and bolster public confidence.

Fourthly, Implement rigorous mechanisms to investigate and sanction electoral violations promptly, deterring malpractice and upholding the rule of law, and

Enhance security measures during elections to ensure the safety of voters, candidates, and electoral officials. This includes deploying well-trained and impartial security personnel, establishing effective communication channels, and addressing cases of violence and intimidation promptly.

5.3 Conclusion

The EU Election Observation Mission to Nigeria's 2023 general elections provided an evidence based, impartial review of the democratic process. It confirmed that while technological reforms (like BVAS) showed promise, they were undermined by systemic failures, weak rule of law, insecurity, and erosion of public trust. Despite the federal government's criticisms, the EU's findings aligned with those of local observers, suggesting the need for substantive reforms if Nigeria is to strengthen its democracy by 2027. The role of EU EOMs particularly in 2023 general election provide significant development in the Nigeria political landscape. Despite that, fostering democratic government in Nigeria have encountered obstacles and advancements. Other EU efforts, such as formal forums, agreements, and dialogue, election observation missions, projects and programs, and assistance for electoral reforms, are intended to enhance the democratic process and promote compliance with human rights and the rule of law, ensuring good and democratic governance. Despite Nigeria's socio-political obstacles and the EU's strategic objectives, the sustained promotion of democracy by "Team Europe" is demonstrated through international summits and direct political engagement. The EU EOM's recommendations after every General Elections in Nigeria emphasize the

necessity of decisive political determination on the part of the Nigerian government and its agencies, such as INEC, politicians, and security forces, and measures to enhance democracy, offering a way to improve transparency, equal participation, and accountability in Nigeria's electoral system and the democratic space at large.

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