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GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined Good Governance and Democratic Elections in Nigeria, emphasizing how credible electoral processes shape accountability, transparency, and institutional trust. Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 has been marked by both notable progress and persistent challenges, particularly electoral malpractice, weak institutional capacity, and corruption. The 2023 general elections highlighted critical gaps in electoral technology, logistics, and result transmission, further undermining public trust in democratic institutions. This study adopts Modernization Theory to explain how limited economic development, weak institutions, and low levels of civic engagement continue to undermine electoral credibility and governance outcomes. It also analyzes the role of key institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society organizations (CSOs), and anti-corruption agencies in strengthening democratic processes. The findings reveal that credible elections contribute to political stability, improved public service delivery, and increased citizen participation. The study concludes that democratic consolidation in Nigeria requires coordinated institutional reforms, strengthened enforcement of electoral laws, and deeper investment in civic education and socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Good Governance, Democratic Elections, Electoral Integrity, Economic Development.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's shift from military control to a competitive multi-party democracy in 1999 produced nominal democratic institutions; nonetheless, the quality of governance and the integrity of elections continue to be disputed. Extensive voter registration and frequent elections cycles have formalised competition; yet, persistent conflicts regarding vote administration, delays, and post-election litigation have undermined popular confidence in electoral results. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has recognised operational and logistical difficulties during the 2023 general elections and in subsequent evaluations, emphasising the need for legal and procedural reform. Deficiencies in structural governance exacerbate electoral apprehensions. Nigeria does poorly on various governance indicators, such as governmental efficacy, adherence to the rule of law, and corruption control, which influence electoral processes and voters' capacity to hold elected officials responsible post-appointment(Thovoethin, 2015).

The World Bank governance indicators reveal that Nigeria's percentile rankings in these areas are consistently below the global median, signifying ongoing institutional fragility that hampers policy implementation and scrutiny. Corruption and impunity directly impact electoral integrity and governance results. Transparency International's latest country profile categorises Nigeria as one of the nations with considerable perceived public-sector corruption, a context that heightens the likelihood of vote-buying, patronage networks, and the exploitation of public resources for political gain. Notable anti-corruption recoveries and prosecutions have been documented; yet, public perception and systemic weaknesses remain, hindering the conversion of legal proceedings into enduring institutional transformation (Laniran, 2018).

The 2023 presidential election elucidated numerous tensions. Narrow margins, accusations of anomalies, technological breakdowns in electronic transmissions, and significant street protests all highlighted a disparity between official procedures and perceived validity. International and local observers identified deficiencies that, although not entirely discrediting the process, elicited apprehensions over transparency and the safeguarding of voters' rights, factors that precipitate litigation and civil upheaval following the election. These examples illustrate the profound interconnection between election administration and the overall quality of governance. Academic and policy discussions increasingly characterise Nigeria's democratic resilience as contingent upon three interrelated reforms: enhancing electoral institutions and technologies, advancing rule-of-law and anti-corruption measures, and fostering civic education and inclusive political competition. Evidence indicates that incremental reforms, law modifications, commission evaluations, and prosecutions are effective only when integrated into comprehensive institutional capacity enhancement and transparency initiatives. In light of ongoing governance deficiencies (rule of law, efficacy, and corruption) and recurrent election-related disputes recorded since 2023, there is an immediate necessity for empirical, policy-focused research that connects particular governance shortcomings to discernible electoral failures and evaluates feasible reforms. This study would assist policymakers in prioritising actions that enhance technical electoral administration and reinforce the institutional safeguards essential for democratic accountability (Goede, 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance

Governance is the method employed to achieve the esteemed goals of the state. Thus, governance refers to the administration of a population inside a specific region or state. It consists of two essential elements of the state: the state structure and the functions of the legislative, judicial, executive, and administrative entities at all tiers of government. Governance is, concisely, a fluid condition. Hirst and Thompson (1996) define governance as "the regulation of an activity through diverse methods to attain a range of desired outcomes." Thus, governing inside a political framework is a more complex undertaking. Secondly, political governance is focused towards service. Governance is best comprehended through Lasswell's seminal definition of politics as the distribution of resources: who obtains what, when, how, and potentially how much. Thus, governance is fundamentally connected to the allocation of values within society, which is primarily political in nature. Although governance relates to politics, it is philosophically separate (Painter, 2017).

