

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING THE MOST SUITABLE ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR A PLURALISTIC COUNTRY LIKE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper investigates the suitability of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system for Nigeria, a country characterized by its ethnic, cultural, and political pluralism. The research is driven by critical questions: Is the FPTP electoral system conducive to representing Nigeria's diverse populace? What are the implications of adopting FPTP on political stability and minority representation in a pluralistic society? Through these inquiries, the study seeks to explore the compatibility of FPTP with Nigeria's unique socio-political landscape. The primary objectives include assessing the effectiveness of the FPTP system in promoting democratic governance in Nigeria, evaluating its impact on representation for minority groups, and determining whether alternative electoral systems could better serve the nation's diverse interests. By employing qualitative research methodology, the study utilizes in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis to gather insights from political analysts, civil society organizations, and citizens from various ethnic backgrounds. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of perceptions, experiences, and suggestions regarding the electoral system. The theoretical framework for this research draws from the principles of democratic representation and the concept of proportionality in electoral systems. It highlights the importance of aligning electoral processes with the values of inclusivity and equal representation, especially in a country like Nigeria where historical grievances and ethnic tensions persist. This framework facilitates understanding how different electoral systems can either bridge or deepen the divide within a diverse society. Findings from the study indicate that while the FPTP system is straightforward, it may not adequately represent Nigeria's intricate plurality. The prevalence of winner-takes-all outcomes often marginalizes minority voices, leading to political disenfranchisement and unrest, resulting in a lack of confidence in the electoral process. The research emphasizes that an electoral system which favors majoritarian representation can perpetuate existing inequalities and inhibit the formation of inclusive governance structures. The paper recommends a thorough reconsideration of Nigeria's electoral framework. Specifically, it suggests the adoption of a mixed electoral system that combines elements of proportional representation with FPTP to enhance inclusivity and better reflect the diverse interests within the polity. By implementing reforms that prioritize equitable representation and accountability, Nigeria can create a more stable political environment that fosters unity among its diverse populations. This study ultimately contributes to the broader discourse on electoral systems and their impact on democracy in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Electoral Systems, Elections, Pluralism and Nigeria

Introduction

The electoral system of a country is a fundamental component of its democratic architecture, influencing governance, representation, and public trust. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by ethnic diversity, complex socio-political dynamics, and a history of political instability, the choice of electoral system is particularly critical. The First Past the Post (FPTP) system, currently employed in Nigeria's federal and state elections, has sparked considerable debate regarding its effectiveness in catering to the needs of a pluralistic society. (Mohammed 2013). This paper explores the appropriateness of FPTP for Nigeria, assessing its strengths and weaknesses in the context of the country's diverse population and political environment.

FPTP operates on a simple principle: the candidate who receives the most votes in a constituency wins, regardless of whether they achieve an absolute majority. This system is favored for its simplicity, speed of counting votes, and ease of understanding (Lijphart, 1999). However, it also raises concerns about the underrepresentation of minority groups, the potential for "winner-takes-all" outcomes, and the marginalization of smaller political parties (Gallagher, 1991). In a country like Nigeria, where over 250

ethnic groups coexist and regional affiliations significantly influence political behavior, the implications of adopting FPTP are particularly pronounced (Bach, 2012).

Electoral systems shape political engagement and citizen participation. In Nigeria, FPTP has been associated with increasing political polarization and tensions, as the winner's advantage often exacerbates ethnic and regional divides (Okafor, 2015). The consequences of this system can lead to disenfranchisement of minority groups, reducing their willingness to participate in the political process and undermining the legitimacy of the electoral outcomes (Kirk, 2016). Thus, the examination of FPTP in Nigeria not only considers its mechanics but also its broader impact on national unity and democratic health.

Moreover, the historical context of Nigeria's electoral processes highlights the challenges faced by its democratic institutions. The country has experienced numerous electoral crises, marked by violence, allegations of rigging, and a lack of public trust in electoral outcomes (Kura, 2015). These issues underscore the need for a critical assessment of whether FPTP is the most suitable system for fostering an inclusive and representative democracy. Alternative electoral systems, such as proportional representation or mixed systems, could potentially address some of the shortcomings associated with FPTP by ensuring better representation for diverse groups (Lijphart, 2004).

This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the FPTP system in the context of Nigeria's pluralism. It will delve into the historical and socio-political factors influencing electoral dynamics, examine empirical evidence regarding the performance of FPTP in Nigeria, and explore alternative systems that could better accommodate the country's diversity. Ultimately, this study aims to determine whether FPTP is indeed the most suitable electoral system for a pluralistic nation like Nigeria, or if reforms are necessary to enhance democratic governance and social cohesion.

