

Inconclusive elections in Nigeria and its security implications: Righting the wrongs in 2023

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Keywords Democracy, election, inconclusive election, electoral violence, politics

Abstract The string of disputed elections in Nigeria has posed a significant threat to the country's efforts to consolidate democracy. In representative democracies, inconclusive elections are a quite frequent occurrence. But in Nigeria, they are sometimes stage-managed and permitted to occur in order to further the deliberate goals of power centers. Consequently, the causes and solutions of Nigeria's recent political growth are critically examined in this paper. This paper uses a mixed method research design that includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection and descriptive analysis. It has been determined through a thorough review of the literature that electoral violence and malpractice together are to blame for the nation's rising voter turnout and disputed electoral legitimacy. According to the findings, Nigeria must immediately implement comprehensive electoral reform in order to establish a new electoral system built on digital election technology. This will produce leaders who lack originality and who are worthy of purposeful leadership and good governance, as self-serving leaders are disastrous for any country.

Introduction

Global realities and a very regular democratic practice are inconclusive elections. According to Abah & Nwokwu (2016), they are widespread occurrences in both developed and developing nations. Elections typically last for months in both developed and developing democracies, such as Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Kenya, and Malawi, to make sure the results align with their own constitutions. According to Bosco and Verney (2016), the ten-month-long “repeated” 2015–16 Spanish elections caused “the breakdown of established patterns of political representation” in the nation. Inconclusive elections became the new standard in Spain due to a similar tendency that began with the 2019 electoral impasse (Henley, 2019; Rainsford, 2016). Furthermore, when the President's proposed “neutral” government encountered strong resistance, Italy's 2018 inconclusive election resulted in a caretaker administration (Jones and Balmer, 2018;

Chiappa, 2018). “Elections in September (2019) failed to resolve the deadlock left by equally inconclusive polls in April” of same year, according to an article in the Israeli press. Following progressively challenging discussions, new records were set in 2017 and 2018 by the Netherlands with 208 days and Sweden with more than four months (Henley, 2019). Belgium had 541 days to negotiate a coalition government before the 2010 elections. When the governing coalition fell apart in 2018, Belgians showed what happens to politics when there are no politicians, going 589 days without a government and running the show in a caretaker capacity (Birnbbaum, 2019). They put an end to the longest period of time that was thought to have passed in a developed nation without an elected administration. In Europe and beyond, a lot of elections now result in polls that are difficult to conclude (Henley, 2019). Because of this, victory is now meaningless “unless the party can form a government” (Rainsford, 2016). Nigeria’s political process has been plagued by inconclusive elections like a hydra-monster. This is because of a variety of variables that contribute to the word “inconclusive election’s etymology. The phrase “inconclusive election” was not a well-liked catchphrase in Nigeria before the 2015 general election. During the tenure of Professor Yakubu, the current Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission National (INEC), the term “inconclusive election” gained popularity. It is important to comprehend what an election is at this stage. A formal decision-making process called an election is used by the public to select a candidate for public office. According to Saminu (2016), it has also been called a celebration of democracy, in which voters choose representatives who would assume power in a predetermined amount of time.

Pre-election, election, and post-election activities are mandated by the electoral cycle, which may be explained by the fact that election administration bodies throughout the world use both human and material resources to improve free, fair, and credible processes since they are processes rather than events.

However, with so many close polls in Nigeria’s history, the process has taken on a new and hazardous dimension in recent times. It is crucial to emphasize that Nigeria’s electoral system faces a significant challenge with the persistent problem of inconclusive elections becoming more commonplace in the country’s election administration. As a result, this topic is especially conducive to investigation within the framework of the program.

Nigeria’s electoral history and procedure show that inconclusive elections are a recent but frequent occurrence. The fact that there has been so much discussion over inconclusive elections in the public sphere highlights how crucial elections are to democracy. The voter is adamant about having the ability and right to choose the people who will lead the affairs of the country, therefore they want their votes to matter in addition to simply casting them. In this sense, Joseph (1987) contended that while elections do not always ensure beneficial democratic governance, it is also true that elections are central to the contemporary understanding of democracy, which emerged from the contemporary society’s incapacity to accept the traditional democratic ideal of incorporating all citizens in the decision-making process. Conversely, Abdulyakeen (2022) conjectured that despite election abuse, misuse, and electoral system manipulation, elections continue to be crucial for deciding key issues in the majority of political systems. Elections, for

instance, show that genuine political power originates from free and fair elections, and that legitimate elections free from anomalies and malpractices are necessary for democracy to survive. Additionally, the entire adult population's right to vote, regular elections in the context of constitutionally open competition for legislative seats, peaceful campaigning, uninfluenced secret voting, accurate tallying and reporting of election results are all necessary for free and fair elections. In spite of the fact that inconclusive election is well provided for in the Electoral Act 2010 as well as Independent Nigeria Electoral Commission (INEC) Guidelines and Regulations many of the political gladiators see inconclusive election as a clever and deceptive way of manipulating the electoral process to favour a particular political party that is why the former speaker of the House of Representatives. Dogara (2019) cautioned the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) against declaring elections to be inconclusive in order to avoid creating a risky precedent. At least six states in 2019 had their elections ruled invalid by INEC, including Bauchi, the home state of the former speaker. Speaking at the People's Democratic Party (PAP) national executive council meeting in Abuja, Dogara mentioned election-related issues in Ghana and other African nations, claiming that only Nigerian elections are deemed to be inconclusive. That INEC, under the direction of a world-class history professor, will establish this risky and legitimate precedent in our political history is truly regrettable. It is pure, what has transpired.

Nigeria's political landscape has always included elections since the country's restoration to democracy in 1999. This is the case because democracy, as defined by Appadorai (1975), is a form of governance in which the people themselves pick representatives to represent them and use their authority either directly or through representatives. Stated differently, democracy guarantees that citizens are involved in their governance by electing representatives. In general, elections are seen as a formal process of decision-making that gives eligible voters plenty of options to select candidates running for elected office based on a range of political platforms. It provides a channel through which eligible voters can choose the right candidates to be given the reins of power in order to ensure effective governance. Elections gained popularity because direct democracy, which was used in the Greek City States at the time, is almost impossible to implement due to population growth. Election Management Bodies had to be established in order to ensure free, fair, and legitimate electoral processes. The electoral commission's organization and nomenclature have undergone modifications in Nigeria. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the current electoral umpire tasked with the difficult responsibility of ensuring free, transparent, fair, and credible elections in the nation. It was formerly known as the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), National Electoral Commission (NEC), and National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). It is significant because INEC is the only electoral body that was genuinely founded to be free from the shackles of any branch of the government. This explains why the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is stressed in its name. Its independence will provide it the freedom to hold universally recognized general elections in which the real winners of the contests might be declared.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced widespread international condemnation for carrying out its constitutional duties, particularly with regard to its involvement

in the conduct of the general elections in 2003 and 2007, which were found to be rife with irregularities, violence, and massive manipulation. The former president, Late Alhaji Umaru Yar' Adua, was forced to acknowledge that the election that put him in office was heavily rigged due to the scope of the anomalies that marked the electoral proceedings. Fortunately, both domestic and international observers viewed the general elections held in 2011 and 2015 under Prof. Atahiru Jega's chairmanship as largely free, fair, and credible. This gave Nigerians greater hope and confidence in the electoral umpire's ability to uphold the will of the people and ensure that their choices were respected and that their needs were met. This is not to argue that there weren't any isolated incidents of violence or other anomalies typical of Nigerian elections.