Governance, being a human phenomenon, is executed within a particular socio-cultural context and relates to the broader realm of politics. Politics is the authoritative allocation of values, dictating who receives what, when, and how, whereas governance pertains to the processes and methodologies for distributing these values in accordance with the ideals of equity, justice, and fairness. Thus, it is through the practical execution of authority and governance protocols that state powers acquire meaning and substance. The World Bank characterises governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (Odunuga, 2003). The Bank recognised three critical dimensions of governance: the nature of the political system, the manner in which authority is exercised in the management of a nation's social and economic resources, and the capacity of governance to plan, formulate, implement policies, and execute functions (Lateef, 2016).

Ysa, Albareda, and Forberger (2014) consider government and governance to be synonymous ideas. Governance is characterised as a multifaceted system of methods, procedures, relationships, and institutions through which individuals and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, complete their obligations, and resolve conflicts. Government and governance are fundamentally interconnected. The government, as a governance structure, encompasses four fundamental attributes: sovereignty, power, authority, and legitimacy (Loughlin, 2018). All these elements or attributes function as instruments of effective governance by offering crucial anchoring and legal or moral justifications for the government. This study defines governance as the process of allocating resources through governmental institutions to attain public benefit. Thus, governance includes institutional and structural frameworks, decision-making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacities, human development, information transmission, and the attributes and methods of leadership within a political system. Thus, governance fundamentally entails the identification and settlement of problems. It relates to social, economic, and political progress. Consequently, governance includes social, economic, administrative, and political aspects (Ysa, Albareda, & Forberger, 2014).

Economic governance involves decision-making processes that directly or indirectly affect a country's economic activities or its relations with other economies. Economic governance profoundly influences societal challenges, encompassing equity, poverty, and quality of life. Political governance refers to the decision-making processes and policy implementation of a legitimate and authoritative state. The state must consist of separate legislative, executive, and judicial branches, serve the interests of a diverse community, and allow citizens to freely pick their representatives. The World Bank defines administrative governance as a framework for policy implementation carried out by an efficient, independent, accountable, and transparent public sector. These components constitute the governance system, which denotes the formal institutional and organisational framework for authoritative decision-making in the modern state. Systemic governance encompasses the mechanisms and frameworks that regulate political and socioeconomic interactions to protect cultural and religious beliefs and values, promote health, freedom, and security, and create opportunities for individuals to achieve their potential, thereby improving the quality of life for all (Ysa, Albareda, & Forberger, 2014). Governance denotes the method by which governments exercise authority in the administration and allocation of a nation's social and economic resources.

The attributes and methodology of this distribution ascertain the efficacy or inefficacy of governance. Thus, when resources are distributed to promote inequality or to satisfy individual or group ambitions, the essential principles of governance, which correspond with the foundational beliefs of politics and the state, are compromised. Therefore, resources must be allocated judiciously, equitably, and fairly to achieve the essential objectives of the state. This suggests that governance can be precisely classified as either exemplary or inadequate. It is imperative to acknowledge that the notion of good governance as a criterion is only significant if predicated on the existence of the experience and reality of poor governance. Thus, the standard of good governance serves as the political concept intended to challenge and replace the occurrence of poor governance (Rotberg, 2014). The notion of good governance pertains to all sectors of society, encompassing the government, legislature, judiciary, media, private sector, corporate sector, trade unions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Public accountability and transparency are equally essential for all stakeholders. The objective of achieving the maximum benefit for the largest number of individuals can only be accomplished when all sectors of society function in a socially responsible manner (Jashari & Pepaj, 2018). The African Development Bank defines good governance as encompassing and promoting effective states, active civil societies, and vibrant corporate sectors.