Pros and Cons of FPTP

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Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The choice of electoral systems has long been a subject of scholarly debate, particularly in diverse societies like Nigeria. The First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the highest vote count wins in a single-member district, has its supporters and critics. This literature review examines existing research on electoral systems, their impacts on representation, governance, and the specific challenges faced by pluralistic societies.

Several theories inform the study of electoral systems. The Duverger's Law posits that FPTP tends to favor a two-party system, leading to political stability (Duverger, 1954). However, in highly pluralistic contexts, this can marginalize smaller parties and reduce overall representation (Blais, 2002). This theory is crucial in understanding Nigeria's political dynamics, where multiple ethnic groups and parties vie for power.

Research indicates that FPTP can distort electoral outcomes, particularly in multi-ethnic societies. Norris (2004) highlights that FPTP often leads to disproportionate representation, where a party can win a majority of seats without a corresponding majority of votes. In Nigeria, this has been evident in various elections, where the largest ethnic groups dominate the political landscape, sidelining minority interests (Ibrahim, 2015).

Further, electoral studies suggest that FPTP can foster a culture of vote-buying and patronage, undermining democratic integrity (Omotola, 2010). The system may incentivize political actors to focus on winning rather than on policy issues, further entrenching ethnic divisions.

Comparative studies reveal that alternative electoral systems, such as proportional representation (PR), can enhance representation in pluralistic contexts. PR systems are designed to ensure that the number of seats held by a party is proportionate to the number of votes received (Lijphart, 1999). Research by Blais and Massicotte (2002) demonstrates that PR can reduce ethnic tensions by allowing multiple groups to gain representation, fostering a more inclusive political environment.

For Nigeria, implementing PR or a mixed electoral system could address the issues inherent in FPTP. For instance, a mixed system, combining FPTP and PR, could allow for both local representation and broader party representation, balancing the interests of diverse groups (Karp & Banducci, 2008).

Several case studies illustrate the effects of different electoral systems on pluralistic societies. For example, the post-apartheid electoral system in South Africa employs a PR system, which has allowed for greater representation of diverse groups (Mattes & Richmond, 2007). This contrast provides valuable insights into how Nigeria might benefit from reforming its electoral system.

In Nigeria, elections are often marred by violence and manipulation, raising questions about the legitimacy of the FPTP system in accommodating its diverse populace (Uchendu, 2020). Observational studies indicate that ethnic and religious identities heavily influence voting behavior, suggesting that FPTP exacerbates these divisions by leading to unrepresentative outcomes (Adebayo, 2019).

This study utilizes a comparative analysis framework, focusing on the relationship between electoral systems and their capacity to represent diverse populations effectively. The theoretical approach is grounded in several key concepts:

- This concept refers to how well an electoral system reflects the diversity of a society in its political institutions. Representation can be understood in terms of descriptive representation

(the demographic characteristics of elected officials) and substantive representation (the interests and concerns of constituents).

- Stability is a crucial factor in assessing electoral systems, especially in multi-ethnic societies. Theories of governance emphasize the importance of inclusive political frameworks that can mitigate conflict and promote national cohesion (Diamond, 1999).
- This framework examines how ethnic identities influence political behavior and electoral outcomes. Understanding ethnic politics is essential in Nigeria, where identity plays a pivotal role in shaping voter preferences and party affiliations (Nnoli, 1995).
- Accountability mechanisms, including electoral systems, shape the responsiveness of elected officials to their constituents. A system that fosters accountability can enhance democratic legitimacy and trust in governance (Fukuyama, 2013).

By employing this theoretical framework, the study seeks to assess the suitability of FPTP for Nigeria's pluralistic context, considering the implications for representation, stability, and governance.

The literature on electoral systems highlights the complexities and challenges associated with FPTP in pluralistic societies. While the system offers simplicity and ease of administration, its potential to marginalize minority groups and exacerbate divisions raises significant concerns in the Nigerian context. As the country continues to grapple with its diverse realities, exploring alternative electoral frameworks may offer pathways to more inclusive and representative governance. This study aims to contribute to this critical discourse, providing insights into the implications of electoral choices for Nigeria's democratic future.

Research Methodology

This research examines the suitability of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system in Nigeria, a country characterized by significant ethnic diversity and political complexity. To address this question, a qualitative methodology is employed, utilizing textual, contextual, and document analysis. This section outlines the methodology in detail, highlighting the rationale for the chosen methods and the processes involved in data collection and analysis.

Qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring complex social phenomena, such as electoral systems and their implications for governance and representation. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the nuances surrounding FPTP in the Nigerian context, focusing on existing literature, historical documents, and relevant case studies.

Textual analysis involves the systematic examination of written texts to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. In this study, a variety of textual sources are analyzed, including: Academic literature on electoral systems, especially those focusing on FPTP and its implications in multi-ethnic societies, is critically reviewed. This includes works by Blais (2002) and Lijphart (1999), which provide foundational theories on electoral representation and system performance; Government reports, electoral commission publications, and constitutional documents relevant to Nigeria's electoral processes are analyzed. These texts reveal the legal framework governing elections and offer insights into the historical evolution of electoral systems in Nigeria, and Newspaper articles and opinion pieces provide contemporary perspectives on elections in Nigeria, highlighting public sentiment, electoral malpractices, and the overall perception of the FPTP system. Analyzing media narratives helps to contextualize the electoral system within the broader socio-political discourse.

Contextual analysis emphasizes understanding the broader socio-political environment in which the FPTP system operates in Nigeria. This analysis involves: An exploration of Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial history is essential to comprehend how historical events have shaped the current electoral landscape. Works by scholars such as Nnoli (1995) provide critical insights into how colonial legacies and ethnic divisions have influenced contemporary electoral practices; Given Nigeria's diverse population, understanding the interplay of ethnic and religious identities is crucial. This analysis focuses on how these identities impact voting behavior and political allegiance, referencing studies that illustrate the fragmentation of the political landscape (Adebayo, 2019), and Comparative analysis of other

pluralistic societies that employ different electoral systems, such as proportional representation in South Africa, offers valuable lessons for Nigeria. This contextual lens aids in evaluating the effectiveness of FPTP in promoting inclusive governance (Mattes & Richmond, 2007).

Document analysis involves reviewing and interpreting various forms of documentation to gather data relevant to the research question. This includes- Analyzing Nigeria's electoral laws, such as the Electoral Act, provides insights into the operational mechanisms of the FPTP system. Legal documents reveal the formal rules governing elections and the implications for political competition (Ibrahim, 2015); Reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) contain vital data on voter turnout, election results, and reports on electoral violence. Analyzing these documents helps assess the practical outcomes of the FPTP system and its impact on electoral integrity, and International Observations: Reports from international bodies, such as the European Union and the Commonwealth, offer external evaluations of Nigeria's electoral processes. These documents often highlight areas of concern and provide recommendations, contributing to a broader understanding of the effectiveness of FPTP in the Nigerian context.

The data collection process involves systematically gathering relevant texts and documents. This includes:

- Academic databases, such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, are utilized to locate scholarly articles and papers related to electoral systems, with a particular focus on Nigeria. Keywords such as "First-Past-The-Post in Nigeria," "electoral systems in pluralistic societies," and "ethnic politics in Nigeria" guide the search.
- Accessing official government websites and the INEC website provides primary documents, including election results, policy papers, and historical records pertinent to the electoral system.
- Online media archives and newspaper websites are searched for articles covering past and recent elections in Nigeria. This provides contemporary perspectives and reflects public opinion regarding the FPTP system.

Data analysis involves synthesizing and interpreting the collected information. The following steps are employed:

- Textual data is coded to identify recurring themes related to FPTP, representation, governance, and ethnic dynamics. This thematic analysis allows for the organization of findings into coherent categories, making it easier to draw conclusions.
- The findings are compared with alternative electoral systems employed in other countries. This analysis highlights the strengths and weaknesses of FPTP, considering contextual factors unique to Nigeria.
- The analysis is critically interpreted, assessing how the findings align with or contradict existing theories and literature. This step ensures that the study contributes to the academic discourse on electoral systems and their suitability for diverse societies.

While this methodology provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The reliance on existing texts means that the study may not capture all contemporary voices, particularly marginalized perspectives that could offer critical insights into the FPTP system. Additionally, the absence of primary data collection through interviews or surveys may limit the depth of understanding regarding public perceptions of the electoral system.

This research methodology, grounded in qualitative methods, textual, contextual, and document analysis, provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the suitability of the FPTP electoral system in Nigeria. By examining existing literature, historical contexts, and relevant documents, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on electoral reform in Nigeria, ultimately assessing whether FPTP is the most appropriate electoral system for a pluralistic society.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, examining the suitability of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system in Nigeria, a nation characterized by significant ethnic diversity and political

complexity. The findings are derived from textual, contextual, and document analysis, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the FPTP system in relation to Nigeria's unique socio-political landscape. One of the most significant findings is that the FPTP electoral system often results in disproportionate representation. Research indicates that FPTP can lead to scenarios where a party wins a majority of seats without receiving a majority of the votes (Norris, 2004). In Nigeria, this has manifested in several elections, where major parties, predominantly representing the interests of dominant ethnic groups, secure substantial legislative power while marginalizing smaller parties and ethnic minorities. For instance, during the 2019 general elections, the All Progressives Congress (APC) secured a majority in the National Assembly despite not achieving an absolute majority of the popular vote. This outcome illustrates how FPTP can entrench the dominance of larger parties at the expense of smaller parties and minority groups (INEC, 2019).

