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## Imperative to Deepening Democratic Culture for Good Governance and Credible Election in the Aftermath of the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper examines the imperative to Deepening Democratic Culture for Good Governance and Credible Election in the aftermath of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The paper adopted a qualitative method of research to explore the need for deepening democratic culture for credible elections and good governance in our political system. Data were collected from secondary sources such as published text, reports and the internet. The paper adopted the Liberal and Elite theory as its framework of analysis. The paper reveals that the 2023 general elections were not credible due to poor preparedness, institutional deficiency and lack of transparency. This has great implications for democratic sustainability, good governance, norms and acceptability of the democratic system as the best form of government. The paper concludes that there is a need to reinvent the ethical values of democratic principles in our electoral process for future elections. Doing this will help to restore the hope and confidence lost in our electoral process due to the institutional failure of Independent National Electoral Commission to conduct credible elections in the 2023 general elections. This could be achieved through structural reform and concerted efforts of stakeholders, politicians, INEC as a body, political parties, government, and local and international election observers.*

**Keywords:** Imperative, deepening, democratic culture, good governance, credible election

### **1. Introduction**

Nigeria, as a democratic country, has had a history of non-credible elections spanning from the post-independent period to date. Most elections in Nigeria are characterized by irregularities, rigging and violence, thereby affecting democratic principles of electing representatives credibly. The issue of credibility in any democratic process promotes good governance, which helps immensely to deepen the democratic culture of every nation-state and the development of democratic societies. The acceptability and legitimacy enjoyed by representatives elected through credible processes make them accountable and responsive to the people who elected them into office. However, the need to deepen our democratic culture becomes necessary for our political development and democratic sustainability. The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria was expected to be a defining moment in the history of the nation, promoting democratic culture and ensuring credibility, but the process fell short of the expectations of many Nigerians due to poor conduct of the process by the electoral umpire. This raised fundamental issues regarding the neutrality of the election management body by various political parties and contestants during the electoral exercise and created doubt about the maturity of Nigerian democratic state. When the election is not credible, it has implications for governance, participation, accountability, democratic culture and norms of societies. The credibility of 2023 general elections has become a crucial issue that affects the country as both local and international observers, through their various reports, have questioned the integrity and credibility of the process. However, European Union Post-Mortem Report (2023) on Nigerian election stated that:

*Institutional deficiencies and lack of transparency and access to key information led to low public confidence in the process and adversely affected the conduct of the elections. Obstruction and organized violence limited the free expression of the will of the voters despite efforts by civil society to promote democratic standards.*

A credible election is one in which the outcome is widely accepted as legitimate by all stakeholders, including the candidates, political parties, civil society groups, media and the general public. However, the reverse was the case in the aftermath of the election as aggrieved political parties are currently in court seeking redress. In essence, Nigeria's performance on critical indicators of democracy such as free and fair elections, transparency and accountability, good

governance, rule of law, internal party democracy, and government responsiveness to the needs of the masses fell below expectations and tenets of achievable democracy.

In democratic culture, the necessary norms, values, structures, and institutions are expected to be strengthened, entrenched, and institutionalized. However, sustaining democracy requires a thriving conscious of civic and political culture that guarantees popular governance processes and leverages optimal safeguards against authoritarian relapse (Przeworski, 1997; Zakaria, 1997; Carothers, 2007).

Given the imperative to deepening democratic culture for good governance as a veritable determinant of the state democratic practice, according to Jackman and Miller (1996), it can be argued that Nigeria's democratic experience seems to have been cursed by the arcane culture of political opportunism. This has threatened the achievement of credible elections to the effect that electoral democracy in Nigeria has largely appeared to be a sham (Okoli & Orinya, 2013). Invariably, a credible electoral process, which is universally acclaimed as the fulcrum of democracy and promoter of good governance, seems to have been lacking with regard to Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It is against this backdrop that this paper is poised to examine the Imperative to Deepening Democratic Culture for Good Governance and Credible Election in the Aftermath of 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

## 2. Conceptual Clarification: Democratic Culture, Good Governance and Credible Election

### 2.1. Democratic Culture

The concept of democratic culture is defined as the desire and ability of individuals in a population to participate actively, individually and together, in the government of public affairs affecting them. The existence of a democratic culture within a population is characterized by the active contribution, effective and in duration, of members of civil society to the development of the common good, the terms of "living together," and the construction of collective decisions.