Scholar (2019) defines good governance as the dedication and capacity to effectively allocate and manage resources to address communal challenges. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (UNESCO, 2005) delineates eight fundamental components of effective governance. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable, inclusive, and compliant with the rule of law. It ensures the mitigation of corruption, takes into account minority viewpoints, and guarantees that the opinions of society's most vulnerable members are recognised in decision-making (Aggarwal, 2023). The Vision 2010 document of Nigeria articulated efficient government as follows; Effective government requires responsibility in every aspect. This denotes the rule of law and an autonomous judiciary, including freedom of expression and the right to political affiliation. Effective governance requires transparency, equity, and integrity in public administration. Effective governance in Nigeria requires constitutional authority and a genuine federal structure. These constitute the essential pillars upon which any notion of growth is established. Evaluating a country's management is essential to ascertain the efficacy of its government, hence differentiating between success and failure. The inadequacy of governance signifies that political leaders have poorly managed the economy and several social institutions.

Rose-Ackerman (2005) delineates various attributes of inadequate governance, such as: the failure to clearly differentiate between public and private interests, resulting in the misappropriation of public assets for personal gain; the inability to establish a stable legal and governmental framework conducive to development, leading to arbitrary law enforcement; an excess of rules, regulations, and licensing requirements that obstruct market functionality and encourage rent-seeking behaviour; and misaligned priorities with developmental objectives, resulting in resource misallocation and a deficiency of transparency in decision-making processes. Mensah (2019) contends that the concurrent presence of these characteristics creates an atmosphere harmful to development. In these circumstances, he further argued that governmental influence over their populations is likely to be significantly reduced. This undermines compliance with decisions and regulations.

Governments frequently implement populist strategies or, in some authoritarian regimes, employ coercion. The economic burden is typically significant, involving a diversion of resources to internal security and a rise in corruption. Poor governance fundamentally denotes ineffective administration and does not necessarily indicate a lack of democracy. The incapacity of a state to achieve or realise its essential nature at a certain time is evident. Inadequate governance, marked by corruption and a lack of accountability and transparency, allows favoured elites and interest groups to seize a substantial portion of societal resources, adversely affecting the general people (Mensah, 2019). Thus, inadequate governance is detrimental to a nation's socio-economic and political progress. Therefore, state resources must be managed to achieve the desired level of socioeconomic progress for all members of the political community. The consumed resource must align with the level of development attained. In summary, efficient governance relates to the operational efficiency of a government concerning its leadership capabilities. The breakdown of governance may directly indicate a failure in leadership. The most effective governors are those who confront their society in a condition of social and political deterioration and effectively lift it to a position of importance and affluence. Effective governance depends on its ability to achieve the state's goals, which encompass justice, equity, protection of life and property, enhanced civic engagement, adherence to the rule of law, and improvement of the populace's living conditions. Governance is considered ineffectual when it fails to achieve the state's objectives (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014).

According to Enkosi (2016), an election is the procedure through which an electorate selects officials, via voting, to act on its behalf or represent it in an assembly for the purpose of governance or administration. An electorate denotes a group of persons legally authorised to vote in an election, regardless of the method employed. Elections facilitate a fundamental level of political engagement, potentially the sole act of participation for the bulk of the populace, so fostering a sense of belonging and a degree of accountability for governmental actions.

Election Credibility

Transparent elections and electoral credibility are terms often used interchangeably to denote "free and fair elections." This concept has historically been contentious among political scientists. Nevertheless, it has become a prevalent phrase among journalists, politicians, democracy advocates, and social scientists. Some scholars contend that the notion of "free and fair" incorporates normative considerations. The contentious nature of the term "Free and Fair election," akin to other concepts in political discourse, complicates its interpretation due to divergent fundamental democratic values, obscuring the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate democratic principles.