Every ordinary Nigerian has been wondering what would happen to the general elections that are scheduled to take place nationwide by 2019 and beyond if the electoral body is unable to declare winners in the recently concluded staggered elections of the Kogi and Bayelsa States on their first election days. This paper aims to investigate the problem of inconclusive elections in Nigerian democracy, providing insights into its causes and suggesting ways to rectify this aberration in our political system.

Statement of the problem

The first instance of INEC-declared IGEs occurred during the 2011 Imo state gubernatorial election, following twelve years of democratic experience beginning in 1999. Although the incumbent governor of Imo attempted to employ the IGEs method to influence the 2011 gubernatorial vote and its result, it was unsuccessful in doing so; however, it did pave the way for the governor's continued tenure in the state's 2015 gubernatorial election. The same thing happened to the states of Anambra in 2013 and Kogi and Bayelsa in 2015. The aforementioned tactic facilitated the ascent to power of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Osun state's 2018 off-cycle gubernatorial election as well as in Kano and Plateau states' 2019 elections. One observation regarding the IGEs is that, in comparison, the final supplementary polls show reduced voter participation as shown by voter turnout. Once more, the final election's total victory margin is typically negligible in relation to the preliminary polls. Because of this, winning via the IGEs plan could be compared to winning using unconventional methods, particularly in cases where a losing candidate ultimately turns around and wins, as has happened in the states of Osun, Kano, and the Plateau. Therefore, it appears concerning that the geometric growth of the IGEs from one event in one state in 2011 to 12 incidents in 11 states by 2019 has occurred. Given that IGEs are becoming a technical weapon against the opposition, many Nigerian voters find this trajectory intolerable (Thisday, 2019).

Momoh and Adejumobi (1999) eloquently emphasized this point, saying that elections play a pivotal role in the democratic process by fueling representative government. They also act as a tool for the state's legitimization and control over the reins of power, while also guaranteeing political accountability to the people. Thus, the issue that needs to be asked is: How can inconclusive elections support or contradict the previously proposed elements of free and fair elections?

It should be noted that the number of inconclusive elections in the nation's recent elections has increased. An inconclusive election not only exacerbates stress, breeds worry, and generates the possibility that people may begin to doubt the integrity, sanctity, and legitimacy of the electoral body, but it also fosters resentment, latent animosities, concealed animosity, and mutual suspicion. This study's primary goal is to assess the reasons behind Nigeria's inconclusive elections, their impact on security, and how to make amends in 2023. However, the researcher seeks to achieve the following objective:

- i) To identify the reasons for Nigeria's inconclusive elections.
- ii) To assess the impact of a hung election on democracy and its implications for security.
- iii) To determine INEC's contribution to the abolition of disputed elections in Nigeria.
- iv) To ascertain the obstacles INEC must overcome in order to hold legitimate elections in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarification

A study of this size cannot be finished without clearly outlining the key concepts that serve as its pillars. We are interested in the following concepts: election and election with no clear winner.

Election

The election process gives eligible voters a voice in national administration. Voting in recurring elections allows for this to happen. According to Dye (2001), elections are a key tool used in democratic societies to find new political leaders. It is essential for citizens to participate in any democracy effectively. Heywood (2000) saw elections as a means of selecting members of electorates, a specified entity, to occupy positions. He maintained that elections give eligible voters plenty of chance to select candidates who meet the qualifications and make the kind of decisions necessary to hold public office in the people's name. Elections give eligible residents a way to vote and help choose the candidates running for different elective offices.

Inconclusive election

The conclusion of elections in Nigeria without a clear winner being returned is a developing tendency in the country's electoral process. It suggests a scenario in which elections are conducted, but the results are canceled so that the election winners cannot be determined. Put another way, a significant number of ballots were canceled during the polls because of reported violence and other random irregularities, thus the returning officers were unable to announce the final results that would have determined the genuine winners. Supplementary elections are called as a result of this scandal, and the results determine the candidates' final status.

Section 33 states that supplementary elections, a declaration of suspension of the voting process, or the announcement of an additional day for the exercise are frequently referred to as inconclusive elections, according to Babalola A. M. et al. (2019).

According to Onah and Chukwu (2019), the election was not definitive is a situation in which irregularities resulting from cancellations in some electoral units prevent the electoral umpire from declaring the outcome of the election, thus sufficiently undermining the electoral laws, rules, and regulations supporting the election. Some of the following circumstances lead to inconclusive elections and damage the credibility of the polls: Election results from several polling places or electoral units were canceled owing to anomalies; major security breaches occurred in a number of the electoral districts; and other incidents included the absence of elections in certain electoral units. According to Nigeria's election enabling legislation, an election should be declared inconclusive if the number of voters who lost their right to vote due to unfavorable incidents appears to be higher than the number or the difference between the winner and runner-up. This is because those voters have the potential to change the outcome of the entire election if given the opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

Nweke and Emordi (2020) further argued that the notion of a "inconclusive election" is a namby-pamby occurrence that has become so common in Nigeria that it has become a new lexicography of election platitudes and clichés. The problem with the term "inconclusive election," which is so popular, is that there are no scholarly or academic definitions for it because it hasn't been put through such rigorous scrutiny. This paper aims to define the seemingly unclear compound-concept of inconclusive election through the application of a juridical technique.

In a related development, Abah and Nwokwu (2016) assert that the conclusion of elections in Nigeria without a clear winner is a growing occurrence in the country's electoral process. It suggests a scenario in which elections are conducted, but the results are canceled, making it impossible for winners to be declared. Stated differently, an election is deemed inconclusive if there is a candidate who fails to meet the required number of votes to be declared the winner following the polls. In other words, "he or she must fulfill all legal prerequisites, obtain the majority of legitimate votes cast in the election that provides all eligible voters with the chance to exercise their right to vote." In the event that no candidate meets this prerequisite, the election is deemed to be unresolved.

