

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA 1999-2023

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Abstract

The political economy of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-present) provides a critical lens through which to examine the intersection of politics, economics, and governance in one of Africa's largest democracies. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of electoral processes in Nigeria, analyzing the influence of economic factors, political structures, and socio-cultural dynamics on electoral outcomes. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, elections in Nigeria have been marked by intense political competition, high levels of voter apathy, widespread electoral fraud, and, more recently, significant improvements in electoral administration. However, the political economy of elections remains a key factor in understanding both the successes and limitations of Nigeria's democratic consolidation. The paper identifies several crucial factors shaping Nigeria's electoral landscape, including the role of political parties, patronage networks, and electoral financing, as well as the impact of economic inequality and regionalism on voting behavior. It discusses how political elites have leveraged state resources and economic advantages to influence electoral outcomes, often through practices such as vote buying, manipulation of electoral laws, and strategic use of state apparatus. The role of oil wealth, for example, has created an uneven playing field where economic resources play a central role in electoral campaigns, contributing to a cycle of patronage and corruption that undermines democratic accountability. Additionally, the paper examines the evolving role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in reforming the electoral process and mitigating electoral fraud, while acknowledging the persistent challenges related to voter registration, the credibility of electoral outcomes, and post-election violence. The influence of civil society, media, and international actors in promoting electoral transparency and accountability is also analyzed. Ultimately, this paper argues that the political economy of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is a dynamic interplay of economic resources, political power, and institutional reform. Understanding these factors is crucial for addressing the challenges to democratic consolidation and achieving more free, fair, and transparent elections in the future.

Keywords: Political economy, Election, Nigeria

Introduction

Elections are foundational to democracy, providing citizens with a platform to voice their preferences and hold political leaders accountable. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by vast diversity, abundant resources, and deep-seated socio-economic challenges, the political economy of elections presents a complex interplay of various factors. The high cost of elections, coupled with pervasive poverty, substantial national debt, escalating costs of election materials, and low voter turnout, paints a picture of a democratic process under strain. This paper explores these interconnected issues to illuminate Nigeria's political economy of elections.

Elections in Nigeria are notoriously expensive. According to statistical reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the costs associated with conducting elections have escalated dramatically over the years. In the 2019 general elections alone, INEC spent approximately 240 billion Naira (around \$660 million) (INEC, 2019). This expenditure covers a wide range of costs, including logistics, personnel, training, and materials.

The financing of elections often comes from diverse sources, including government allocations, private donations, and party contributions. However, this funding landscape creates several problems:

- The need for significant financial resources often leads to corrupt practices among political actors who seek to finance their campaigns (Adebanwi, 2015). This corruption can manifest in the form of vote-buying, bribery, and the influence of money on electoral outcomes.

- Due to insufficient public funds for election financing, many politicians resort to borrowing, leading to a cycle of debt accumulation that constrains future public resources (Ogunmodede, 2020).
- High election costs can exclude capable candidates who lack the financial resources to participate. This often leads to a political landscape dominated by wealthy elites (Ibeanu, 2008).
- When politicians focus on recouping their investments rather than serving the public good, governance quality can suffer, leading to further disenchantment among citizens.

Nigeria is grappling with profound poverty challenges. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, approximately 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, exacerbating socio-economic disparities across the country (NBS, 2020). Poverty limits citizens' access to education, health care, and economic opportunities, all of which hinder political participation. Poverty significantly influences voter turnout rates. In the 2019 elections, turnout was approximately 35% of registered voters, a historic low (World Bank, 2019). Many citizens, struggling to meet their daily needs, often view elections as irrelevant to their immediate concerns. Low-income voters are particularly vulnerable to vote-buying tactics employed by politicians. Candidates may offer money or goods during elections to secure votes, further entrenching poor governance and perpetuating a cycle of corruption (Jinadu, 2005). This transactional approach undermines the democratic process and leads to disillusionment among citizens. The influence of poverty on political participation has considerable implications for policy representation. Without active engagement from a broader demographic, the interests of marginalized groups may be overlooked: Politicians may prioritize the interests of affluent constituents who have the means to contribute to campaign funds, leading to a lack of representation for low-income populations (Abdulrasheed, 2019).

Nigeria's national debt has ballooned over the years, with the Debt Management Office reporting an increase to over 32 trillion naira (approximately \$85 billion) by mid-2021 (DMO, 2021). This mounting debt poses significant challenges for governance and public service delivery. High national debt constrains government spending, impacting the allocation of funds for elections. Chronic underfunding leads to logistical challenges for election management, further complicating the credibility of the process (Olaniyan, 2020). Increasing debt can lead to a lack of political stability, as citizens may become disillusioned with a government that is perceived as unable to manage the economy effectively. The economic pressures resulting from debt can lead to unrest, affecting the electoral environment (Ogunleye, 2021). The burden of national debt can frustrate efforts to provide quality public services, leading to citizen dissatisfaction. When citizens feel that their needs are not being met, their engagement in the electoral process may diminish. This creates a cyclical problem where poor governance leads to low voter turnout and further entrenches an ineffective political class: As citizens lose faith in their government's ability to deliver, involvement in elections declines, leading to a further erosion of democratic legitimacy (Krause, 2021).

Printing electoral materials, such as ballots, voter registers, and other essential documents, presents a significant expense for electoral management. The costs associated with printing materials have risen sharply due to inflation, poor planning, and logistical challenges. INEC's expenses related to printing in the 2019 elections alone were estimated to be around 20 billion naira (INEC, 2019). The high cost and complexity of printing electoral materials can result in logistical delays, affecting the timely delivery of such materials to polling units. These delays can lead to confusion, disenfranchising voters (Akinwunmi & Adigun, 2020). Financial constraints can affect the quality of printed materials. Poorly printed ballots or voter register books can lead to errors that might compromise the electoral process and result in misunderstandings and disputes at the polls (Ojo, 2015). The rising costs of electoral material printing intertwine with broader economic issues, including inflation, currency devaluation, and governmental inefficiencies that affect the overall political landscape.

