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## FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY APPRAISAL OF THE NIGERIAN 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DISPUTE

**Kingsley Onyibor Nweke**  
**Department of Psychology,**  
**Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka,**  
**Anambra State, Nigeria.**

**Email: kingsleyuweke73@gmail.com, Phone: 08064134253**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The research examined the Nigerian 2023 Presidential Election dispute: It's Forensic Psychology appraisal. The study deployed a theoretical approach to examine the behaviours of the actors of the election. Findings revealed gross intimidation, voter suppression, vote buying, killing, and result manipulations, and the inability of INEC to upload electoral results using BIVAS. It was recommended that these findings should be further investigated to bring to justice all culprits associated with those unlawful acts.*

**KEYWORDS:** Forensic Psychology, Nigeria 2023 Election, Presidential Election Dispute

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### INTRODUCTION

In most governments in the world, the practice of democracy has always been associated with elections. This has necessitated the adoption of various unethical, antisocial, and anti-election practices in order to win the election. These unwholesome activities associated with Nigeria's election processes have become forensic issues. These forensic issues associated with electoral processes are criminal and legal issues political parties and contestants engage in during elections. These issues are referred to as electoral fraud contestants and party agents deployed in winning an election.

Thus, electoral fraud may be regarded as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, discrimination, physical assault, force protection blackmail, or destruction (Namibia et al., n.d.-a). Some politicians and party agents use them as strategies in influencing electoral outcomes. A historic autopsy of Nigeria's various presidential and general elections from 1964 till date revealed a growing pattern of electoral violence (Okolie et al., 2021; Alert 2022! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding, n.d.; Leslie et al., 2021; Chimezie Ajeli, 2022; ; Okolie, et al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, Leslie et al, 2021, Chimezie, 2022, Canice, et al 2022).

Forensic observation reveals that diverse forms of electoral fraud were associated with

elections in Nigeria. Manipulation connotes a sense of electoral irregularities which are an affront to legal and democratic good practice. The forensic implication is that those that initiate such behaviours target influencing electoral outcomes. The 2011 election was marked by violence, vote-buying, and political killings (*Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria's 2023 Elections*, 2023).

More recently, other forms of electoral fraud have been reported such as voters' intimidation, ethnic motivation attacks, voting/election manipulation, disruption of the electoral process in pooling units, failure to use the BVAS in uploading election results, abuse of incumbency by various political office holders and politically motivated killing (Namibia et al., n.d.-b). Similarly, the European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria reported that on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023, presidential and gubernatorial Assembly elections reported that there was an abuse of incumbency by various political office holders which distorted the playing field and there were large-scale allegations of vote buying (*European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria*, n.d.)). Furthermore, YouTube evidence revealed multiple forensic frauds in most parts of the country such as flogging, chasing away of voters, revealing evidence of vote suppression, and voter intimidation in the 2023 election. Other evidence, includes the destruction of election materials, incomplete party logos on INEC ballot papers, relocation of pooling units on election day,

targeted attacks on some ethnic groups assault cases, snatching of ballot boxes, unlawful arrest of contestants, abuse of authority, alleged rigging, changing of electoral result, and the inability of INEC to use the BIVAS.

Finally, these observations during the Nigerian 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections are of forensic concern on the premise that it is a bridge between electoral law and good democratic practice. Furthermore, these fraudulent behaviours were data that were used in the outcome of the Nigerian 2023 Presidential President-elect. Therefore, careful examination of these behaviour may go a long way in bringing perpetrators to the book.

### **Statement of the problem**

The process of electing a democratic president in Nigeria has been a troubling one over the years. There was evidence of voter intimidation, electoral malpractice, political assassination, inter-party/intra-party violence, threats, thuggery, deaths, religious and ethnic divisions, bomb attacks, lack of trust in electoral and security management, public safety, porous nature of Nigerian borders, political crisis and civil unrest witnessed in each of the elections (Chimezie, 2022; Canice Esidene et al., 2022; Hindowa et al., 2022; Leslie 2021; Okolie 2021). In the Nigerian 2023 Presidential election, records reveal that a similar pattern has been witnessed. Therefore, the motivation of the present research is to advance a forensic psychology autopsy of possible unlawful and anti-democratic practices witnessed during the election.

### **Purpose of the study**

- i. To give a forensic psychological appraisal of the Nigerian 2023 presidential election.

### **Research Question**

- i. What are the forensic evidences of the Nigerian 2023 presidential election.