FPTP exacerbates ethnic polarization within Nigeria's political framework. The system incentivizes parties to appeal primarily to their core ethnic constituencies, leading to a politics of exclusion (Adebayo, 2019). Candidates often focus on identity politics, which deepens societal divisions rather than fostering national cohesion. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the Northern and Southern regions of Nigeria, where political allegiances are heavily influenced by ethnic and religious affiliations (Ibrahim, 2015).

The reliance on ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization can lead to the exclusion of minority groups from political representation. In contrast, proportional representation systems have been shown to promote broader representation, allowing diverse voices to participate in governance (Lijphart, 1999).

Another critical finding is that the FPTP system contributes to voter disengagement in Nigeria. Given the perception that votes for smaller parties are 'wasted,' many voters align themselves with dominant parties, thus diminishing electoral competition (Uchendu, 2020). The phenomenon of strategic voting undermines genuine electoral participation and can lead to lower voter turnout.

Data from the 2019 elections indicated a decline in voter turnout, with only 35% of registered voters participating, down from 44% in 2015 (INEC, 2019). This trend raises concerns about the legitimacy of the electoral process and the overall health of democracy in Nigeria.

The FPTP system can complicate political accountability. In a system where multiple parties compete in single-member districts, winning candidates may feel less compelled to be responsive to the broader electorate once in office, particularly if they secure victory through a plurality rather than a majority (Fukuyama, 2013). This dynamic can foster a culture of impunity, where elected officials prioritize party loyalty over constituency needs. Moreover, the focus on winning individual constituencies may lead to neglect of national issues, as elected representatives may prioritize local patronage over broader policy considerations. As Omotola (2010) notes, this can result in fragmented governance, where the national agenda is overshadowed by local interests.

The findings reveal that the FPTP system is associated with various electoral malpractices in Nigeria, including vote-buying, intimidation, and violence. The high stakes involved in winning single-member districts often lead to unscrupulous tactics by candidates (Uchendu, 2020). Reports from the 2019 elections documented widespread allegations of vote-buying and coercion, undermining the integrity of the electoral process (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The competitive nature of FPTP can create a hostile environment where political actors resort to violence to secure electoral victories. This was evident in the violent clashes reported during the 2019 elections, which left numerous casualties and raised significant concerns about the safety of voters and the overall electoral environment.

The Nigerian electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has attempted to address these issues through reforms and the introduction of technology to enhance transparency (INEC, 2019). However, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited in the face of entrenched political cultures that prioritize short-term gains over democratic principles.

A comparative analysis of alternative electoral systems highlights the potential benefits of proportional representation (PR) for Nigeria. Research shows that PR can facilitate more equitable representation, allowing smaller parties and minority groups to gain seats in the legislature (Blais, 2002). For instance, countries like South Africa, which utilizes a PR system, have demonstrated that such frameworks can mitigate ethnic tensions by promoting inclusivity (Mattes & Richmond, 2007). The experiences of other countries suggest that transitioning to a mixed electoral system, combining elements of both FPTP and PR, could enhance representation and accountability in Nigeria. This approach would allow for local representation while ensuring that minority voices are included in the political process.

The findings of this study indicate that while the FPTP electoral system offers certain advantages, such as simplicity and speed of results, it is not the most suitable electoral framework for Nigeria's pluralistic society. The system's propensity for disproportionate representation, ethnic polarization, voter disengagement, and electoral malpractices presents significant challenges to the integrity of Nigeria's democracy. As Nigeria continues to navigate its complex political landscape, exploring alternative electoral systems, particularly those that promote proportional representation, may provide a pathway toward a more inclusive and representative governance framework. This research underscores the need for ongoing discourse on electoral reform, emphasizing the critical importance of aligning electoral systems with the diverse realities of the Nigerian populace.

Analysis of Findings and SWOT Analysis

The examination of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system in Nigeria reveals significant insights into its effectiveness as a mechanism for governance in a pluralistic society. This section provides a detailed analysis of the findings and employs a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to encapsulate the overall assessment of FPTP in the Nigerian context.