According to United Nations Missions in Timor (UNMIT, 2005), a culture of democracy and governance moves beyond the mere procedures of democracy and the establishment of democratic institutions. It further stated that:

*A state that identifies with the culture of democratic government is one that welcomes a wide scope of political participation, embracing a pluralistic system of political parties, a vibrant civil society and media, integrating women and minorities in all levels of government, protecting rights and dignity of children and involves an integrated approach to sustainable governance for and by all the people (UNMIT, 2005).*

However, a democratic culture rests on the existence of the persons of forms of autonomy of thought and action. The democratic culture of any country determines its political participation. Thus, the development of culture is dependent on the existence of a modern state that can protect the rights of its citizens. A culture of democracy must reflect on norms and values that place a premium on the freedom of individuals.

### 2.2. Good Governance

The concept of good governance is central to any political economy because it deals with the institutions, processes and relationships necessary to moving a society forward. Good governance is a key instrument that fuels a sustained, peaceful, secured and overall development of society as it is likely to breed peace and provide for the security of lives and property, which will, in turn, create the enabling environment for sustainable development to thrive. Odock, cited in George-Genyi (2013:57), states that good governance is "a system of government based on good leadership, respect for the rule of law and due process, accountability of the political leadership to the electorate as well as transparency in the operation of government." He further stated that the full exposition of the and practice of good governance hinges on the role played by leadership. A cursory look at this view implies that good governance is an enterprise jointly undertaken by both the leadership and the followers. According to Lawson (2012), good governance as an approach to the modern system of governance requires the inclusion of the generality of the people in the administration of the state through their elected representatives. It is a global approach to promote freedom of association and expression exemplified by impartial legal systems established to protect individual rights and liberties of the citizens in accordance with the constitution of the state.

More so, Fukuyama (2013) maintained that good governance is not only about making rightful decisions towards effective policy implementation. However, it is all about taking the best possible step in making those decisions beneficial to the people. Therefore, the essence of good governance is the ability to make and enforce suitable rules in delivering required public services to the people.

World Bank (1994) states that good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos, an executive arm of government accountable for its actions, a strong civil society participating in public affairs and all behaving under the rule of law. However, European Union (2002); conceptualizes good governance as the rule, process and behavior that affect the ways in which powers are exercised at the state, national and international levels, particularly as it regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

From the view of Mohideen (1997), governance becomes "good" when it is operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. Therefore, good governance in a wider context can be perceived from two points. Firstly, the creation of a conducive environment for economic activities that ensures macro-economic stability, which is imperative for national growth and development. Secondly, having the political will to embark on political reforms to achieve improvement in public sector management, economic and financial accountability, predictability underlined by the rule of law and transparency.

According to Davis (2003) and Madhav (2007), good governance is managing socio-economic development in an environment devoid of rancor, ill will, strife, struggle and disdain. The implication of the above is that if elections are free and transparent, it will help to produce leaders who are accountable to the people, ensure the participation of the citizens in their own affairs, and observe the rule of law, which will promote equal justice for all and as well ensure that the voice of the minority groups is heard in the decision-making process. Also, Oyovbaire (2007) maintained that good governance entails using power and authority to affect human conditions to improve the quality of human life and transform the physical environment.

However, good governance is, therefore, the process of making and implementing good policies in the state. This would be propelled by credible elections anchored on democratic principles and norms.