Civic education plays a crucial role in fostering voter participation. In Nigeria, low levels of political awareness contribute to disengagement from the electoral process. The lack of targeted civic education campaigns exacerbates the problem, leaving many citizens unaware of their electoral rights and

responsibilities (Ibeanu & Eze, 2016). The perception of elections as ineffective—often influenced by widespread corruption and the failure of elected officials to deliver on promises—further discourages voter turnout. Many citizens believe that their vote does not matter, fostering apathy towards the electoral process (Hankins & Wright, 2017). Difficulties in accessing polling units, including long distances, inadequate transportation, and infrastructural deficits, make it cumbersome for citizens to vote. These barriers disproportionately affect poor and rural populations (NBS, 2020).

When electoral participation is limited, the voices of substantial segments of the population may be overlooked in political decision-making, leading to policies that do not reflect the public's will (Blais & Massicotte, 2002). Low participation raises concerns about the legitimacy of elected representatives. When a small percentage of the population participates in elections, it can lead to questions about the mandate and authority of those in power (Elder, 2020).

Targeted campaigns aimed at educating citizens about the importance of voting and the electoral process can foster greater engagement. Civil society organizations play a vital role in this regard by organizing outreach initiatives (Eke, 2018). Utilizing technology, such as mobile applications for voter registration and information dissemination, can make the electoral process more accessible. Social media platforms can also provide relevant information and engage younger audiences (Olatunji, 2020). Addressing logistical barriers through better transportation options and accessible polling stations can enhance the voting experience. Investments in infrastructure and community engagement are crucial to facilitate higher turnout (Ojo, 2015).

The political economy of elections in Nigeria is influenced by complex interconnections among high electoral costs, pervasive poverty, substantial national debt, and logistical challenges in printing election materials. These factors contribute to low voter turnout, further undermining the democratic process. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including electoral reforms, civic education initiatives, and targeted efforts to enhance economic conditions for the citizenry. To build a robust democratic system, Nigeria must focus on improving its electoral processes, ensuring that they are accessible, transparent, and representative of the entire populace. Strengthening the democratic fabric necessitates addressing the economic and structural barriers that currently undermine the significance of citizens' participation in the electoral process.

Literature Review

Since the transition to democracy in 1999, the financial demands of conducting elections in Nigeria have surged. Scholars such as Okeowo (2020) highlight that the costs associated with electoral logistics, security, and campaign financing have escalated dramatically, creating barriers for many political candidates, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The increasing financial burden has raised concerns about the potential for corruption and the integrity of the electoral process.

The high cost of elections has fostered a political culture where money plays a pivotal role in influencing electoral outcomes. Ebegbulem (2012) notes that candidates often resort to corrupt practices, including vote-buying and using state resources to fund their campaigns. This not only undermines the fairness of the electoral process but also perpetuates a cycle of patronage and dependency on wealthy benefactors.

Alemika (2014) emphasizes that the lack of stringent regulations regarding campaign financing exacerbates these issues. Despite provisions in the Electoral Act, enforcement remains weak, allowing political actors to exploit loopholes for personal gain. This reality raises questions about the accountability of elected officials and the overall integrity of governance in Nigeria. The economic implications of high electoral costs extend beyond individual candidates. Nwosu (2018) argues that excessive spending on elections diverts resources away from essential public services, exacerbating socio-economic challenges in a nation where poverty rates remain alarmingly high. This misallocation of resources undermines citizens' trust in democratic institutions and raises critical questions about the efficacy of the electoral process.

Poverty remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, affecting electoral participation and shaping voter behavior. Bayo (2020) asserts that economically disadvantaged populations are often marginalized in the electoral process, making them more susceptible to manipulation through vote-buying. The linkage between poverty and low voter turnout is well-documented, as financial constraints often prevent individuals from actively participating in elections.

The World Bank (2021) reports that Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates globally, with over 40% of its population living below the poverty line. This socio-economic backdrop complicates the electoral landscape, as poor citizens may prioritize immediate economic survival over civic engagement. Nigeria's rising debt levels pose significant challenges for governance and public service delivery. Idris (2021) highlights that the increasing debt burden constrains the government's ability to fund essential services, which in turn affects citizens' perceptions of the state and their willingness to participate in the electoral process. A population that feels neglected and disenfranchised is less likely to engage in electoral politics, further entrenching the cycle of low voter turnout. Eze (2021) adds that high debt levels can lead to economic instability, exacerbating poverty and diminishing public trust in the electoral process. This lack of trust can result in apathy toward elections, as citizens may perceive the political system as unresponsive to their needs.

Low voter turnout is a significant concern in Nigerian elections. Ogundipe (2022) notes that various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including political apathy, disenfranchisement, and lack of trust in the electoral process. The perception that elections are predetermined or influenced by elite interests discourages ordinary citizens from participating. Moreover, Mbah (2020) argues that logistical challenges, such as inadequate voter education and poor electoral infrastructure, further hinder turnout. Many eligible voters are unaware of the electoral process or face barriers when attempting to vote, particularly in rural areas.