Inconclusive elections in Nigeria: Views on the root causes

The fundamental causes of Nigeria's inconclusive elections have generated differing opinions. On the one hand, election results that are inconclusive are typically attributed to INEC, the Nigerian electoral oversight organization, canceling results mostly because of electoral violence. It is undeniable that violence surrounding elections has turned into a serious problem for Nigerian politics. It has been impeding our nation's efforts to establish a sustainable democracy.

Because there is always a chance that there may be widespread violence following the election procedures, electoral violence has a history that is as old as Nigeria. To support this claim, Abbass (2008) used the following phrases to describe the political climate in Nigeria during election seasons:

Political unrest has always been a hallmark of every Nigerian election held since the 1950s. Thus, there are concerns about the electioneering processes that may be linked to violence and individual

rights violations. Therefore, since Nigeria's independence, elections have proven to be a major political liability, producing considerable political turbulence and endangering the existence of corporate Nigeria, rather than being a process and a method of exercising legal political rights. In Nigeria, elections have always been seen as a "do or die" situation.

According to Ogefere (2015), since Nigeria reverted to democratic rule in 1999, there have allegedly been more than 15,700 deaths from political, intercommunal, and sectarian violence. There has been a contention that politicians who are desperate and determined to use whatever means necessary to win elections have frequently coordinated the wave of violence during elections. They use their goons, fully equipped with deadly weapons of mass destruction, to threaten, harass, and coerce voters in an attempt to achieve their vile goals. They also aim to sabotage the democratic processes. Extreme circumstances occur before, during, and after the elections that result in the maiming of lives and assets valued at billions of Naira. It is quite regrettable that our security personnel have been repeatedly linked to plotting to disenfranchise voters in plain daylight by teaming up with political gladiators and obnoxious goons.

Even though the poll was hailed as one of the freest and fairest in the nation, Ogefere (2015), citing Human Rights Watch, disclosed that election-related casualties and communal violence in the Northern part of Nigeria following the April 2011 Presidential elections resulted in over 800 deaths. The argument we are attempting to make is that electoral violence has consistently existed throughout the nation's democratic regimes prior to, during, and following elections. At some Republics, this threat has cost the nation its hard-won democracy. For example, politicians' failure to play by the rules of the political game led to the first military intervention that precipitously terminated the First Republic in 1966 with Major Kaduna Nzeogwu's coup (Ndoh, 1997). There are countless examples, and the Second Republic was not exempt.

But it was thought that the Kogi State gubernatorial election might have produced a different outcome if not for the preventable political violence that occurred on November 21, 2015, which led to the cancellation of votes in 91 of the 2,400 polling places. Prof. Emmanuel Kucha, the chief returning officer of the poll, based his declaration of an inconclusive election on electoral norms, claiming that the total number of ballots rejected outweighed the vote difference between the two front-runners (Ibrahim, 2015). Kucha specifically stated that incumbent governor Idris Wada of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) received 199,514 votes, while Prince Abubakar Audu of the All Progressive Congress (APC) received 240,867. There were 41,353 votes separating the two front-runners, and 49,000 votes were canceled overall. So, to ascertain the real victor, a rerun election was planned.

Nor was the situation in Bayelsa State any different. The election results in one local government area, Southern Ijaw, had to be canceled because the state, which had only eight local government areas, was plagued by extraordinary violence and several anomalies. It is now quite evident that INEC declares elections invalid due to results at the polls being canceled because of violence. At a one-day roundtable for stakeholders and civil society on INEC and inconclusive elections, the chairman of INEC, Mr. Oluwale Osaze Uzzy, the Director of Voter Education in the Commission, stated that the country's inconclusive elections are caused by the desperation

of most politicians to win. He continued by saying that the political class views elections as a “do or die” situation, which is why violence, intimidation, and bribery of poll workers and voters are used to sabotage them. Ugwuanyi (2016).

Remarkably, section 128 of the Electoral Act declares that “Anyone who acts or incites others in a disorderly manner at an election commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a maximum of N500,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.” It is instructive to note that, since the restoration of democracy in 1999, there has not been a high-profile prosecution or conviction for election violence or malpractices, despite the existence of this Act and other pertinent laws. This suggests that the laws pertaining to electoral offenses are not being strictly enforced.

Moreover, the issue is frequently made worse by the fact that the criminals and miscreants typically outnumber the security personnel tasked with maintaining order before, during, and following the polls. Furthermore, the security personnel are ill-prepared to deal with security threats when they materialize during the polls due to their inadequate equipment. As they employ force or coercion, intimidation, harassment, and other tactics to accomplish the excessive objective of their employers, security personnel have been charged on multiple instances with engaging in partisan politics during elections. Furthermore, there have been instances of dishonest INEC employees working together with candidates to rig the results of elections in order to benefit their desperate bosses. One instance of this was when three separate result sheets from a recent election were used to justify the detention of an INEC officer by the police. Regretfully, the official has not been charged as of yet. There are countless more instances of INEC officials engaging in corruption while performing their duties. In keeping with the previous statement, INEC’s technological voting materials have flaws. Desperate politicians have a tendency to take advantage of technology devices that malfunction or are handled improperly by inexperienced INEC workers in order to further their irrational desires. If security personnel are unable to keep things under control in this scenario, there may be violence and other irregularities that taint the way the polls are conducted. However, some worried parties believe that the primary motivation for the INEC led by Prof. Yakubu to invalidate the votes and declare inconclusive results was to carry out a covert plan from higher places that vehemently opposed the announcement of a winner.

To support this claim, it was reported that, only a few days before the Kogi governorship election, Yakubu Mahmood, the head of INEC, met in secret with Buhari. This raises the possibility that he was following a script that the president had given him. Whatever the case, inconclusive elections have been steadily increasing in frequency within the Nigerian political system, and coordinated measures are needed to stop this unsightly phenomenon regardless of its underlying reasons.

Inconclusive elections and constitutional position in Nigeria

As was made very obvious earlier in our discussion, INEC has regularly used the cancellation of election results at some polling places to determine the outcome of indecisive elections when the overall number of cancelled votes is more than the vote difference between the front-runners. INEC has frequently supported her claims and positions with pertinent sections of its

rules. At this juncture in our political evolution, an examination of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution as modified can prove beneficial. As is well known, a nation's constitution serves as its foundational legal code. It establishes government institutions, lays out what should and shouldn't be done, and specifies penalties for breaking any of its rules. In this regard, the constitution makes ample provisions clear regarding the procedures and prerequisites for declaring a candidate for the office of governor or president following the election.