Fagbohun, (2013) contend that the phrase "free and fair election" cannot be associated with a universal standard of electoral competition, as no such standard exists and the electoral process is too intricate for a simplistic formula. Consequently, a definition of the essential criteria for a free and fair election must be established to facilitate the evaluation of election monitoring. Chigudu, (2016) argues that critics of the term "free and fair election" often assert that it is easier to delineate what is not free and fair than to define what is. They claim that the term lacks substantive meaning, as it can be adapted to meet the requirements and directives of various organizations. Despite this cautionary perspective, international entities such as Transparency International and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have endeavored to elucidate the concept, ensuring it does not become disregarded.

Mirembe, (2019) asserts that three categories of rights must be recognized and upheld to ensure free and fair elections. These rights encompass: the right to vote and electoral rights (which guarantee universal, non-discriminatory suffrage, secret balloting, and the right to individual recourse in cases of rights infringement); the right to candidacy, expression of political views, and campaigning; the right to equitable media access; the right to freedom from political violence; the right to legal protection; and the rights and responsibilities of the state (which define the state's duty to establish an efficient, impartial, and non-discriminatory framework for voter registration, voter education, and election commission oversight).

Elections

The concept of election in politics is not limited to formal political organizations; it can also be utilized by smaller, informal entities, such as clubs, to select their leaders. A substantial population utilizes elections to select a limited number of individuals for political positions. Elections have been an essential element of representative governance for almost 200 years in the modern period. Contemporary elections are significantly shaped by the construction and evolution of representative democracies, which serve to ascertain their existence (Stone, 2013).

Elections serve not only as a mechanism for democratic engagement but also as an intense contest for power, dominance, and resources. While not an essential prerequisite for democracy, elections serve as the primary indicator of democratic governance. The election is the essential tenet of democracy. Elections are competitions to choose who will be selected to lead society through voting and/or appointment or nomination, albeit consensually.

Elections, while not an essential prerequisite for democracy, serve as the principal criterion for democratic governance. Elections are the foundational principle upon which democracy is established. Elections are crucial for the advancement of democracies (Wojtasik, 2013). Boese, (2019) observed that in democracies, "rulers serve as custodians of the common good, accountable to citizens for their stewardship." Liberal democracies fulfill this obligation by conducting democratic elections at designated intervals (Wojtasik, 2013). Democracy is defined and ascertained through electoral processes. Elections grant "citizen-electorates" the power to choose the government. Whoever is selected to lead must meet the expectations of the constituents who granted them authority.

Democratic Elections in Nigeria

Since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, there have been significant improvements in its elections, such as regular multi-party elections, more people registering to vote, and gradual legal changes, but there are still ongoing issues with how elections are managed and a INEC's own post-2023 reviews highlight operational failures in transmission technology, logistics gaps and the need for procedural reforms to strengthen transparency and credibility.

Kelley, (2012) emphasise that technical problems in a single election cycle cannot be separated from larger governance deficits. International observation missions (NDI/IRI, EU EOM, and Commonwealth) documented recurring problems in 2023: inadequate planning, irregularities at polling units, inconsistent results management, and patterns that depressed turnout and fuelled litigation and protests. These reports connect administrative lapses to diminished legitimacy and longer-term democratic fatigue.

A substantial strand of the literature examines clientelism and vote-selling as structural constraints on electoral quality. Empirical studies and policy analyses show that vote-buying, poverty, and patronage networks distort incentives for both voters and parties, weakening the accountability link between ballots and policy outcomes; researchers argue that addressing socio-economic drivers is as important as fixing procedural faults.

insecurity, elite competition, and weak rule of law amplify opportunities for manipulation and reduce citizens' ability to seek redress. Recent academic and policy pieces call for a three-pronged reform agenda: strengthening election management capacity and technologies, tackling vote-buying through enforcement and civic education, and reinforcing judicial and anti-corruption mechanisms, to turn formal electoral procedures into meaningful democratic choice (Naomi & Chukwueme 2018).