### *2.3. Credible Election*

For adherents and scholars of democracy, election represents the best means for people to get the best deal from those who rule over them. In theory, it is representative democracy at its best. It forms an important pillar that places the power to govern with the people and is a litmus test for democratic institutions (Baido, Dankwa & Eshun, 2018). As ingredients of representative government, credible elections are the best means of deepening democracy and promoting good governance (Jega, 2014). He further noted that historical evidence revealed that elections in Nigeria are far from being credible because of a series of malpractices that characterized its conduct. Free, fair, and credible elections are the principle upon which other indicators of democracy are evaluated. Lindberg (2004) posits that a free, fair and credible electoral process enacts an important component of distributive justice in relation to power and enhances the authority and legitimacy of a democratically elected government. Lindberg's argument underscores the importance of elections as a primary means through which the ruled (the people) select and establish a binding social contract with their leaders (rulers) and the government as an institution. Bush and Prather (2018) define an election as credible when people trust its results and believe that it produces an outcome that reflects the will of the people. Thus, credibility is built on people's perceptions of how free and fair the electoral process was, to the extent that the results are perceived as reflecting the will of the people. Election helps to guarantee democratic values of equality of individuals and freedom to decide a course of action or who to vote for. However, elections are said to be credible when rules, regulations and laws governing the electoral process are followed and ultimately, credible candidates are freely and fairly selected to represent the electorate. Credible elections must provide equal rights and opportunities for all citizens who are eligible to contest or vote to freely participate in the elections, with, however, some just and reasonable restrictions. In the words of Ojo (2014), despite the fact that regular, free, fair and credible elections are important to routinise democratic ethos, the conduct of elections in Nigeria has been deficient. He further maintained that since Nigeria returned to the democratization process in 1999, the conduct of elections has left much to be desired because the election process has been characterized by electoral fraud, including vote buying and electoral violence, among other violations, undermining its legitimacy and of government. Credible elections require an open pre-election environment in which citizens can participate without fear or obstruction; political parties, candidates and the media can operate freely; an independent judiciary functions fairly and expeditiously; and electoral authorities operate impartially. However, fundamental electoral rights cannot be divorced from the election process, procedures and institutions.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The Liberal Democratic and Elite theories are used as the theoretical framework for this paper. The Liberal democratic theory, according to Graham et al. (1997), could be traced to the works of scholars like John Locke, Jean Jacque Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham and David Ricardo, among others who acquired their philosophies from liberalism. This theory advocates for the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process to choose representatives or leaders. This grants express and outright liberty to the electorate to express their franchise through free and fair elections to determine the majority interests allowed for the formation of government. Going by democratic practice, this would deepen democratic culture and ensure a credible electoral process, but the recent 2023 general elections conducted by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) showed a manifestation of clear deviation from the fundamental underlying principles of democracy of ensuring credible electoral process and it has implication on deepening democratic culture and ensuring good governance. Theoretically, deepening democratic culture entails the credibility of the election and how various actors in the electoral process organize themselves to achieve ethos and principles of democracy. Elections as an element of democracy according to the provisions of the liberal democratic theory have features such as majority rule, popular participation of the people, commitment to individual dignity and preservation of life, liberty and property (Dye & Zeigler, 1972)

However, elite theory is another form of theory that focuses on how few members of the society outwit the majority when it comes to the issue of power distribution in the state. The theory originated from the work of Gaetano Mosca (1958-1941). The theory posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy-planning networks, holds the most power and that this power is independent of democratic elections.

The basic assumption of this theory is that power is concentrated, the elites are unified, and the non-elites are diverse and powerless. Elites' interests are unified due to common backgrounds and positions and the defining characteristic of power is institutional position. It is a theory that describes a different form of power relationship and how few but powerful members of the society determine who gets what when it comes to the issue of governance and power distribution in the state. Because of the positions they hold in a state, they use it to influence government decisions and the outcome of every election. In their quest for political power and to achieve their targets, Sambo (1999) maintained that