To that degree, the Grundnorm's provisions cannot be changed or added to by any other law. This may have advised the National Assembly to follow the Constitution, which specifies, among other things, that:

In an election to the office of the President or Governor or, whether or not contested and in any contested election to any elective office, the results shall be ascertained by counting the votes cast for each candidate and subject to provisions of Sections 133, 134 and 179 of the Constitution, the candidate that receives the highest number of votes shall be declared elected by the appropriate returning officer.

This is stated in section 69 of the Electoral Act in reference to the Constitution. It appears that neither the Constitution nor the Electoral Act contain any provisions stating that the returning officer should declare the elections inconclusive if a predetermined number of votes are canceled at the polling places or if the election was prevented from happening because it was made possible through intentional violence. Nonetheless, the INEC chairman explained the wave of inconclusive elections by saying that they happen when, following polling, no candidate satisfies the requirements before a winner is declared. He insisted that in order for a candidate to be declared victorious, he or she had to meet all legal requirements, including receiving the majority of valid votes cast in an election where all eligible voters were given the chance to cast a ballot and, in the case of executive positions, meeting the prescribed spread within the constituency. He contended that any other action would violate the Electoral Act, the Constitution, and the core values of democracy. It can entail declaring winners of the elections even when they did not receive the majority of valid votes (Daily Nigeria News, 2016).

As convincing as the aforementioned argument would seem, concerned Nigerians felt that the INEC rules served as the foundation for the term "inconclusive election" to be introduced into Nigerian politics. Every political observer who pays close attention to politics is constantly wondering how INEC came to decide to base its actions on its own derivative guidelines, which are far less adequate than the Constitution, which has sufficiently covered the topic, and the Electoral Act, which deferred to the same provisions of the Constitution. Even while opinions on INEC's decision to declare the elections in both the Kogi and Bayelsa States inconclusive vary, the reality remains that our Constitution and the Electoral Acts should always act as a compass when navigating murky places in our electoral system. Even if the INEC had stuck to this strategy in the general elections of 2003 and 2007, there's a good chance that the results would not have been announced because of the extreme violence and other anomalies that plagued the polls. In order to stop the rapidly spreading culture of inconclusive elections, we should be quick to clarify that we are not endorsing violence or irregularities during elections. Rather, we

are attempting to emphasize that our electoral laws and the Grundnorm should take precedence over any other laws on matters pertaining to our electoral processes. Any case involving matters relating to elections can be heard by our legal system. For the time being, it appears to be the last chance for the average person to have elections held in violation of the nation's electoral laws void or annulled. Even better, electoral courts ought to be established with the responsibility of trying and convicting anyone involved in an election in Nigeria.

Empirical review on inconclusive elections

The concerning problem of inconclusive elections in Nigeria has been brought to light by empirical study, which has linked the cause to the 2019 INEC Regulations and Guidelines. Specifically, the research has pointed out that the margin of lead principle (MOLP) in the 2019 elections would be taken into consideration. (Sule and Sambo, 2019). According to Babatola et al. (2019), political actors are the driving force behind the conditions that lead to an inconclusive election in Nigeria, which they claim is a rape on democracy. Inconclusive elections are caused by Nigerian voters who occasionally volunteer to act as thugs for politicians in order to continue violent and fraudulent conduct during elections.

While Abah and Nwokwu (2016) blamed Nigerian politicians for not playing the political game by the rules, Ojoye (2019) and Ayorinde and Olajide (2011) concluded that inconclusive elections have constituted an emerging threat to Nigerian democracy. Zakari (n.d.) on the other hand saw inconclusive elections as part of a robust and steady democratic process with steady progress in Nigeria. Furthermore, Agbu (2016) said that the partial use of technology allowed for election tampering, which is the reason elections are deemed undecided. These actors' desperation and will to succeed at all costs frequently lead to ambiguous poll results. Beyond underdeveloped nations, the research team of Bosco and Verney (2016), Henley (2019), and Jones and Balmer (2018) observed that inconclusive elections pose a global challenge to the democratic evolution of affluent nations such as Spain and Italy.

These facts point to the inevitable outcome of close elections in representative democracies. Even though power centers may use the frequency of inconclusive elections to further their own agendas, they may not always be orchestrated and enforced to benefit a certain group of people's interests. Therefore, it is not out of the ordinary for an election to begin today and conclude later, particularly when this arrangement is intended to guarantee adherence to constitutional electoral provisions. On the other hand, it is uncommon for electoral delays to be caused by acts of violence and malpractice. In contrast, while some developed countries record inconclusive elections to address minor constitutional issues pertaining to a majority win, most developing countries, including Nigeria, declare inconclusive elections due to electoral irregularities, tense security situations, partisan misconduct, and occasionally, collusion between political actors and the electoral management body over the calculation of the winning margin.

Rerun elections between the top two candidates typically take place in the former case as well, with an exceptionally smooth electoral procedure. But in the latter case, the replays are typically severely compromised by a political environment and electoral climate rife with tight

security concerns, intimidation, threats, and massive electoral anomalies. All eligible candidates from the original elections are allowed to run in the rerun elections that followed the inconclusive results in Nigeria; however, the calculation of the lead margin is incorrectly based on the difference between the two front-runners in the initial polls.

Methodology

This work uses a mixed method research approach, meaning that both quantitative and qualitative data must be gathered. Respondents from six geopolitical zones in Nigeria-Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Imo, Rivers, and Osun states-make up the study's population. The content analysis strategy-based approach tends to follow scientific rigors and research methods that include methodical data gathering, organization, description, and interpretation in different formats. The methodical, impartial, and cogent investigation of textual contents in order to identify communication patterns is part of the content analysis approach. By using trustworthy and replicable studies as primary data sources, the research breaks free from the physical and technological constraints related to gathering unprocessed field data. This methodology aligns with the use of sophisticated meta-analysis, synthesis of data, and assessment that seasoned researchers cultivate over time.

Instrument of data collection

The instruments for gathering data for this study include the following;

(i) Documentary Instruments

In order to conduct this research, a variety of scholarly articles as well as official administrative records and papers from government ministries and agencies in the states of Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Imo, Rivers, and Osun will be gathered. These records were gathered, arranged, and examined critically. This was done to allow the researcher to compare the information from the studied literature with the respondents' responses.

(ii) Questionnaire Instrument

The researcher individually created and sent a highly structured questionnaire. The distribution of the questionnaire was made throughout all of the chosen local government areas, which make up the target population, to guarantee that accurate information was obtained and that the questionnaire covers the whole population of the study.

(iii) Personal Interview

During this investigation, the researcher also conducted in-person interviews to get first-hand information. It is a tool for gathering data that gives the researcher face-to-face interaction and in-depth knowledge of the research issue. This tool was chosen because it allows for more in-depth investigation of research topics.