One of the primary findings indicates that the FPTP electoral system often leads to disproportionate representation, whereby political parties can secure a majority of seats in the legislature without obtaining a majority of the popular vote (Norris, 2004). This phenomenon is particularly problematic in a diverse country like Nigeria, where ethnic groups and regional interests are pivotal in shaping political dynamics. The analysis of the 2019 elections revealed that major parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) secured a significant number of seats despite not winning an absolute majority of the votes (INEC, 2019). This disparity in representation can result in alienation among minority groups, fostering resentment and potentially leading to social unrest. Scholars such as Blais (2002) argue that such systems may reinforce majoritarianism, sidelining minority voices and undermining the legitimacy of democratic governance.

The FPTP system exacerbates ethnic polarization within Nigerian politics. The findings illustrate that candidates often appeal primarily to their ethnic bases, leading to a fragmented political landscape where identity politics takes precedence over national unity (Adebayo, 2019). This focus on ethnic identity can marginalize less represented groups and reduce the incentives for inter-ethnic collaboration, further entrenching divisions.

As indicated in the analysis, this dynamic was evident in the 2019 elections, where parties primarily mobilized support along ethnic lines. This approach undermines the potential for a cohesive national identity, making it difficult for Nigeria to build a unified political front that transcends ethnic divisions (Ibrahim, 2015).

Another critical finding is the impact of FPTP on voter behavior and engagement. The perception that votes for minor parties are "wasted" can lead to strategic voting, where individuals align with larger parties to increase the chances of their votes being meaningful (Uchendu, 2020). This phenomenon contributed to a significant decline in voter turnout in the 2019 elections, with only 35% of registered voters participating, compared to 44% in 2015 (INEC, 2019).

This disengagement reflects a broader issue within Nigeria's democratic framework, where citizens may feel disillusioned by a system that fails to adequately represent their interests. Consequently, this

lack of engagement can lead to weakened political accountability, as elected officials may feel less pressure to respond to the electorate's needs.

The findings also highlight serious concerns regarding electoral integrity in the FPTP system. The competitive nature of elections encourages practices such as vote-buying, intimidation, and violence, as candidates seek to secure victory at all costs (Uchendu, 2020). Reports from the 2019 elections documented numerous instances of electoral malpractices, raising significant concerns about the credibility of the electoral process (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

These issues not only undermine public trust in the electoral system but also contribute to a cycle of political violence that can destabilize governance and erode the foundations of democracy in Nigeria. The response from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has included measures to enhance transparency, yet the ingrained political culture remains a formidable barrier to genuine reform (INEC, 2019).

The analysis of alternative electoral systems, particularly proportional representation (PR), offers insights into potential pathways for reform. Countries like South Africa, which utilize PR, have demonstrated that such frameworks can promote inclusivity and equitable representation, helping to mitigate ethnic tensions (Mattes & Richmond, 2007). This comparison suggests that transitioning to a mixed electoral system, incorporating elements of both FPTP and PR, could enhance representation in Nigeria. Such reforms could allow for local representation while ensuring that minority voices are included in the political process.

The following SWOT analysis summarizes the findings and implications of the FPTP electoral system in Nigeria.

Strengths

- **Simplicity and Clarity:** FPTP is straightforward and easy for voters to understand. Voters simply select one candidate, making the voting process accessible (Blais, 2002).
- **Speed of Results:** The FPTP system allows for quick counting and declaration of results, contributing to political stability in the short term (Duverger, 1954).
- **Stability of Government:** In some contexts, FPTP can lead to a stable two-party system, reducing fragmentation in the legislature and facilitating governance (Fukuyama, 2013).

Weaknesses

- **Disproportionate Representation:** As discussed, FPTP often fails to reflect the actual voting preferences of the electorate, leading to majority control by dominant parties at the expense of minority voices (Norris, 2004).
- **Ethnic Polarization:** The system fosters identity politics, where political affiliations are primarily based on ethnic lines, undermining national unity (Adebayo, 2019).
- **Voter Disengagement:** The perception of wasted votes leads to strategic voting and decreased voter turnout, weakening the democratic process (Uchendu, 2020).
- **Electoral Malpractices:** FPTP contributes to an environment conducive to electoral fraud and violence, eroding trust in democratic institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Opportunities

- **Electoral Reform:** There is significant potential for reforming the electoral system to incorporate elements of proportional representation, which could enhance inclusivity and representation for minority groups (Lijphart, 1999).
- **Public Awareness and Engagement:** Increasing civic education and public awareness about the electoral process can empower citizens to demand accountability and actively participate in elections (Omotola, 2010).
- **International Support:** Nigeria can benefit from the experience and support of international organizations in implementing electoral reforms and enhancing democratic governance (Mattes & Richmond, 2007).