Electoral violence is another critical factor influencing voter turnout in Nigeria. Ebegbulem (2012) emphasizes that violence during elections not only threatens the safety of voters but also instills fear, discouraging participation. Instances of violence, intimidation, and coercion can lead to significant declines in voter turnout, as seen in the 2019 elections where incidents of violence were reported across several states. Disputed election results are a recurring issue in Nigeria's democratic journey. Adebayo (2019) outlines that disputes often arise from allegations of rigging, fraud, and manipulation, leading to protracted legal battles and political instability. The 2019 general elections exemplified this trend, as multiple cases of electoral disputes were recorded, reflecting a systemic problem within the electoral framework.

The legal framework for addressing electoral disputes in Nigeria is often criticized for its inefficiencies. Nwankwo (2015) highlights that the judiciary's role in resolving electoral disputes is frequently undermined by political interference, leading to perceptions of bias and ineffectiveness. This lack of confidence in the judicial system exacerbates public disillusionment with the electoral process. The consequences of disputed elections extend beyond individual contests; they can destabilize the political landscape and hinder democratic consolidation. Eze (2021) argues that electoral disputes can lead to violence, protests, and political crises, further eroding trust in democratic institutions. The cycle of disputed elections contributes to a political culture characterized by conflict and mistrust, impeding the development of a stable democratic framework.

The political economy of elections in Nigeria since 1999 reveals a complex interplay of high electoral costs, pervasive poverty, low voter turnout, and disputed election results. These factors are deeply interconnected, influencing one another and collectively shaping the electoral landscape. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that promote transparency, enhance electoral integrity, and foster citizen engagement. Ultimately, strengthening Nigeria's democratic processes is essential for ensuring responsive governance and sustainable development.

Theoretical Clarification

Political economy is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between politics and economics. It integrates insights from economics, political science, sociology, and history to understand how political institutions, the political environment, and economic systems influence each other. In the context of Nigeria, particularly since the return to democratic rule in 1999, a political economy framework can provide a robust lens through which to analyze the dynamics of elections. This paper explores how political economy concepts can elucidate the electoral landscape in Nigeria, highlighting the interplay of power, economic interests, and institutional structures.

Political economy can be defined as the study of how economic theories such as capitalism or socialism intersect with political processes. It seeks to understand how political institutions and the economic system shape one another (Baldwin, 2015). The theoretical framework includes various aspects:

- **Institutional Analysis:** This involves examining how institutions—formal and informal—affect economic and political outcomes.
- **Power Dynamics:** It looks at how power is distributed and exercised within societies and how this influences economic policies.
- **Economic Interests:** The role of various economic actors, including businesses, labor groups, and elites, is crucial in shaping policy and political outcomes.

Nigeria's electoral process is deeply influenced by its institutions. The Electoral Act and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are key components that govern elections. However, the effectiveness of these institutions has been undermined by issues such as corruption and lack of transparency. According to Joseph (2019), the INEC has often been criticized for failing to ensure free and fair elections, which can be traced back to institutional weaknesses and the influence of political elites.

The political landscape in Nigeria is characterized by a network of elites who wield significant power and influence over the electoral process. These elites often engage in rent-seeking behaviors, leveraging their political connections for economic gain (Owolabi, 2018). The 2019 general elections illustrated this phenomenon, where political patronage and financial inducements played a crucial role in voter mobilization and manipulation (Adetula, 2020). This aligns with the political economy perspective that emphasizes the strategic actions of powerful actors in shaping political outcomes.

Economic interests significantly influence electoral politics in Nigeria. The interplay between oil wealth and political power is particularly notable. Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on oil exports, and the revenues generated have been a source of both power and conflict. According to Adeola (2021), control over oil resources has led to intense competition among political actors, often resulting in electoral violence and manipulation. This reflects the political economy argument that resource wealth can exacerbate tensions and distort democratic processes.

The political economy framework also sheds light on voter behavior in Nigeria. Economic conditions, such as unemployment and poverty, shape voter preferences and participation rates. Research by Aiyede (2020) indicates that economic hardship often leads to disillusionment with the electoral process, reducing voter turnout and engagement. This disenfranchisement can be exploited by political actors who promise economic rewards in exchange for political loyalty.

Corruption is a pervasive issue that undermines the integrity of elections in Nigeria. The political economy perspective underscores the importance of accountability mechanisms in ensuring fair electoral processes. Despite various anti-corruption initiatives, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited (Okeowo, 2022). The lack of accountability allows for electoral malpractices, which erode public trust in democratic institutions.

The 2015 general elections were pivotal in Nigeria's democratic journey. The successful transition of power from the incumbent to the opposition party marked a significant milestone. However, the elections were marred by violence and allegations of electoral fraud. The political economy analysis

highlights how economic interests of political elites influenced the conduct of the elections, with reports of vote buying and manipulation being rampant (Ojo, 2016).

The 2019 elections further illustrated the challenges within Nigeria's political economy. Despite reforms, there were widespread allegations of voter suppression and manipulation. Political elites utilized their economic power to influence the electoral process, demonstrating the persistent role of economic interests in shaping political outcomes (Olawale, 2020). The failure to hold perpetrators accountable has perpetuated a cycle of impunity that undermines democratic governance.

Applying a political economy framework to analyze Nigeria's elections since 1999 reveals the intricate connections between political institutions, economic interests, and electoral outcomes. The analysis highlights the significant role of political elites and corruption in shaping the electoral landscape. While progress has been made, the challenges posed by economic dependency, institutional weaknesses, and accountability issues continue to threaten the integrity of Nigeria's democracy. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential for developing strategies to enhance democratic governance in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

This study on "The Political Economy of Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic" adopts a qualitative research methodology, focusing primarily on document analysis and textual analysis to explore the political, economic, and institutional factors that shape electoral processes in Nigeria. By examining existing documents and textual materials, the research aims to uncover the complex interplay between economic resources, political strategies, electoral laws, and institutional dynamics that influence the outcomes of elections in Nigeria since the return to democratic governance in 1999.