Validity and reliability of instruments

By confirming that the instruments' contents are in line with the study's goals and research topic, the researcher validated the instruments. Additionally, attempts were taken to guarantee that every element deemed pertinent to the investigation is sufficiently covered.

Furthermore, the pretest method—which involves piloting the instruments on a small group of respondents who are not the target population but are located in the same study location—was used to guarantee the reliability of this study (Oguonu and Anugwom, 2006). This was carried out over a range of times to see if their earlier and later reactions would be consistent. The questionnaire was structured in a clear, succinct, and easy-to-understand manner to facilitate respondent comprehension and guarantee consistency in their responses, while also ensuring the instruments' high reliability. Finally, the external criterion method was used to ensure that the research has high validity. This was accomplished by determining the accuracy of the results obtained from a specific instrument by comparing them to both the research obtained from questionnaires and existing knowledge. The aforementioned techniques were meticulously implemented to guarantee the study's high degree of validity and reliability.

Results and discussion

In this section, empirical results are presented and discussed utilizing a combination of the many units of analysis inherent in electoral violence and voter participation in Nigeria, as well as electoral malpractice and election legitimacy. The argument that the IEs are detrimental to democratic consolidation and are declared by the INEC based on a fictitious margin of lead factor is thus supported empirically by the following subheadings, which leave out other crucial variables like voter turnout and the proportion of voters with permanent voter's cards (PVCs).

Electoral malpractice and credible elections in Nigeria

Election-related malpractice has always been a part of Nigerian election history (Agbu, 2016). Undoubtedly, electoral misconduct weakens electoral integrity and lowers the democratic worth of legitimate elections.

Both the winning and losing political parties typically accept the results of elections that comply with the law. However, when the opposite is true, the results are contested, and what usually happens next is rejection, legal action against the decision, and in the worst situations, bloodshed. There are several instances of ballot box snatching, election material diversion, election result falsification and mutilation, and financial bribery of election officials in each of the 11 states in Nigeria where the IGEs were held (see Table 1). While violent elections do not always result in inconclusive results in Nigeria, the 12 instances of IGEs are largely and in various ways marred by incidents of electoral malpractice, irregularities, and violence. Although the principle is often triggered by the circumstances listed in the table, the INEC typically considers the MOLP when declaring elections to be inconclusive. Thus, the MOLP or the margin of victory failing to meet the constitutional requirements is a consequence of the factors presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Electoral irregularities and violence: The recurring features of the IGEs and SGEs in Nigeria, 2011–2019

El. Year	Reasons for incon. Elect	SGEs characterized by	El. year	Reasons for incon. elect.	SGEs characterized by
2011 and 2015 election cycles (5 observations in 4 states)			2016 and 2019 election cycles (7 observations in 7 states)		
Imo (2011)	Irregularities, partisan misconduct, manufacturing of election results, late arrival of election materials, no election in some wards	Violence, intimidation, abuse of power of incumbency, youth resistance to electoral malpractice	Osun (2018)	Irregularities, non-use of electronic devices, use of manual accreditation, missing result sheets, abscondment of election	Violence, malpractice, vote bribery, thugs' intimidation despite huge deployment of security operatives
Anambra (2013)	Snatching of ballot box, huge deployment of security personnel, no candidate polled 25% in two-third of 21 LGAs	Voter apathy, huge deployment of security personnel and buying of votes	Adamawa (2019)	Electoral irregularities such as fraudulent falsification of election results and vote buying	Voter apathy
Imo (2015)	Irregularities like electoral malpractice and falsification of election results	Intimidation, vote buying, multiple thumb printing	Bauchi (2019)	Fraudulent falsification of election results, the use of court injunctions on election collation and announcement of results	Relative calmness
Kogi (2015)	Violence, huge deployment of security personnel, snatching of elections materials, over voting	Relatively calm with voter apathy and low voter turnout	Benue (2019)	Voters' inability to vote in some areas	Intimidation, harassment and vote buying
Bayelsa (2013)	Massive electoral malpractice, severe military activities, intimidation and harassment of voters, poll officials and party agents	Militarized electoral process, no election in Kolana ward 17, late arrival of poll materials, harassment and intimidation	Plateau (2019)	Election irregularities, intimidation and harassment of voters, poll officials, and party agents	Intimidating utterances, threatening statements and compelling comments

El. Year	Reasons for incon. Elect	SGEs characterized by	El. year	Reasons for incon. elect.	SGEs characterized by
2011 and 2015 election cycles (5 observations in 4 states)			2016 and 2019 election cycles (7 observations in 7 states)		
			Kano (2019)	Violence, failure to use the smart readers, overvoting and other irregularities	Voter apathy due to massive electoral malpractice and violence
			Sokoto (2019)	Irregularities, violence, failure to use the smart card readers, over voting, and intimidation	Voter apathy arising from massive electoral malpractice and violence

Note: incon. elect. means inconclusive election, SGEs means supplementary gubernatorial elections.

Source: Compiled by authors from INEC and online media data.

The Independent General Elections (IGEs) in Nigeria are a postponed electoral procedure that is typically designed to facilitate electoral manipulation for political gain. The 2011 Imo gubernatorial election had a number of significant anomalies. The Oguta local government area (LGA) election, together with the Mbaitoli and Ohaji/Egbema LGA elections, was declared inconclusive. Due to stage-managed late arrival of election materials, there was no election in Ngor/Okpalla (Ayorinde and Olajide, 2011). Politicians later appropriated the materials, which had been released on schedule. When it became apparent that the poll officials had noticed the hijack, they were later set free. The 2011 Imo governor's race was marked by this degree of electoral fraud and the threat of violence, which gave the IGEs the reputation of being a risky political event in Nigeria. Beyond what was seen in the first election, intimidation, the use of force, and threatening statements were made in the impacted areas on May 6, 2011, the day of the final poll. After multiple failed attempts to rig the results, the opposition All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), which had roughly 18,000 votes in the first round of the exercise, ultimately prevailed in the repeat poll.

The 2019 Bauchi governorship election serves as another example of how contentious IGEs may be in Nigeria. The INEC ruled the Bauchi governorship election inconclusive because the number of invalidated votes (45,312, Table 2) exceeded the margin separating the two front-runners, Mohammed Abubakar of the APC and Bala Mohammed of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The INEC established a Committee to investigate the Bauchi poll in response to the issues surrounding the election. The Committee found that 2,533 votes were cancelled out of 25,330 forged ballots in four polling places in Ningi LGA. In connection with this, armed gangs brutally interrupted the Tafawa Balewa LGA election results collation process. Seven of the local government's eleven registration zones were impacted by this outage. The INEC Committee's conclusions, similar to those in Ningi, indicated that the "missing" results in the impacted areas were "available and in safe custody" (News Agency of Nigeria, 2019: para. 5). Additionally, Dominion

Anosike, the returning officer for Tafawa Balewa LGA, and his family members were threatened with death by armed groups. The officer was terrified as a result, and she left the area and was replaced by a new police officer.