Nigerian political elites always engage in manipulation of the political process towards the acquisition of power and this has resulted in a series of electoral frauds witnessed in the previous elections conducted since Nigeria's Independence. Going by example, it is not farfetched from what was witnessed in the 2023 general elections. The elites, with their positions of holding state power, connived with some electoral body officials and party surrogates to sabotage the electoral process through widespread rigging, ballot snatching, vote buying, disenfranchisement of voters through late arrival of electoral materials, falsification of results, using thugs to disrupt election in areas considered to be opponents strongholds, announcement of fake results. A typical example is Adamawa gubernatorial election, where the Resident Electoral Commissioner of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), who is not empowered by law, announced the election result while the process was ongoing. This illicit character affects the outcome of every election in Nigeria and governance. It has serious implications for achieving sustainable democracy, credible process and development.

#### **4. Democratic Culture, Credible Election and Good Governance: The Nexus**

One of the hallmarks of democracy is putting in place structures and institutions that can guarantee a system and process that is credible when choosing elective officeholders. A democratic culture provides the foundation for a credible process to strive, which transcends good governance by promoting values, attitudes and behaviors that support accountable and participatory decision-making. When the process is free, fair and transparent, political officeholders, democratic institutions and the government in place enjoy legitimacy and acceptability. This contributes to good governance as a democratic institution and governments believe that they are widely elected by people. Therefore, proper representation, accountability, service to humanity and delivery would be their yardstick of governance. Good governance, in turn, strengthens democratic values and institutions, ensures that democratic principles are upheld, the rule of law is respected, and the rights and freedoms of citizens are protected. One of the challenges bedeviling most countries in Africa, including Nigeria, is that most elections are not credible to reflect people's wishes and aspirations. Elections are rigged to favor candidates who represent the wishes and interests of a few individual political elites rather than the generality of the masses. Therefore, good governance is eluded because those selected rather than elected believe that the process and voting power of the masses have no significance to their emergence to power. However, impunity, rascality, not complying with democratic principles, absence of internal democracy, and not obeying court orders are largely found in their style of governance. Furthermore, Ibrahim (2007) has noted that the outcomes of many elections in Africa have been so contested that the conditions for the survival of the democratic ideals have been compromised, thereby making the democratic feature bleak and not promising. Elections have been characterized by fraudulent machinations which frustrate the democratic aspirations of the people. Credible elections serve as a mechanism to translate the democratic culture and good governance principles into practice by providing opportunities for citizens to participate, express their preferences, and hold their leaders accountable. This interdependence is vital for maintaining a healthy and robust democratic system that promotes the well-being and prosperity of its citizens.

However, the interplay between these three components is vital for the health and sustainability of a democratic system. A democratic culture fosters active citizen participation, political awareness, and engagement, which, in turn, contribute to good governance. Good governance establishes the institutional framework necessary for conducting credible elections by ensuring transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Credible elections, in turn, reinforce democratic culture by legitimizing the political process, providing a peaceful means for political transitions, and strengthening citizen trust in the democratic system. Furthermore, each of these components has a reciprocal influence on the others. For example, credible elections enhance good governance by enabling the peaceful transfer of power, providing opportunities for fresh ideas and perspectives, and strengthening public trust in elected representatives. Good governance, on the other hand, supports a democratic culture by promoting transparency, inclusivity, and the protection of fundamental rights, which are crucial for the development of an engaged and informed citizenry.

Looking at the symbiotic relationship between democratic culture, good governance and credible elections prior to the 2023 general elections, Nigeria's elections have long been fraught with recurring irregularities, operational setbacks, multi-dimensional electoral violence, voter intimidation, and structural intricacies that have affected democratic culture, governance and credibility of every electoral process in our political system. However, the widespread electoral malpractices witnessed during the 2023 general elections will further discourage voters from participating in decision-making through electoral exercise, thereby affecting democratic norms and the culture of civil participation. Voter apathy during the electoral process will increase due to a lack of public trust in the institution and political system. However, there is a need for a paradigm shift to ensure that credible processes are followed in selecting political office holders and leaders in all institutions. This would engender good governance and reaffirm democratic cultures and norms needed in a democratic society. The disconnection existing, which has led to bad governance and leadership failure as a result of compromising the system and not adhering to democratic principles, needs to be corrected through structural reforms for future elections and the development of the Nigerian state.