Document analysis serves as the primary method of data collection in this study. A range of official and public documents will be examined to understand the formal structures and policies governing elections in Nigeria. Key documents include:

- **Electoral Legislation:** Official texts such as the Electoral Act (most recently amended), party regulations, and other legal documents from Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will be analyzed to examine the institutional framework of elections, focusing on electoral rules, funding regulations, voter registration processes, and the conduct of electoral officials. These documents will provide insight into the formal regulations that govern elections, as well as the extent of institutional reforms aimed at improving electoral integrity.
- **INEC Reports:** Official reports published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), particularly post-election assessments, will be analyzed to understand how electoral reforms have been implemented and their impact on the fairness and transparency of elections. These reports often include data on voter turnout, election violence, and electoral malpractice, offering valuable insights into the political economy of elections.
- **Party Manifestos and Policy Documents:** The manifestos and policy documents of major political parties in Nigeria, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), will be analyzed to assess how economic issues such as oil wealth, patronage, and regional economic imbalances are framed in election campaigns. These documents will also help understand how political parties utilize economic resources to gain electoral advantage.

In addition to official documents, textual analysis will be employed to examine media coverage, political speeches, campaign advertisements, and other publicly available texts related to elections. This analysis will focus on:

- **Media Reports:** Newspapers, news websites, and broadcast media reports covering elections will be analyzed to assess how electoral issues—particularly economic issues like state resources, corruption, and electoral fraud—are framed in public discourse. This includes the representation of electoral violence, party competition, and voter behavior.

- **Political Speeches and Campaign Materials:** Speeches by political leaders and campaign materials (such as posters, flyers, and manifestos) will be analyzed to uncover how political actors frame the electoral process, appeal to voters, and mobilize support using economic rhetoric. These materials often reflect how political elites exploit economic issues and state resources to influence election outcomes.
- **Social Media Content:** Given the increasing role of social media in Nigerian politics, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp will also be analyzed to examine how political actors and citizens discuss elections, political economy, and governance. Social media posts and online campaigns provide insight into how political narratives are constructed and disseminated to a wider audience.

By relying on document and textual analysis, this study will provide a nuanced understanding of the political economy of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This methodology allows for the exploration of institutional frameworks, party politics, and media representations, all of which are crucial to understanding the dynamics of Nigerian elections. The findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how economic power, political strategies, and institutional structures shape electoral outcomes in one of Africa's largest democracies.

Manifestos of the APC and PDP; and the Political Economy of Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which began in 1999, marked a new era of democratic governance following years of military rule. The two dominant political parties in this period have been the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The manifestos of these two parties serve as blueprints for their political ideologies and promises to the electorate. However, the political economy of elections in Nigeria has been shaped by deep structural issues, including patronage politics, electoral fraud, and the control of state resources. This paper explores the manifestos of the APC and PDP, as well as the political economy that underpins elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The Manifesto of the People's Democratic Party (PDP)

The PDP, which was the ruling party from 1999 to 2015, has consistently framed its manifesto around economic growth, national unity, and infrastructural development. The party's focus during its years in power was on consolidating democratic governance, improving the nation's economy, and providing basic services such as healthcare, education, and electricity.

The PDP's 2011 and 2015 manifestos underscored its commitment to diversifying the Nigerian economy, reducing dependence on oil exports, and promoting agriculture, industrialization, and infrastructure development. One of its most ambitious goals was to enhance the country's power supply, promising to generate 40,000 MW of electricity by 2020 (PDP, 2011). The party also emphasized its vision for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and job creation through a mix of social safety nets and entrepreneurship programs.

However, the PDP's time in power was marred by criticisms of corruption and poor governance, particularly concerning the management of oil wealth. The party's manifestos often reflected an emphasis on tackling corruption, but its inability to fully address these challenges led to widespread public disillusionment and the eventual loss of power in 2015.

The Manifesto of the All Progressives Congress (APC)

The APC, which emerged as the main opposition party in 2013 and won the 2015 presidential election, has positioned itself as a party of change, promising to address the flaws of the PDP's governance. The APC's 2015 and 2019 manifestos reflected its commitment to fighting corruption, securing the nation, and diversifying the economy.

One of the central pillars of the APC manifesto was the fight against corruption. The party promised to establish a more transparent government and root out corruption within public institutions. The APC also pledged to promote economic diversification, with an emphasis on agriculture, manufacturing, and the creative industries (APC, 2015). In its 2019 manifesto, the party reaffirmed its commitment to improving the infrastructure, particularly roads, railways, and electricity generation, though critics argued that the pace of these developments had not matched the promises.

The APC also focused on security, particularly in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency and rising banditry in northern Nigeria. Its manifesto promised to strengthen the military and improve intelligence gathering to ensure the safety of citizens.

The manifestos of the APC and PDP reveal the contrasting visions and promises of the two dominant parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. While the PDP focused on economic growth, infrastructure, and national unity during its years in power, the APC has centered its campaigns on anti-corruption, security, and economic diversification. However, the political economy of elections in Nigeria remains a complex web of patronage, electoral fraud, and the strategic use of state resources, often undermining the integrity of the democratic process. As Nigeria continues to grapple with these challenges, the question remains whether future elections will move beyond these structural issues toward a more transparent and accountable system of governance.