Furthermore, Governor Abubakar used great effort to obstruct the state's election process by obtaining an injunction against the Tafawa Balewa LGA election results collation process through a Federal High Court. The Court of Appeal, a higher court, swiftly overturned the injunction. The INEC was eventually authorized by the Justice Ekwo-led Court of Appeal to move on with the collation and announcement of the previously postponed results in Bauchi (Akinwale et al., 2019). The exercise culminated in a supplementary election on March 23, 2019, in the impacted areas, where the opposition again defeated the incumbent governor. The PDP candidate received 6,376 votes, while the APC governor received 5,117, increasing the difference between the two candidates' totals by 5,318 votes (Asadu, 2019).

When politicians realize that an election is unlikely to go in their favor, it is evident what a power grab elections (the IGEs) have become in Nigeria. They plan acts of violence to support the annulment of election results in a few key districts. It is implied that the IGEs undermine the validity of these surveys. The graphic details of the IGE trend in Nigeria from 2011 to 2019 are depicted in Figure 1. The graph illustrates how, over the course of eight years, the IGE impacted seven states in the north and four in the south of Nigeria.

Table 2. Summary of initial results of IGEs in Nigeria between 2011 and 2019

El. Year	El. Type	Region	State	Initial result (votes)		Margin (%)	C. votes
				Leading party	2nd party		
2011	General	SE	Imo	NA*	NA**	18,000	NA***
2013	Off-cycle	SE	Anambra	APGA (174,710)	PDP (94,856)	79,854 (29.62)	113,113
2015	General	SE	Imo	APC (385,671)	PDP (306,142)	79,529 (11.50)	144,715
2015	Off-Cycle	NC	Kogi	APC (240,867)	PDP (199,514)	41,353 (9.39)	49,953
2015	Off-Cycle	SS	Bayelsa	PDP (105,748)	APC (72,594)	33,154 (18.59)	120,827
2018	Off-cycle	SW	Osun	PDP (254,698)	APC (254,345)	353 (0.07)	3,498
2019	General	NE	Adamawa	PDP (367,471)	APC (334,955)	32,476 (4.62)	40,988
2019	General	NE	Bauchi	PDP (469,512)	APC (465,453)	4,059 (0.43)	45,312
2019	General	NC	Benue	PDP (410,576)	APC (329,022)	81,554 (11.03)	121,019
2019	General	NW	Kano	PDP (1,014,474)	APC (987,819)	26,655 (1.33)	128,572

El. Year	El. Type	Region	State	Initial result (votes)		Margin (%)	C. votes
				Leading party	2nd party		
2019	General	NC	Plateau	PDP (583,255)	APC (538,326)	44,929 (4.01)	49,377
2019	General	NW	Sokoto	PDP (489,558)	APC (486,145)	3,413 (0.35)	75,403

Note: NA = Not Available; NA* = online report showed that APGA was leading in 12 LGAs; NA** = online report indicated that Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was leading in 11 LGAs; NA*** = elections were cancelled in 4 LGAs and 1 Ward and the margin of lead difference between the two leading candidates is less than the total registered voters in the affected areas; NC = North Central; NE = North East; NW = North West; SE = South East; SS = South South; SW = South West; C. = cancelled; El. = election; IGEs = IGEs. Source: Authors' compilation from INEC and online media data TABLE 2 Summary of initial results of IGEs in Nigeria between 2011 and 2019 (cont.).

Table 3. Summary of final results of IGEs in Nigeria between 2011 and 2019

El. year	El. Type	Region	State	Final result (votes)		Margin (%)
				Leading party	2nd party	
2011	General	SE	Imo	APGA (336,859)	PDP (290,496)	46,363 (7.39)
2013	Off-cycle	SE	Anambra	APGA (180,178)	PDP (97,700)	82,478 (29.68)
2015	General	SE	Imo	APC (416,996)	PDP (320,705)	96,291 (13.05)
2015	Off-Cycle	NC	Kogi	APC (247,752)	PDP (204,877)	42,875 (9.47)
2015	Off-Cycle	SS	Bayelsa	PDP (134,998)	APC (86,852)	48,146 (21.70)
2018	Off-cycle	SW	Osun	APC (255,505)	PDP (255,023)	482 (0.09)
2019	General	NE	Adamawa	PDP (336,386)	APC (376,552)	40,988 (5.63)
2019	General	NE	Bauchi	PDP (470,570)	APC 475,888	5,318 (0.56)
2019	General	NC	Benue	PDP (345,155)	APC (434,473)	89,318 (11.46)
2019	General	NW	Kano	PDP (1,033,695)	APC (1,024,713)	8,982 (0.44)
2019	General	NC	Plateau	APC (595,582)	PDP (546,813)	48,769 (4.27)
2019	General	NW	Sokoto	PDP (511,611)	APC (512,002)	391 (0.04)

Source: Authors' compilation from INEC and online media data.

Tables 2 and 3 give additional statistical analysis of the two leading parties' initial and final outcomes in the impacted states' gubernatorial elections throughout the time under discussion. The figures show that there is typically little variation in voter turnout in the extra polls, with the difference between the first and final results ranging from 0.02% in Osun in 2018 to 3.11% in Bayelsa in 2015. In light of these negligible percentage discrepancies, there was no reason for the first-round governorship elections not to conclude.

Table 4 presents the variations between the first and last results of Nigeria's gubernatorial elections for the two front-runners in 2011 and 2019. The statistics in the Table demonstrate that there isn't a statistically significant difference that would prevent the election from finishing in the first round. This lack of difference is due to the fact that the presence of unethical electoral methods, violence, and other issues that characterized both the preliminary and final elections.

Table 4. Difference between initial and final GERs in eleven Nigerian states, 2011–2019

El. year	El. Type	Region	State	IR (votes)	FR (votes)	Diff. (%)
2011	General	SE	Imo	NA	627,355	NA
2013	Off-cycle	SE	Anambra	269,566	277,878	8,312 (1.52)
2015	General	SE	Imo	691,813	737,701	45,888 (3.21)
2015	Off-Cycle	NC	Kogi	440,381	452,629	12,248 (1.37)
2015	Off-Cycle	SS	Bayelsa	178,342	221,850	43,508 (10.87)
2018	Off-cycle	SW	Osun	509,043	510,528	1,485 (0.15)
2019	General	NE	Adamawa	702,426	712,938	10,512 (0.74)
2019	General	NE	Bauchi	934,965	946,458	11,493 (0.61)
2019	General	NC	Benue	739,598	779,628	40,030 (2.63)
2019	General	NW	Kano	2,002,293	2,058,408	56,115 (1.38)
2019	General	NC	Plateau	1,121,581	1,142,395	20814 (0.92)
2019	General	NW	Sokoto	975,703	1,023,613	47910 (2.40)

Note: IR means initial result; FR means final result; Diff. means difference (between initial and final results); GERs means gubernatorial election results.