#### **5. Overview of 2023 General Elections and the Dynamics of the Process**

The 2023 general elections were the seventh consecutive general elections since the return of the country to democracy in 1999. It is an election contested by more than 17 political parties with a new electoral framework known as the Electoral Act 2022. One significant thing about the election, as announced by Independent National Electoral Commission, is the use of technology in the conduct of the process using Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for fingerprint and facial biometric identification and authentication of the voters. The essence of this newest technology is to ensure a smooth and credible electoral process that would at least restore confidence in the electoral system and make

sure that the votes of Nigerians count at the end of the exercise. The previous general elections in 2015, which featured Nigeria's first-ever opposition victory at the presidential level, appeared to deepen the trend of INEC's improving public legitimacy and increased embrace of technology. However, the hope and aspirations of Nigerians in the conduct of 2023 general elections were dashed following issues regarding the credibility and acceptability of the process and outcome. Given the internal challenges that characterized the past government, including insecurity, corruption, high levels of unemployment, and poverty, one would have expected the electoral umpire who has the responsibility of managing the electoral process to toll the line of strengthening democratic practice in Nigeria by ensuring free, fair and credible election. However, poor preparedness and the election not being transparent, as claimed by other contestants from other political parties who are presently in court challenging the process and outcome, European Union and other election observers reports both local and international, left everyone in doubt that Independent National Electoral Commission has performed below expectations in discharging her responsibilities. This has implications for deepening democratic culture and values for sustainable democratic gains. It encourages voter apathy and makes the voters lose faith in the electoral system. However, according to European Union Report (2023) on the conduct of the general elections:

*The 2023 general elections did not ensure a well-run, transparent and inclusive democratic process as assured by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Public confidence and trust in INEC were severely damaged during the presidential poll and were not restored in state-level elections, leading civil society to call for an independent audit of the entire process (EU Report, 2023)*

However, the 2023 election is a watershed moment in the history of the democratic process, opening up competition among four top candidates from various political parties. Though there are candidates from other parties, the race is considered to be a four-horse race among major political parties, such as APC, PDP, LP and NNPP. Since the return of democracy in 1999, the election presents candidates representing geo-political zones of the country, making it competitive for voters to vote on ethnic, party and religious lines. Though voters voted according to these parameters, it witnessed high participation of youths who wanted to make a change in the art of governance due to the hardship and economic crisis faced by Nigerians. However, the process failed to ensure transparency and credibility in the process due to high levels of electoral malpractices, violence, vote buying, over-voting and intimidation.

## 6. Challenges of Good Governance and Credible Elections in Nigeria

The absence of good governance is one of the challenges bedeviling Africa and Nigeria in particular. The lack of a credible electoral process has implications for Nigeria's democratic system as those seeking political powers are mostly not credibly elected but rather selected or imposed on the people by a few considered as "God Fathers" through irregularities and fraudulent ways. This has affected accountability, performance, development and service delivery. Good governance is a situation in human society where leadership and followership adhere to the due process rule of law and act responsibly and responsive to set objectives in societal or corporate governance (Gbemudu & Ajabor, 2019). In Nigeria, attributes of good governance, which would engender economic growth, development and reduction in poverty level through creating jobs are missing due to faulty elective processes. Most people occupying elective positions are elitist in character and have little or no interest in serving the people rather than their own personal interests. This has resulted in high levels of corruption, impunity, disobedience of the rule of law and court order, flagrant abuse of human rights, intolerance, stealing of public funds and many others. Reiterating this view, Laure (2021) maintained that the fundamental goal of seeking public officers in Nigeria is for personal gain and enrichment. These have posed development crises to the Nigerian state in different forms. However, Nweke (2019) noted that leadership challenges in Nigeria have threatened good governance, and this is posed by the 1999 democratic military-in-civilian garb leadership. The Nigerian Fourth Republic has been characterized by leadership challenges. These challenges are demonstrated in different manner and magnitude and that has threatened the developmental agenda of the Nigerian state.