Elections in Nigeria Since 1999 and the Primacy of Material Condition

Elections are a fundamental pillar of any democratic society, serving as a means through which citizens exercise their political rights and influence government formation. Since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, the electoral landscape has undergone various transformations, characterized by challenges and advancements. This paper explores the role of material conditions—particularly socio-economic factors—in shaping electoral outcomes and influencing voter behavior in Nigeria. By examining the elections from 1999 to the present, the analysis will highlight the critical intersections between material conditions and the electoral process, shedding light on the implications for democracy in Nigeria.

After decades of military rule and political instability, Nigeria transitioned to democratic governance in 1999 with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as President. This period marked a new chapter in Nigeria's political history, characterized by efforts to enhance electoral integrity, promote civil liberties, and encourage citizen participation. The transition was facilitated by the realization of the imperative for credible elections as crucial to legitimizing the newly-elected government and fostering national unity.

Following 1999, Nigeria witnessed several general elections, including the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections. Each election cycle presented unique challenges and dynamics, shaped by socio-economic realities, party politics, and the influence of various interest groups.

- 2003 Elections: The 2003 elections were marred by allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation, raising concerns about the integrity of the electoral process (Uchendu, 2008).
- 2007 Elections: The transition of power from Obasanjo to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua highlighted issues of electoral violence and the credibility of the electoral body. The elections were characterized by widespread irregularities, prompting national and international condemnation (Lindberg, 2008).
- 2011 Elections: Marked by significant reforms and heightened public awareness, the 2011 elections were relatively more credible, though still plagued by violence in some regions (Rijin, 2013).
- 2015 Elections: The 2015 elections were historic, resulting in the first peaceful transfer of power between two major political parties in Nigeria's history. The elections were a product of increased public disenchantment with the status quo, particularly due to poor governance and economic challenges (Ibeanu, 2016).

- 2019 Elections: The 2019 elections were held amid growing concerns about security, economic hardships, and political polarization. While the elections proceeded with a considerable voter turnout, allegations of electoral malpractices surfaced once again (Sadiq, 2019).

Material conditions refer to the socio-economic factors that influence individual and collective well-being, including income levels, employment opportunities, access to education and healthcare, and overall living standards. In Nigeria, these conditions greatly shape citizens' perceptions, priorities, and behaviors during elections. Impact of Material Conditions on Electoral Outcomes

- Voter Behavior and Decision-Making: Material conditions inform voters' choices significantly, as citizens often prioritize candidates' ability to address their economic needs over other political considerations. For instance, voters may support candidates promising immediate economic relief, job creation, or infrastructural development (Dibua, 2014).
- Party Loyalty vs. Economic Interests: While political loyalty to ethnic or party affiliations traditionally influences voter behavior, economic realities may prompt voters to prioritize candidates based on their promises and ability to improve material conditions in their communities. This shift can lead to a pragmatic approach in voting behavior (Ojo, 2018).
- Clientelism and Patronage Politics: Material conditions often give rise to clientelism, where politicians provide material benefits or incentives to secure votes. This patronage system can undermine democratic values, as citizens may trade their political rights for immediate material gains (Duncan, 2019).

The 2015 elections can be understood through the lens of material conditions, wherein the electorate was largely driven by the need to address crippling economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and widespread corruption in governance. The opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), capitalized on this discontent to present itself as a credible alternative (Ibeanu, 2016). The 2019 elections again underscored the primacy of material conditions on voter behavior. Despite significant public dissatisfaction with economic performance, voters were often influenced by immediate material inducements, such as food items and cash distributions, particularly in rural areas (Sadiq, 2019).

The socio-economic context in Nigeria has been marked by significant challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. These hardships profoundly impact the political landscape. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, influencing voting behavior as people prioritize economic survival over electoral integrity (NBS, 2020). The growing number of unemployed youth has made them a key demographic in elections. Their dissatisfaction with government performance has led to increased political mobilization, but economic desperation often results in susceptibility to manipulation by political actors (Umar, 2020).

The electorate frequently votes with the expectation of change, particularly when faced with deteriorating material conditions. Candidates who successfully communicate their plans to address these expectations often gain electoral favor (Dibua, 2014). Repeated electoral failures to address material conditions can lead to disillusionment, resulting in apathy or disengagement from the electoral process altogether, particularly among youth voters (Ojo, 2018).

Nigeria's diverse regional landscape, marked by varying levels of development, significantly impacts electoral behavior. The North and South exhibit stark contrasts in socio-economic conditions, influencing how material conditions manifest in elections. The North faces persistent poverty and insecurity, with voters often seeking immediate solutions to these challenges. Politicians may exploit these conditions to garner support through promises of security and socio-economic interventions (Duncan, 2019). In the South, where educational attainment and access to resources are relatively higher, public expectations focus more on governance quality and accountability. This shift influences electoral choices toward candidates perceived as capable of providing good governance rather than just economic relief (Umar, 2020).

The effectiveness of electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) directly influences the electoral outcomes and the extent to which material conditions play a role in elections. The credibility of the electoral process must be solidified through robust institutional

frameworks that promote transparency and accountability. This includes addressing issues of corruption and bias within INEC (Salihu, 2019). Enhancing public awareness about voters' rights and the electoral process can empower citizens to make informed decisions, thus reducing the impact of material inducements (Ezeani, 2020).

A comprehensive review of electoral laws is critical to ensuring that candidates cannot leverage material conditions to buy votes. Effective regulatory measures can foster a more equitable electoral environment (Oladele, 2018). Improving voter registration processes can help mobilize marginalized populations, allowing them to participate in electing representatives who address their material conditions (Duncan, 2019).