Source: Authors' compilation from INEC and online media data.

Once more, the subject of election-related violence including graphic slaughter was not very pressing during Nigeria's 1998–1999 election season. This is a result of Nigerians' sincere waiting for democratic governance, which became achievable in 1999, as they were truly tired of harsh military regimes. But the election seasons that followed in 2003 and 2007 turned tumultuous and bloody, with 100 and 300 lives lost, respectively. Despite the fact that the 2011 elections were hailed as being comparatively free and fair, this turned into something unusual. Because of the use of digital technology, there were comparatively fewer fatalities in the 2015 elections than in the 2011 ones (Nwangwu et al., 2018). Sadly, the results of the 2015 elections were not maintained in the 2019 elections, which resulted in the loss of 626 lives and the destruction of property valued at millions of Naira (SB Morgen Intelligence, 2019). It is stated that in the southern Kaduna state's Kajuru LGA, another 130 persons perished.

An analysis of security threats and mitigation measure for the 2023 general election in Nigeria:

Summary of an in-depth interview (qualitative data)

Participants from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones were assigned codes. Anambra (AN2), Imo (IM3), Plateau (PL5), Sokoto (SK6), Bayelsa (BS7), Kaduna (KAD 8) and Osun (OS9) are the states that make up Kano (KA1). Inquiries were made in an effort to provide more information in response to the study's research questions. Finding the reasons for Nigeria's inconclusive elections was the first question.

“The specter of elections not being held in many parts of the country due to insecurity or leading to many cancelled or inconclusive elections is real and if not properly dealt with may lead to constitutional crisis that could present a clear danger to Nigeria’s democracy,” KA1 said in response to this question. “Specifically given its history of flawed or questionable elections, I think this could be a serious threat to Nigeria’s democracy.”

As a result, the rise in violence and unrest poses a severe threat to Nigerian governance as a whole as well as the smooth running of the polls and electoral process. Speaking on the “Framework for election security in Nigeria,” ANO2 also pointed out that electoral politics and election administration have historically been seen as just another kind of warfare, particularly since the general election of 1951. Similar opinions were held by OS9 and BS7, who believed that Nigerian politics are best understood in light of three salient undercurrents depicted in the country’s history: the country’s underdevelopment and challenging topography, which place severe capacity and logistical limitations, as well as imperfections, on electoral administration and governance generally; and the political mobilization of ethnicity for electoral competition under a federal political system intended to reflect and sustain ethnic, not geographical, diversity.

According to RI4, the issue with ethnic diversity from a security perspective was not the diversity itself, but rather the way it was managed through the party system, where political parties used ethnicity to secure ethnic voting bases for elections, and the way that electoral politics could turn violently into ethnic hate speech and violent pre- and post-election conflicts. According to IM3, creating a framework that would lessen the negative effects of these three undercurrents that shape the nation’s election security landscape and change elections from being tools for democratic reversal into ones for democratic consolidation was the main task ahead of the general election in 2023. Core features such as the failure of public security providing, the rise in non-state security provisioning, political manipulation and abuse by security actors, and the increasing individualization and communalization of security required to be addressed by this framework, according to PL5. According to OS9, measures have also been made to weaken and jeopardize the integrity of INEC and the nation’s electoral governance system. He pointed out that the attempt played a significant role in the lengthy discussion over the terms and enactment of the 2022 Electoral Act between the federal executive branch and the legislature. The following query concerned assessing the impact of a close election on democracy and its implications for security.

In response to this query, PL5 observed: The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported 163 politically connected clashes resulting in 44 fatalities across 30 states in the first nine months of 2022. According to SK6, there was a pattern of violence throughout the geopolitical zones that included party official kidnappings and abductions, as well as attacks on secretariats and conflicts between opposing parties. The statements made by BS7 and KA1 were consistent in pointing out that there had been a spike in political violence and attacks on INEC infrastructure in all six geopolitical zones. According to RI4, the results of the 2023 election could be thwarted by growing insecurity, disinformation, money politics, religion, and ethical distraction. IM3: expressed worries regarding the security of election workers, voters, and materials. It also highlighted the difficulties politics would confront in the wake of ongoing

incidents of kidnapping, violence, banditry, insurgency, and intercommunal strife. The general election in 2023 will be a huge logistical undertaking, according to SK6, which raised concerns about reaching the 176,846 voting places. This would necessitate hiring and preparing about 1.5 million poll workers and security personnel. This is around four times the strength of the armed forces of Nigeria. The four main candidates – Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party, and Rabiu Musa Kwankwanso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) – would be shaped by religion, ethnicity, and money politics, according to AN2.

Regarding the subject of difficulties, RI4 stated that “After the APC decided to run a Muslim-Muslim ticket, religion is likely to feature prominently in debates.” Voter registration drives, which encourage young people to get involved in politics, may also have revolutionary effects and benefit Obi. “If the recent gubernatorial elections and presidential primaries teach us anything, money will still be a major factor in deciding the winner. Lastly, there will likely be an increased level of ferocity in online campaigning, with assaults on opponents, candidates, and INEC likely to be amplified on social media in the lead-up to, during, and even after voting. In a similar spirit, AN2 said that everyone would have continuous access to electoral infrastructure during the campaign and voting period, particularly those who have been internally displaced due to hostilities. Noting that Mahmud Yakubu, the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is the first INEC head in the nation’s history to be appointed to a second term, the new report highlighted the significance of the replacement of 19 Resident Electoral Commissioners at the Commission, pointing out the difficult lack of people with integrity in authority will affect the elections. PL5 and KAD8, on the other hand, held the same opinion, believing that the 2022 Electoral Act may have brought about a number of modifications that would further enhance the legitimacy of elections. The new electoral act now defines over voting in terms of accredited voters as opposed to registered voters, and according to IM3, cases of inconclusive elections would be drastically reduced in 2023. Additionally, INEC would be able to review results signed under duress or financial inducement under the new act. The report pointed out that the election’s transparency could be increased if INEC wisely used the technology it had pushed for and been granted through the new electoral act. It also added that the poll’s credibility would be influenced by how freely and unhindered citizens could cast their ballots.