Election is a process of electing or selecting representatives in a democratic institution. It is the most acceptable avenue for choosing or changing leadership globally. It is a road map through which citizens participate in the decision-making of states. Ordinarily, it is supposed to be sacred and the outcome reflects people's wishes and aspirations, which would transcend to good governance. However, in practice, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, it has created a space for elitist decisions with regard to a few individuals governing on behalf of the majority. The Nigerian political structure has been exposed to several abuses and this threatened democratic institutions and sustainability.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999 to carry out several functions, especially to organize elections into various offices in Nigeria. Carrying out these responsibilities has been met with challenges that continuously undermine our democratic and electoral values. Since periodic elections are part of the principles of democracy in every nation, election periods are history-making occasions. It is history-making because all activities related to an election: registering the voters, campaigning for election, voting, and making sure that the vote count has great consequences for a state and the international community watches with keen interest to see how the process goes. An electoral process can either make or mar a state. It either helps it to consolidate the gains of democracy or throws away the effort of a state's past patriots and heroes (Madaki, 2012:159)

From independence till date, Nigeria has experienced different challenges during the electoral process preceding the pre-election, during and post-election period and this has implications for our democratic journey. Odama (2010) noted that the history of elections and electoral malpractices in Nigeria can be examined in four phases: elections during the colonial period, elections in the first years of independence (1960-1965), elections during military rule and autocracy, and elections under civilian regimes in between the military rule and autocracy and today's civilian fourth republic. He

observed that the background of electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria dates to the period before 1960. In the same vein, 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 were not free from the activities of electoral malpractices. However, election malpractice has thus become a reoccurring event in Nigeria's political history and constitutes enormous concern for the survival of Nigeria's democracy (INEC, 2011). In 2015, the electoral malpractices and violence were minimal because the incumbent president promised noninterference in electoral matters and conceded defeat at the end of the process, which relatively brought peace and reduced the electoral violence aftermath of the election. This act brought stability to our political and electoral process. Although there were pockets of malpractices at state and national assembly elections, the process was adjudged free and fair than previous elections conducted in the past. The 2019 and 2023 general elections were not without flaws. There are skirmishes of malpractices that characterized the 2019 general elections, though won by incumbent president Buhari. However, the conduct of 2023 general elections attracted criticisms from both local and international observers over the conduct of the election by Independent National Electoral Commission. Issues such as Electoral violence, intimidation, vote buying, ballot box snatching, manipulation of results by electoral officers, involvement of security personnel in protecting political thugs, noncompliance in the usage of technology in the transmission of results as promised by electoral umpire, late arrival of electoral materials at polling units which resulted to disenfranchising of voters, voters apathy, poor preparedness by electoral management body and many others characterized the electoral process and made it a charade.

Furthermore, there are critical challenges militating against the enthronement of a democratic culture of good governance in Nigeria, which demand attention. After six decades of political independence, the threat of insecurity, insurgency, militancy, armed Bandits, and herders-farmers' conflict, agitations from some parts of the regions dominate Nigeria's political space. The qualities of the political process, as well as the transparency required for democracy to deliver true dividends, are still missing (Wogu et al., 2015)

Also, Sule et al. (2017) observed that Nigeria's political culture since democratization has had a negative effect on voting patterns and electoral outcomes. On the one hand, the process is based on a culture of violence, rigging and corruption. Politicians have often manipulated the electorate using religion, ethnicity, money and other means to divide voters. Political power is central to wealth accumulation; as such, elections are war-like events. It is often "winner take all." On the other hand, powerful ethno-regional groups from all six geo-political zones have developed at various times to compete for power. The implications include constant reinforcement of ethnicized politics in drawing lines of regional divisions. In addition to the foregoing complexities, the electoral body- Independent National Electoral Commission, has often been criticized for its unpreparedness and electoral irregularities, including inadequate supply of voters' registration cards, untrained personnel and insecurity of votes (Ali, 2018). Politics, to a large extent in Nigeria, is the exclusive preserve of the powerful, well-connected and wealthy few whose interest does not always align with public interest.