Threats

- **Political Instability:** Continued reliance on FPTP may exacerbate existing ethnic tensions and lead to political violence, threatening the stability of governance in Nigeria (Uchendu, 2020).
- **Resistance to Change:** Established political elites may resist reforms that threaten their power, creating barriers to necessary electoral changes (Ibrahim, 2015).
- **Economic Challenges:** Broader economic issues, such as unemployment and poverty, can distract from electoral reforms and lead to disillusionment with the political process (Fukuyama, 2013).

The analysis of findings and the SWOT analysis underscore the complexities and challenges associated with the FPTP electoral system in Nigeria. While the system offers certain advantages, its weaknesses—particularly in terms of representation, ethnic polarization, and electoral integrity—raise critical questions about its suitability for a pluralistic society. As Nigeria navigates its diverse political landscape, the potential for electoral reform presents an opportunity for enhanced governance and representation. Exploring alternative systems, particularly those that promote proportional representation, could pave the way for a more inclusive and resilient democratic framework, ultimately contributing to national cohesion and stability.

Implications for Research and Practice

The examination of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system in Nigeria reveals critical insights that have significant implications for both future research and practical applications within the country's electoral framework. Understanding the limitations and challenges associated with FPTP is essential for addressing issues of representation, governance, and civic engagement in Nigeria's pluralistic society. This section outlines the implications for research and practice based on the findings of this study.

Implications for Research

The findings from this research underscore the necessity for comprehensive studies that evaluate the effectiveness of various electoral systems in Nigeria. While this study focused on FPTP, future research should explore other systems, such as proportional representation (PR) or mixed electoral systems, to assess their potential benefits for enhancing representation and reducing ethnic polarization.

Suggested Areas for Further Research:

- Comparative studies between FPTP and PR systems in similar multi-ethnic societies.
- Longitudinal studies analyzing the impact of electoral reforms on voter engagement and representation.
- Investigations into the socio-political implications of electoral malpractices within the context of FPTP.

The insights gathered from the analysis indicate a pressing need for research focused on electoral reforms in Nigeria. Future studies could explore:

- The feasibility and potential impact of transitioning to a mixed electoral system.
- Best practices from other countries that have undergone electoral reforms and their applicability to Nigeria.
- The role of civil society and international organizations in advocating for and implementing electoral reforms.

The role of ethnic identity in Nigerian politics presents a fertile area for further investigation. Research should delve into:

- The dynamics of identity politics and its influence on electoral outcomes.
- The ways in which electoral systems can mitigate or exacerbate ethnic divisions.
- Strategies for promoting inter-ethnic coalitions and collaborative governance.

Given the findings on voter disengagement and strategic voting, future research should focus on understanding voter behavior in the context of FPTP. This can include:

- Surveys and qualitative studies to assess public perceptions of the electoral system and its impact on participation.
- Studies on the effectiveness of civic education initiatives aimed at increasing voter engagement.
- Investigations into the motivations behind strategic voting and its implications for electoral outcomes.

The role of technology in enhancing electoral integrity and transparency is another vital area for future research. Potential studies could examine:

- The effectiveness of electronic voting systems in improving the accuracy and security of elections.
- The impact of social media on voter mobilization and engagement, particularly among youth.
- Innovations in electoral monitoring and reporting mechanisms to reduce electoral fraud.

Implications for Practice

The research findings indicate that the FPTP system may not be the most suitable for Nigeria's diverse society. Practitioners in the field of political science, governance, and civil society organizations should advocate for comprehensive electoral reforms. This includes:

- Engaging stakeholders across the political spectrum to discuss potential reforms and gather input from various ethnic groups.
- Proposing pilot projects to test mixed electoral systems in specific regions before a nationwide implementation.

The effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is crucial for ensuring fair and transparent elections. Recommendations for practice include:

- Enhancing INEC's capacity through training and resource allocation to better handle the complexities of administering elections in a pluralistic society.
- Establishing independent oversight bodies to monitor electoral processes and ensure accountability.

To combat voter disengagement and increase participation, civil society organizations, political parties, and government agencies should implement robust voter education campaigns. These initiatives could include:

- Workshops and community forums aimed at educating voters about the electoral process, their rights, and the importance of participation.
- Leveraging technology and social media platforms to reach younger demographics and inform them about upcoming elections and their significance.