In response to this query, KA1 stated that, especially in the northwest and southeast, insecurity is still a major problem. The existing cultural, infrastructural, and institutional environments in which the polls will be conducted present additional challenges for this operation. Some of these might be lessened if the whole INEC budget were released promptly. Ultimately, the election’s credibility may depend just as much on the role that the security services and the courts play as it does on the election management organization. Parallel to this, SK6 said that Nigeria was currently experiencing an outbreak of insecurity. The country’s six geopolitical zones have all seen acts of violence committed by bandits, terrorists, and secessionists, further separating it along racial, religious, and political lines. It will be very difficult to hold reliable polls in this situation while ensuring the safety of voters and INEC staff. Since INEC has been unable to deploy

to every ward in every electoral district due to insecurity, the organization's ability to carry out continuous voter registration has already been called into question, according to KAD8.

Summary of major findings

The data analysis's conclusions showed how serious an issue inconclusive elections is, with issues ranging from awareness and widespread education to financial burden and security. The PDP accused INEC and the APC of working together during the December 10th legislative rerun election in Rivers State because they believed the APC was abusing their position of power to bribe the electoral commission, while the APC accused the Rivers State government of attempting to bribe the commission. Inconclusive elections place additional burdens on the federal, state, and local governments in Osun, Rivers, Kano, Anambra, Plateau, Bayelsa, and Imo State. This further adds to the unreliability of the electoral process. With the world and impartial observers watching, all of these accusations and counteraccusations do not bode well for Nigeria's democracy.

The election umpire has not consistently applied the same rule to comparable circumstances in national electoral affairs, according to another study conclusion. This raises concerns about the electoral process's credibility. For example, INEC has been unable to explain why the logic is only used haphazardly and why some elections are not eligible for the use of the inconclusive appellation. For example, the commission's detractors questioned why the results of the governorship elections in Ogun and Kaduna states were not deemed inconclusive, particularly given that the stated results were within the "margin of win" range.

This study has also shown that the various electoral offenders who instigated chaos and violence in the polling places during the Osun state governorship election of 2018 and the Kano governorship election of 2019 resulted in the cancellation of election results, resulting in an inconclusive election. This has created the false impression that mayhem, thuggery, and chaos are inherent to the electoral process.

Furthermore, this investigation found that the winner of the first round of voting would have legitimately prevailed in the election, meeting the requirements of the law of simple majority and geographic dispersion, even in the absence of the 2018 supplemental election in Osun State. What then is the purpose of the supplementary/inconclusive election? This poses a significant threat to the electoral process's sanctity, legitimacy, transparency, and integrity.

This study also showed that the 2018 inconclusive/supplementary elections in Osun, Kano, Plateau, and Sokoto State were simply an elite conspiracy, with no input or consultation from the electorate or their representatives. As a result of the wanton political scheming, negotiations, "gentleman's agreement," and horse-trading that occurred prior to the supplementary elections, it cannot be said that the results truly reflect the wishes and desires of the electorates.

Not every eligible voter casts a ballot on election day; in fact, not every person who is registered to vote does so at all. This is because not every registered voter has obtained their PVC. As such, the margin of vote should be immediately eliminated, as it is a pointless electoral exercise.

This study found that when elections are close, voters become disinterested and INEC has to spend more money. In addition to the aforementioned inconsistencies, the study also found inconsistencies in electoral regulations regarding the margin of votes in close elections.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned results, this study draws the conclusion that credible and transparent elections are essential to democratic governance, which is based on the desires and will of the majority of voters. Elections are not legitimately called elections if they fall short of this requirement. Additionally, because the results do not accurately reflect the wishes and goals of the electorate, an inconclusive election subverts their electoral will. Since there are conflicting electoral laws governing the process and the electoral umpire has not been able to apply the same standards to comparable circumstances across the nation, the legitimacy of inconclusive elections is debatable. Additionally, because the impartiality of INEC and the integrity of the electoral process have been questioned, inconclusive elections have contributed to voter indifference and a lack of continuous interest in the political process.

Recommendations

In light of the results, the research proposed the following recommendations:

- Eliminating the concept of a vote margin based inconclusive election is necessary. It runs counter to the nation's FPTP electoral system, which is based on geographic dispersion and simple majority. Furthermore, in virtually every instance that has occurred thus far in the nation, the party that leads the first round of elections does not typically win the extra or inconclusive election. In fact, wherever in the nation, indecision has benefited one particular party.
- The National Assembly should also evaluate and streamline any conflicting laws pertaining to elections so they comply with the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution. This is due to the conflicting provisions found in the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution, the Electoral Law 2010 as amended, and the INEC Regulation and Guidelines. These provisions have the potential to cause needless controversy, tension, litigation, indecision, and confusion during the electoral process. This is due to the fact that they currently obstruct an honest and transparent electoral process.
- Additionally, there is a need for more study and scholarly attention in the field of inconclusive elections and how they affect the democratic process's integrity. By doing this, the country's democratic ethos will be strengthened and durable electoral changes will be shaped. It will also help to build and enhance the electoral process, credible elections, and voter participation.
- Furthermore, there is a need for increased voter education and sensitization efforts, or raising public understanding of citizens' rights and obligations in relation to the election malpractices. To improve the integrity of the electoral process, voters, governments, NGOs, CSOs, EMB, and other important stakeholders should intensify and lead initiatives pertaining to credible elections and clear electoral laws.

- It is also crucial to emphasize that free and fair elections can result from excellent governance, since voters will support parties that have clearly given them the benefits of democracy and will not allow votes to be stolen by keeping an eye on the ballots. However, voters grow apathetic about elections and the way they are run if there is weak leadership and government.
- EMDs and other important electoral stakeholders must actively prohibit and minimize vote buying and money politics in the nation. Adherence to strict expenditure caps during election campaigns is vital, and Nigeria's economy needs to be realigned to enable the populace on an economic level. This is so that voters in areas with low levels of poverty can choose trustworthy candidates on their own, as opposed to selecting the least qualified candidate who specializes in raising money. That any other laws passed in the country that deal with identifying the real winners of elections should be superseded by the provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Acts. It should be discouraged immediately when elections are deemed to be inconclusive based on INEC standards.
- When it comes to election-related matters, the INEC should always remain impartial. They shouldn't convey through their body language that they are associated with any certain party, whether it be powerful or not. In the course of their responsibilities, they ought to make every effort to act as an impartial referee.
- As essential legal documents having supreme authority over matters of national significance, the Grundnorm and the Electoral Acts should be aligned with the revisions made to the INEC guideline.

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Citation

- Abdulyakeen, A. (2024). Inconclusive elections in Nigeria and its security implications: Righting the wrongs in 2023. *Acta Politica Polonica*, 1 (57), 119–141. DOI: 10.18276/ap.2024.57-08.