3. MODERNIZATION THEORY

Modernisation Theory and Its Relevance to Democratic Elections in Nigeria

The study adopted Modernisation Theory as it theoretical framework. The theory gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s with the contributions of Seymour Martin Lipset (1959), Walt Whitman Rostow (1960), and Talcott Parsons (1964). This theory posits that economic development catalyses social transformation, enhances literacy, promotes urbanisation, and fosters a politically engaged middle class, collectively reinforcing democratic governance and institutions. Lipset's foundational study, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy" (1959), posited that democracy flourishes in societies with elevated socio-economic development, as citizens in these contexts are more informed, less reliant on patronage, and more predisposed to hold political leaders accountable. Rostow subsequently elaborated on this concept by associating stages of economic growth with democratic consolidation, positing that as countries modernise, they acquire the political and institutional capabilities necessary to maintain democratic systems.

Utilising this theory in the context of Nigeria elucidates the persistent issues associated with democratic elections. Nigeria's democratic journey since 1999 has transpired amid ongoing poverty, inadequate literacy rates in certain regions, infrastructural shortcomings, and feeble economic diversification. These circumstances foster an environment conducive to vote-buying, election violence, and diminished civic involvement, so undermining democratic consolidation. According to Modernisation Theory, restricted economic development may render citizens more susceptible to clientelism, patronage politics, and elite manipulation, thus undermining political credibility and accountability systems.

Furthermore, Modernisation Theory emphasises the significance of education and urbanisation in influencing democratic conduct. In Nigeria, communities with elevated literacy rates and urbanisation typically exhibit greater civic engagement and a demand for election transparency, whereas rural and economically disadvantaged parts frequently encounter increased electoral malpractices. This illustrates the theory's claim that economic and social modernisation promotes democratic values and behaviours.

The theory emphasises the significance of institutional capability. Modernisation facilitates the development of robust state institutions that can conduct credible elections, enforce laws, and guarantee electoral justice. In Nigeria, frail institutions and inadequately financed electoral authorities have led to persistent operational problems, notably evident in the 2023 national elections.

4. CONCLUSION

Good governance and democratic elections in Nigeria are closely intertwined, as credible electoral processes form the foundation upon which accountable leadership is built. While Nigeria has made significant progress since the return to democratic rule in 1999, governance and electoral processes continue to face persistent challenges such as electoral malpractices, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and declining public trust. The 2023 general elections exposed operational gaps in electoral technology, logistics, and dispute resolution, highlighting the need for deeper structural reforms rather than surface-level adjustments.

Strengthening the connection between good governance and elections requires improving transparency, strengthening the rule of law, and empowering citizens through civic education and socio-economic development. Democratic elections must not only be free and fair in form but must also lead to effective governance and accountability in practice. A transparent electoral system reinforces citizens' confidence in government, enhances political stability, and promotes inclusive development. Ultimately, democratic consolidation in Nigeria depends on bridging the gap between electoral promises and governance performance.

Recommendations

a. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should invest in strengthening its technological infrastructure, logistics systems, and staff capacity to ensure real-time transmission of results, timely delivery of electoral materials, and transparent collation processes.
b. The **National Orientation Agency (NOA)** should expand civic and voter education programmes, especially in rural and underserved communities, to reduce voter manipulation and promote informed participation in electoral processes.
c. The **Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)** should intensify the investigation and prosecution of electoral offences related to vote-buying, bribery, and misuse of state resources during elections to deter corruption in the political space.
d. **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** should scale up election monitoring, deploy independent observers, and advocate for legal and policy reforms that guarantee electoral integrity and public accountability from elected officials.

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