### **Significance of the study**

The study will go a long way toward a nuanced understanding of the unlawful behaviours of the actors of the Nigerian 2023 Presidential election from the perspective of Forensic Psychology. Thus, the outcome of the study may be of enormous benefit to the court system during the election tribunal proceedings in

the investigation of election-related cases before the court. Similarly, the outcome of the study may serve as a deterrent to future actors about the forensic and legal implications of such unlawful behaviours.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The game theory was popularized by John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (1944). The game theory was conceptualized from parlor games such as chess, chicken, and poker. These games reflect conflict situations between two or more opponents or players in which the player is assumed to be rational and seeks to maximize gains and minimize losses. These players could be individuals or institutions in a contest or competition where each participant is expected to choose alternatives that affect each other's gains or losses. In the electoral process or competition, there are political parties and contestants from various political parties, these contestants are referred to as party representatives. As such they engage in a political contest or competition.

According to the game theory, each contestant and party affiliate employs strategies that target the gains and losses of the opponent. Thus, each party's strategy may be either legitimate or illegitimate. Although, contestants are assumed to be aware of the electoral rules, they strategies according to their convictions on winning electoral outcomes.

### **METHOD**

Information for the study was sourced from research works, print media, and YouTube videos of the activities from most parts of the country during the Nigerian 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections. As such the study adopted a theoretical approach therefore no instruments were used apart from reports of YouTube videos, empirical and theoretical studies. The seminar study was conducted using online sources of information as posted on YouTube. This information was sourced and studied to form a Forensic Psychology appraisal of the activities and outcome of the Nigerian 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections. The study adopted an analytical design, and no statistics were deployed for data management. Rather, the study adopted a theoretical deductive

approach to conclude the findings using available evidence.

## **FINDINGS**

The following forensic issues characterized the Nigerian 2023 Presidential election:

- i. Interparty clashes.
- ii. Rigging, voter intimidation, and violence.
- iii. Unlawful change of pooling units by Electoral Officials.
- iv. The killing of an election candidate.
- v. Heavy manipulation of results and disruption of electoral processes.
- vi. Failure by INEC to transmit results using BIVAS.
- vii. Inconsistencies in the results on electoral forms.
- viii. Vote suppression by ethnic groups.

## **DISCUSSION**

The seminar examined the Nigerian 2023 presidential election dispute: Its forensic psychology appraisal. Accordingly, finding reveal various interparty clashes in most parts of the country. For instance, in Lagos state, there were disturbances that may have affected the outcome of electoral results. This may have also facilitated the political apathy of eligible voters. Similarly, there was evidence of vote rigging, voter intimidation, and violence in some parts, especially in Lagos and Rivers states. Some eligible voters were consequently denied their rights to vote in these localities. Such behavior may lead to forensic fraud of electoral outcomes. Furthermore, electorate pooling units were changed on Election Day without prior information or authorization. This may have led to the perceived insecurity of electorates and affected electoral outcomes. Unfortunately, elections did not hold in such pooling units, therefore voters were disfranchised. During Election Day, there were reports of killing especially of a contestant. Thus, introducing politically motivated killing. Again, such an incidence may lead to vote depression. Yet still there were incidences of heavy manipulation of electoral results in some parts of the country. Such behavior was targeted to present a wrong electoral outcome to the citizens. Yet,

unfortunately, INEC was unable to transmit electoral results using BIVAS, as well as gross inconsistency in results on electoral-sensitive materials. Finally, most pooling locations witnessed voter suppression as some party agents coercively demanded that electorates vote for their party candidates.

These observations may find theoretical explanations in the game theory by Neumann and Morgenstern (1944). Accordingly, the party agents, contestants, and political parties are engaged in a constructive battle to win the election. As a result, they are aware of the law's demands on acceptable behavior. They are also aware of the resources possessed by each of the opponents that may lead to either winning or losing. In order to win the election, each party maps out strategies. Sometimes, candidates or party strategies may be contrary to the electoral law. In this sense, the killings, voter suppression, intimidation, vote buying, inability to transmit electoral results using the BIVAS, rigging, manipulation, violence, and inconsistencies in electoral sensitive forms (Form ECSA), may be explained as diverse strategies initiated to influence the electoral outcome of the Nigerian 2023 presidential election. Thus, these behaviours arouse due to the perception that an election is a competition and relying on the rules may not enable some parties that are not doing well to emerge as winners, hence the manifestation of all sorts of antisocial, antilegal, and anti-democratic behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

The presidential election in Nigeria is the most powerful election for the number one position. Therefore, all parties and contestants deploy various legal and illegal strategies to achieve their desired goals. The research revealed that the Nigerian 2023 presidential election outcome was achieved by some parties and contestants deploying anti-legal and anti-democratic practices.

## **Limitations of the study**

The study has theoretical perspective and not empirical. The information is from the witnesses of the 2023 Presidential election activities in various parts of the country and YouTube evidence.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the incidences of electoral violence, voter intimidation, and vote-buying during the 2023 Presidential election should be thoroughly investigated and addressed.

## Suggestions for further research

It is suggested that future research may focus on the use of interviews and use of empirical approaches in Forensic Psychology.

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