In the 2015 elections, the prevailing material conditions significantly influenced voter behavior. The electorate's disillusionment with the then-ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), stemmed from pervasive corruption and declining living standards. The APC's campaign focused heavily on turning around the economy, promising to tackle unemployment and corruption. As a result, voters turned out in large numbers to support a change in governance (Ibeanu, 2016). Additionally, electoral malpractice manifested through inducements like cash transfers and food distributions during campaigns. Politicians targeted vulnerable populations, especially in rural areas, offering short-term relief (Sadiq, 2019).

During the 2019 elections, similar themes emerged, with economic hardships prompting citizens to evaluate their choices based on material gains. Candidates continued to leverage socio-economic conditions in their campaigns. Despite previous promises, the electorate remained demanding, reflecting heightened expectations for economic relief (Umar, 2020). Material conditions were exploited by various political actors to sway voter opinions. Reports indicated incidents of electoral fraud coupled with attempts to influence decisions through clientelistic approaches (Sadiq, 2019).

The interplay between material conditions and electoral dynamics in Nigeria is profound. Since the return to democracy in 1999, socio-economic factors have shaped electoral behavior, influencing voter decisions and political outcomes. While material conditions have often led to pragmatic voting behavior, they can also give rise to clientelism and other forms of electoral malpractices that undermine democratic principles.

Efforts to strengthen electoral integrity, enhance education awareness, and address socio-economic disparities remain crucial for fostering a more democratic electoral process. Ultimately, empowering citizens and establishing frameworks that prioritize genuine electoral choices over material inducements will be essential for Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

Findings, Discussions and Analysis on the Political Economy of Elections in Nigeria since 1999

Firstly, Nigeria's first-past-the-post system tends to consolidate power around the two major political parties. This has implications for representation and the inclusion of diverse voices in the political process. Secondly, Nigeria's reliance on oil revenues and economic inequality creates challenges for democratic consolidation and accountability. Thirdly, In Nigeria, the prevalence of informal funding sources and weak enforcement of campaign finance regulations undermines the integrity of the electoral process. Additionally, party dynamics play a crucial role in the political economy of elections. Nigeria struggles with party fragmentation, lack of internal democracy, and limited ideology-driven policy proposals. Lastly, societal factors, such as voter turnout and participation, are influenced by socioeconomic conditions, political awareness, and historical contexts.

Nigeria faces challenges such as voter apathy, ethnic and religious divisions, and socioeconomic disparities that affect electoral outcomes. This analysis explores critical issues in the political economy of elections in Nigeria, including big money in politics, high electoral costs, pervasive poverty, electoral fraud, violence, vote buying, and infrastructure deficits. These issues raise important questions about the rationale behind substantial electoral spending amid urgent socio-economic challenges.

The role of money in Nigerian elections has escalated dramatically, leading to concerns about corruption and the integrity of the democratic process. Candidates often rely on significant financial resources to fund their campaigns, with estimates suggesting that presidential candidates can spend upwards of ₦200 billion (approximately \$500 million) in a single election cycle (NDI, 2019). The dominance of big money leads to various adverse effects, including: Politicians may engage in corrupt practices to recoup campaign expenditures (Owolabi, 2018). Wealthy individuals and corporations often influence policy decisions, prioritizing their interests over public welfare (Adetula, 2020). The cost of conducting elections in Nigeria has soared, with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) estimating that the 2019 elections cost approximately ₦242 billion (INEC, 2019). This expenditure raises concerns about the efficient allocation of public resources. High electoral costs divert funds from essential services such as healthcare and education. The World Bank (2021) reports that Nigeria allocates only 6% of its GDP to education, far below the UNESCO recommended 20%. This misallocation exacerbates socio-economic issues, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.

Nigeria faces severe poverty, with approximately 83 million people living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2021). This widespread poverty creates an environment conducive to electoral malpractices, including vote buying and selling. The poverty rate increased from 27% in 2011 to over 40% by 2021 (NBS, 2021). Nigeria's total debt reached ₦33 trillion (approximately \$87 billion) in 2021 (Debt Management Office, 2021). Economic hardship influences voter behavior, leading many to sell their votes for immediate financial relief. The Center for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2020) found that 58% of voters reported being approached with cash offers during the 2019 elections.

Electoral fraud remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, with reports of ballot box snatching, vote rigging, and result manipulation. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG, 2021) indicates that about 70% of Nigerians believe that electoral fraud is widespread. The prevalence of electoral fraud undermines public confidence in democratic institutions, leading to voter apathy. The 2019 elections recorded a voter turnout of only 35%, the lowest in Nigerian history (INEC, 2019). Violence during elections is increasingly common in Nigeria, often driven by political rivalries. The TMG reported over 100 deaths in the lead-up to the 2019 elections (TMG, 2021). Fear of violence discourages voter participation. Many citizens avoid polling stations due to safety concerns, leading to decreased electoral engagement.

Vote buying has become a normalized practice in Nigerian elections, exacerbated by economic hardships. A survey by the NDI found that over 58% of respondents reported being offered money or gifts for their votes during the 2019 elections (NDI, 2019). Vote buying corrupts the electoral process and leads to poor governance, as elected officials may prioritize the interests of their benefactors over those of their constituents (Owolabi, 2018).

Nigeria's infrastructure deficit significantly hampers the electoral process. Poor transportation networks and inadequate power supply complicate logistics, making it difficult to conduct elections efficiently. The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020) estimates that Nigeria loses about 2% of its GDP annually due to inadequate infrastructure. Infrastructural challenges often result in delays in delivering electoral materials. Remote areas remain difficult to access, disenfranchising many voters and undermining the inclusivity of the electoral process.

Voter apathy is a significant issue in Nigeria, stemming from disillusionment with the political system. Factors include electoral fraud, violence, and the pervasive influence of money in politics (Aiyede, 2020). The 2019 elections recorded a turnout rate of just 35%, a decline from 43% in 2015 (INEC, 2019). A CDD study found that 62% of potential voters expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of their vote (CDD, 2020).