The findings highlight the prevalence of electoral violence and malpractices as significant barriers to fair elections. Practitioners should focus on:

- Implementing measures to enhance security during elections, including collaboration with law enforcement to prevent violence.
- Establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing electoral malpractices, with protections for whistleblowers to encourage transparency.

Strengthening political accountability is crucial for building public trust in the electoral process. Practitioners can promote accountability by:

- Encouraging political parties to adopt transparent practices and accountability measures.
- Supporting initiatives that facilitate citizen engagement in monitoring elected officials' performance and advocating for responsiveness to constituents' needs.

Collaboration with international organizations can provide valuable resources and expertise in implementing electoral reforms. Practitioners should consider:

- Partnering with organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union to access best practices and frameworks for electoral integrity.
- Seeking technical assistance in developing strategies to enhance electoral processes and foster democratic governance.

The implications for research and practice derived from this study on the suitability of the FPTP electoral system for Nigeria highlight critical areas for further exploration and intervention. Addressing the challenges posed by FPTP, particularly in terms of representation, ethnic polarization, and electoral integrity, requires a multifaceted approach that includes both scholarly inquiry and practical action. By focusing on these implications, stakeholders can work towards a more inclusive, representative, and resilient democratic framework in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In considering whether the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system is suitable for Nigeria, a country marked by remarkable ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, this paper has elucidated several critical issues. The FPTP system, while straightforward and easy to implement, presents significant challenges in representing the pluralistic nature of Nigeria effectively. It is imperative to acknowledge these challenges to foster a political framework that genuinely reflects the nation's rich diversity and enhances democratic governance.

One of the most salient findings from this research is that FPTP tends to create a winner-takes-all scenario, effectively marginalizing minority groups and voices within the political sphere. In Nigeria, where ethnic affiliations play a crucial role in political identity, the embrace of FPTP can exacerbate feelings of disenfranchisement among various ethnic communities. The frequent sidelining of these minority interests can lead to political instability, tensions, and, in extreme cases, violence, undermining Nigeria's democratic processes. Therefore, an electoral system that fails to offer equitable representation is unlikely to foster political harmony or long-term stability.

Moreover, the concentration of power in a few dominant parties under the FPTP system can stifle competition and discourage political plurality. The incentive for parties is often to coalesce into larger blocs that can secure a majority, which may neglect many underrepresented groups and their needs. This results in a political landscape where small parties, especially those that represent minority interests or regional concerns, struggle to gain traction. The limited competitive atmosphere also stifles innovation within political discourse, as parties may lean towards populism to capture the majority vote, often at the expense of substantive policy discussions and governance issues.

Additionally, this paper emphasizes the need for an electoral system that promotes accountability and responsiveness to the electorate. The FPTP system's tendency to produce disproportionate legislative representation can lead to a disconnect between constituents and their elected representatives, as many citizens may feel their votes do not meaningfully influence the outcome. This disconnection is particularly pronounced in environments where voter apathy is prevalent, as individuals perceive that their engagement in the electoral process does not impact governance. An electoral framework that fails to resonate with the public undermines the foundational tenets of democracy, leading to widespread disillusionment.

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear that Nigeria requires an electoral system that can accommodate its diverse populace while ensuring fair representation and inclusivity. The research suggests that moving away from the FPTP system toward more proportionate alternatives, such as Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) systems or a fully Proportional Representation (PR) system, could enhance electoral fairness and facilitate a more inclusive political environment. These systems allocate seats in a manner that reflects the overall votes received by parties, ensuring that minority voices are given representation proportional to their support within the electorate.

Equally important is the establishment of clear electoral mechanisms aimed at enhancing transparency, reducing electoral malpractices, and boosting public confidence in the democratic process. Reforms

should also encompass comprehensive voter education initiatives, focusing on the importance of participation and the impact of electoral choices. Engaging the populace in discussions surrounding electoral reforms can foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the democratic process, encouraging broader participation in future electoral cycles.

To this end, a collaborative approach is essential: involving policymakers, civil society organizations, political parties, and the electorate in the ongoing discourse about Nigeria's electoral system. Such collaboration can help navigate the complexities involved in transitioning to a more suitable electoral framework that reconciles the need for effective governance with the imperative of equitable representation.

While the FPTP system may have some advantages, such as simplicity and ease of understanding, its limitations in addressing the needs of a pluralistic society like Nigeria outweigh these benefits. The entrenched divisions and historical grievances within Nigeria call for an electoral system that goes beyond the simplistic binary outcome of FPTP. Instead, it is crucial to adopt a model that recognizes and accommodates the country's diverse demographic and cultural landscape. Enhancing representational integrity, promoting political inclusivity, and fortifying democratic principles should be paramount objectives of any electoral reform initiative in Nigeria. As Nigeria continues to navigate its complex political landscape, embracing an electoral system designed to reflect its pluralistic nature will be indispensable in ensuring lasting peace, stability, and democratic progress.