## **7. Need to Deepen Democratic Culture for Good Governance and Credible Electoral Process in the Aftermath of the 2023 General Elections**

The importance of deepening democratic culture cannot be overemphasized, especially in the aftermath of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. It is imperative that we strengthen our democracy, uphold good governance, and ensure a credible process. The Nigerian political system has remained stable since the return of the democratic system in 1999. Therefore, election in Nigeria, which was hitherto the crucial process to sustain democracy, should be strengthened to be in line with democratic principles. Elections in Nigeria since independence have been characterized by violence, thuggery, rigging and manipulations such that election results or outcomes always fell short of citizenry expectations. In the same vein, Yaqub (2011) observed that previous elections in Nigeria were characterized by ballot box snatching, ballot box stuffing, results alteration and falsification, and violence. Based on democratic principles, the electoral process occurs in three stages: the pre-election period, during and after. It is supposed to be free, fair, credible and transparent to avoid rancor, acrimony and conflict. However, in the context of the Nigerian political system, the political elites or class, political parties, the electoral umpire charged with the responsibility of conducting this process and security agencies have failed to make it credible in this year 2023 general elections. Their roles sometimes have undermined democratic strength, thereby discouraging and preventing the people from being involved in democratic practice. This affects the extent to which democratic culture takes root in our normal lives and practices and governance in our political landscape. According to Jibo (2003), in Nigeria, a transition from one government to the other, either military to civilian or civilian to civilian, is usually greeted by violence, manipulations and, in some cases, coup d'état. However, deepening democratic culture to ensure good governance and credible election aftermath of the 2023 general elections, the election management body should redefine their roles by ensuring transparency on electoral issues. Reinventing ethical values and ethos of democracy in our various institutions is crucial for good governance. A paradigm shift from the old order of election body chiefs being appointed and controlled by the ruling executives should be stopped. An Independent electoral body cannot discharge her responsibilities effectively under this present arrangement. They should be financially autonomous and stop being appendages to the executive or ruling government as typically seen. However, some key steps could be identified to help deepen our democratic culture for good governance and credible election in Nigeria, such as widening our political education, making sure that credible people with integrity are appointed or recruited as electoral officers, making sure that the media system function effectively without intimidation and finally to strengthen the judiciary to be more independence to dispense justice without fear or favor with regard to electoral matters.

## 8. Conclusion

The need for a stable democratic system and good governance has been a major pre-occupation of the Nigerian state since its independence in 1960. This aspiration has remained elusive due to many challenges, which have continued to undermine the democratization process in the country. The widespread electoral malpractices, which often characterize elections in Nigeria, are inimical to the consolidation of democracy and good governance. The 2023 outcome of the general elections in Nigeria was followed by the electorate's dissatisfaction with alleged election fraud. If people are to have faith in democracy, the most cardinal point is that they must be assured that their votes count in determining who will govern and in getting rid of a government that has failed them. Where democracy is devoid of credible elections, good governance is negated and the sovereignty of the people is relegated to the background if not completely denied. The result is that the majority of the people would become subservient to the whims and caprices of the political actors who are shielded from any legal action by the immunity clause; hence, they conduct themselves based on their proclivities.

Informed by this paper's findings, deepening democratic culture is essential for good governance and credible elections, particularly in the aftermath of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This would help in our democratic development, considered to be the hallmark of nation-building. However, the sustainability of our democracy requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including the government, political parties, politicians, civil society, and citizens. By taking these steps, we can build a strong and enduring democracy that ensures the welfare of all Nigerians and restore lost confidence in our electoral system.

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