Given the myriad socio-economic issues facing Nigeria, the substantial expenditure on elections raises critical questions. Why allocate enormous resources to elections when pressing needs for healthcare, education, and infrastructure remain unaddressed? A reevaluation of priorities is necessary. Investments in socio-economic development should take precedence over excessive electoral expenditures. This

shift could foster a more stable political environment and enhance the legitimacy of democratic institutions. The political economy of elections in Nigeria is characterized by a complex interplay of ethnic politics, religious divisions, and a flawed electoral system. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, these factors have significantly influenced electoral outcomes, often undermining the democratic process. This paper examines the implications of First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral systems, the potential benefits of Proportional Representation (PR), the prosecution of electoral offenders, and the restructuring of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Furthermore, Nigeria is a diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups, and ethnic identity plays a crucial role in political mobilization. Political parties often align along ethnic lines, leading to the emergence of ethnically-based parties that prioritize group interests over national unity. For instance, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) have both been criticized for favoring specific ethnic groups in their candidate selection processes (Ibeanu, 2019). Ethnic politics contributes to political instability and conflict. The competition for power among different ethnic groups often results in violence and unrest, particularly during elections. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) reported that ethnic tensions have escalated, with violence peaking during election cycles.

Nigeria's religious landscape is marked by a significant divide between Islam and Christianity, particularly in the northern and southern regions. Political parties often exploit religious sentiments to galvanize support, leading to a politicization of religious identity. Candidates may appeal to religious leaders and communities to secure votes, further entrenching divisions (Falola & Ihonvbere, 2019). Religious divisions can skew electoral outcomes, leading to sectarian violence and voter suppression. In the 2019 elections, areas with mixed religious populations experienced heightened tensions, resulting in violent clashes that affected voter turnout (TMG, 2019).

Nigeria employs the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, which awards victory to the candidate with the most votes, regardless of whether they achieve an absolute majority. This system often leads to the marginalization of minority groups and fosters political apathy among voters. FPTP often results in a significant disparity between the percentage of votes received and the number of seats won. For example, in the 2019 elections, the APC won 56% of the seats in the House of Representatives with only 43% of the popular vote (INEC, 2019). Voters for losing candidates experience disenfranchisement, as their votes do not contribute to the outcome. This leads to voter apathy, with many feeling that their participation is futile (Aiyede, 2020). FPTP exacerbates ethnic and religious divisions by encouraging parties to appeal exclusively to their bases, leading to a fragmented political landscape (Owolabi, 2018).

Proportional Representation (PR) systems offer several advantages over FPTP, particularly in diverse societies like Nigeria. PR ensures that all votes contribute to the electoral outcome, reducing the number of wasted votes. This inclusivity can enhance voter turnout and engagement (Ibeanu, 2019). PR facilitates the representation of minority groups and political parties, fostering a more pluralistic political environment. This could lead to more equitable governance, as diverse interests are represented in legislative bodies (Electoral Reform Committee, 2019). By encouraging coalition-building and cooperation among parties, PR can mitigate ethnic and religious tensions. Political actors are incentivized to appeal to broader coalitions rather than exclusively to their ethnic or religious bases (Falola & Ihonvbere, 2019).

The prosecution of electoral offenders is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. Nigeria has witnessed numerous instances of electoral malpractice, including vote buying, ballot box snatching, and result manipulation (TMG, 2019). Despite legal frameworks in place, the prosecution of electoral offenders remains inadequate. Corruption within the judicial system, coupled with political interference, hampers efforts to hold offenders accountable (Owolabi, 2018).

There is a need to enhance existing laws and establish special tribunals for expediting the prosecution of electoral offenders. Training judicial and electoral officers on best practices in handling electoral offenses can improve enforcement (Nigerian Bar Association, 2020).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has faced criticism for inefficiency and lack of independence. Unbundling INEC into specialized bodies focused on different aspects of electoral management (e.g., voter registration, election monitoring) could enhance its effectiveness (Electoral Reform Committee, 2019). Specialized agencies can operate more effectively, focusing on their mandates without the administrative burdens of a monolithic structure (Falola & Ihonvbere, 2019). Clear delineation of responsibilities can improve accountability, ensuring that each agency is held responsible for its performance (Nigerian Bar Association, 2020).

The political economy of elections in Nigeria is intricately linked to ethnic politics, religious divisions, and a flawed electoral system. The challenges posed by the FPTP system necessitate a reevaluation of electoral practices, with Proportional Representation presenting a viable alternative. Additionally, effective prosecution of electoral offenders and reforms within INEC are essential for enhancing electoral integrity. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic political environment in Nigeria.

The political economy of elections in Nigeria since 1999 reveals a complex interplay of issues that hinder the country's democratic development. The influence of big money, the high costs of elections, pervasive poverty, electoral fraud, violence, vote buying, infrastructure deficits, and voter apathy collectively undermine the integrity of the electoral process. As Nigeria grapples with these challenges, it is crucial to reconsider the allocation of resources toward elections in light of the pressing socio-economic issues that demand urgent attention. A shift towards prioritizing development over electoral expenditures could pave the way for a more equitable and democratic society.

Conclusion

The political economy of elections in Nigeria since 1999 reveals a complex and often troubling landscape marked by systemic challenges that continue to undermine the democratic process. Despite the initial optimism surrounding Nigeria's return to civilian rule, subsequent elections have been marred by issues that not only affect electoral outcomes but also the overall stability and governance of the country.