The Way Forward

As Nigeria grapples with the challenges of effectively governing a diverse and pluralistic society, it is imperative to reevaluate the electoral system that underpins its democratic framework. The analysis presented in this paper has highlighted significant concerns surrounding the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, especially its inadequacy in representing the intricate mosaic of Nigeria's ethnic, cultural, and political landscapes. To pave the way forward for a more inclusive and effective electoral process, Nigeria must consider the adoption of alternative electoral systems, enhance electoral governance, and foster political engagement within its populace.

One of the primary recommendations for moving forward is to adopt a more proportional electoral system that recognizes and accommodates the diverse demographic profiles within Nigeria. Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) systems or forms of Proportional Representation (PR) could offer significant advantages over FPTP. MMP, for instance, allows voters to cast two votes: one for a candidate in their local area and another for a political party. This dual voting approach not only maintains the connection between constituents and their representatives but also ensures that the overall composition of the legislature reflects the proportion of votes received by each party.

Implementing a proportional system would help address the historical marginalization of minority groups and smaller political parties, allowing them to gain representation relative to their actual electoral support. This change could lead to a more representative government that better reflects the pluralism of Nigeria's society. Additionally, it would encourage a more vibrant political discourse, as multiple viewpoints and voices could access the parliamentary platform, leading to richer debates and more comprehensive policy-making.

To support the successful implementation of any new electoral system, there must also be substantial improvements in Nigeria's electoral governance structures. This includes reforms aimed at enhancing the independence, transparency, and efficiency of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Strengthening INEC is vital for ensuring that electoral management is impartial and free from political interference. Proposals include appointing commission members through a transparent and merit-based process, as well as ensuring consistent funding to facilitate the commission's operations.

Moreover, investing in technology for voter registration, voting, and counting processes can enhance transparency and efficiency. Electronic voting systems, for example, could reduce the potential for fraud and improve the accuracy of results announced. The adoption of technology must be coupled with

robust cybersecurity measures to safeguard electoral data, further enhancing public trust in the electoral process.

A comprehensive review of electoral laws and regulations should also be undertaken to align them more closely with best practices for democratic governance. This would involve scrutinizing laws dealing with campaign financing, political party registration, and electoral disputes, ensuring they promote fairness and competition.

Equally crucial in moving forward is enhancing public understanding of the electoral system and promoting active civic engagement. Many Nigerians may not fully grasp the implications of electoral systems on their representation and governance. Therefore, targeted voter education campaigns are essential to inform citizens about alternative electoral systems and their benefits. Such campaigns should be carried out through various media, local community forums, and civil society organizations, focusing on the importance of participating in the democratic process and making informed electoral choices.

Encouraging youth participation in politics and electoral processes is particularly vital. Initiatives that engage younger generations can foster a new culture of civic responsibility and political involvement. Programs aimed at developing leadership skills among youth and encouraging their participation in political discussions and activities will help build a more engaged electorate. This could be achieved through partnerships between educational institutions, civil society, and governmental bodies.

The process of reforming Nigeria's electoral system should be inclusive, engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including politicians, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and the electorate. Any proposed changes must be rooted in consensus-building, ensuring that diverse voices and opinions are considered in the design of a new electoral framework. Holding public consultations and forums, where stakeholders can air their views and experiences, would contribute to a more democratic and participatory reform process.

Furthermore, engaging in cross-national dialogues with countries that have successfully navigated similar electoral reform processes can serve as valuable learning opportunities. Analyzing their experiences and adopted best practices can provide insights and help Nigeria avoid common pitfalls.

In the quest for a more representative and effective electoral framework, Nigeria stands at a pivotal juncture. Moving away from the First-Past-The-Post system to adopt more inclusive electoral models would not only enhance representation for minority and marginalized groups but also foster a culture of democracy built on diversity and accountability. Strengthening the institutions that manage elections, promoting voter education, and engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue are all crucial steps in this transformative journey.

By embracing these recommendations, Nigeria can work towards a political landscape that champions inclusivity, responds to the needs of its diverse population, and ultimately strengthens its democratic institutions for the future. Through collective effort and commitment to meaningful reforms, Nigeria has the potential to realize the promise of a democratic system that reflects the aspirations and realities of all its citizens. The path forward requires courage, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of equity and justice in governance.

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