At the heart of these challenges is the pervasive influence of ethnic and religious identities in the political arena. Nigeria's rich tapestry of over 250 ethnic groups and a significant religious divide between Islam and Christianity has shaped political affiliations and voter behavior. Political parties frequently exploit these identities to mobilize support, leading to a fragmented political landscape that often prioritizes narrow ethnic or religious interests over national unity. This fragmentation exacerbates tensions and conflicts, particularly during election periods, contributing to violence and instability.

The electoral system itself poses significant hurdles to effective governance and representation. The use of the First Past the Post (FPTP) system has led to disproportionate representation and the marginalization of minority voices. In many cases, a candidate can win an election without a majority of votes, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement among voters who support losing candidates. This situation has contributed to widespread voter apathy, as many citizens lose faith in the electoral process, believing their participation has little impact on outcomes.

Moreover, the high cost of elections and the influence of big money have further complicated the political landscape. Candidates often rely on substantial financial backing to mount competitive campaigns, creating an environment ripe for corruption and the prioritization of elite interests over public welfare. This situation perpetuates a cycle of underdevelopment, as funds that could address critical social issues are instead funneled into electioneering efforts.

The enveloping ecology of grinding poverty in Nigeria compounds these challenges. With millions living below the poverty line, economic desperation makes voters susceptible to vote buying and other

forms of electoral malpractice. The normalization of these practices undermines the integrity of elections and leads to governance that favors the interests of a few over the needs of the broader population. Consequently, issues such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure continue to suffer from neglect, exacerbating the socio-economic disparities in the country.

Electoral fraud remains a persistent issue, with numerous reports of ballot box snatching, result manipulation, and intimidation of voters. The failure to adequately prosecute electoral offenders has contributed to a culture of impunity, where those who engage in corrupt practices do so with little fear of repercussions. This lack of accountability erodes public trust in democratic institutions and undermines the legitimacy of elected officials.

In addition to these challenges, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has faced criticism for its inefficiency and perceived lack of independence. Calls for reform, including the unbundling of INEC into specialized bodies, have gained traction as stakeholders seek to improve the management of elections and enhance the credibility of the electoral process. Reforming INEC could lead to greater accountability and transparency, fostering public confidence in the electoral system. Despite these daunting challenges, there is room for optimism. The growing awareness among citizens regarding their electoral rights and the increasing engagement of civil society organizations in monitoring elections are positive developments. These efforts can help hold political actors accountable and push for necessary reforms. Moreover, the conversation around electoral reform, including the potential adoption of Proportional Representation (PR), highlights the need for a more inclusive and equitable electoral system that truly reflects the diverse interests of the Nigerian populace.

As Nigeria moves forward, addressing these interconnected issues will be critical for strengthening its democratic fabric. A concerted effort to tackle ethnic and religious divisions, reform the electoral system, enhance the integrity of elections, and address socio-economic disparities is essential for building a more just and equitable society. Ultimately, the path toward a robust democracy in Nigeria lies in the recognition that the political economy of elections is not merely about the mechanics of voting, but about the broader context of governance, accountability, and the pursuit of the common good. Only by confronting these challenges head-on can Nigeria hope to realize its full democratic potential and ensure that its elections serve as a genuine reflection of the will of the people.

Recommendations

- **Electoral System Reform:** Transitioning from the First Past the Post (FPTP) system to a Proportional Representation (PR) model would enhance inclusivity and ensure that all votes contribute to the electoral outcome. This change could reduce voter apathy and encourage broader participation.
- **Strengthening INEC:** Reforming the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) by unbundling it into specialized agencies can improve efficiency and accountability. Each agency could focus on specific areas such as voter registration, election logistics, and monitoring electoral processes.
- **Enhancing Voter Education:** Comprehensive voter education campaigns should be launched to inform citizens about their electoral rights, the voting process, and the importance of participation. This initiative can empower voters and encourage them to engage actively in elections.
- **Addressing Ethnic and Religious Divisions:** Political parties should prioritize national unity by promoting candidates from diverse backgrounds. Initiatives aimed at fostering inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue can help mitigate tensions and promote a more cohesive society.
- **Improving Electoral Security:** Ensuring the safety of voters and electoral officials is critical. Security agencies should be adequately trained and deployed to prevent electoral violence and maintain peace during elections.
- **Prosecution of Electoral Offenders:** Strengthening legal frameworks and establishing special tribunals for the swift prosecution of electoral offenders can deter malpractice. Accountability measures should be strictly enforced to restore public confidence in the electoral system.

- **Regulating Campaign Financing:** Implementing stringent regulations on campaign financing can reduce the influence of money in politics. Transparency in funding sources and expenditure should be mandated to promote accountability among candidates.
- **Promoting Economic Development:** Addressing underlying socio-economic issues, such as poverty and unemployment, can reduce the vulnerability of voters to electoral malpractices like vote buying. Economic initiatives aimed at improving livelihoods can create a more informed and engaged electorate.
- **Encouraging Civil Society Engagement:** Civil society organizations should play an active role in monitoring elections and advocating for electoral reforms. Their involvement can enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process.
- **Utilizing Technology:** Embracing technology in the electoral process, such as electronic voting and biometric voter registration, can streamline operations, reduce fraud, and increase the accuracy of election results.
- **Strengthening Political Party Structures:** Political parties should be encouraged to develop internal democracy by adopting transparent candidate selection processes. This can help build trust and foster greater public engagement with political parties.
- **Building Public Trust:** Initiatives aimed at restoring public trust in government institutions are essential. Open forums and community engagement can bridge the gap between citizens and political leaders, fostering a sense of ownership in the democratic process.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can address the challenges posed by the political economy of elections, ultimately paving the way for a more robust and democratic political landscape.

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