

**CORRUPTION AND ELECTORAL PROCESS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE 2011 AND 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA.**

BY

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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

OCTOBER, 2025.

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by OCHIAGHA DIVINE CHINASA in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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(Ag. Head of Department)

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to God, Mother Mary, my parents (Mr & Mrs Ochiagha) and my Siblings and most importantly, my Uncle(Mr, Abraham Arekhame).

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of corruption in Nigeria's electoral process through a comparative analysis of the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections. It argues that corruption is a structural feature of Nigeria's democratic system, shaping electoral outcomes, political behavior, and public trust. Using qualitative methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary sources, the research explores how electoral malpractice, vote-buying, institutional manipulation, and political violence undermine electoral integrity. The findings reveal that while the 2011 election was relatively credible in procedure, it was followed by widespread post-election violence, whereas the 2015 election marked a historic democratic transition but was heavily characterized by systemic corruption and elite manipulation. The study further establishes that electoral reforms, such as the introduction of biometric technologies, have had limited impact due to weak enforcement and lack of political will. It concludes that corruption operates at multiple levels within the electoral system and continues to hinder democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study recommends strengthening institutional independence, enforcing electoral laws, and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities that sustain political corruption.

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CHAPTER ONE

Background to Study

Introduction

The first elections in Nigeria were conducted in 1922 .by the British colonial administration, largely in response to increasing pressure from nationalist movements demanding greater involvement in the governance process¹. Although the electoral process was characterized by a limited franchise and restricted representation, it nonetheless marked a significant milestone for the nationalists, who viewed it as a step toward the establishment of democratic governance and broader political participation. Following this initial election, subsequent electoral exercises were held across various parts of the country to elect leaders at the national, regional, and local levels. Notably, the 1959 General Elections were particularly significant as they laid the groundwork for Nigeria's independence.

Since then, Nigeria has experienced a series of elections, either as part of transitions between civilian administrations or as efforts to shift from military rule to civilian governance. Broadly, Nigerian elections can be grouped into three categories: those organized by the colonial government (1922, 1951, and 1959); those conducted under military regimes (1979, 1991, 1993, and 1999); and those held under civilian administrations (1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015). Among these, elections conducted under civilian governments have tended to be more fraught with crises than those organized by colonial or military authorities. This paradox can be attributed to the

fact that both colonial and military regimes exercised extensive coercive power, effectively compelling citizens to operate within the legal frameworks and decrees of the time².

Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule on 29 May 1999, the country has conducted five general elections, in addition to several re-run and local government elections. Of these, only the 2015 general election is widely regarded as having met both domestic and international standards. A troubling pattern, however, emerged over time: each successive election appeared to be more flawed than the one preceding it, 2003 was more problematic than 1999, and 2007 was worse than 2003. This downward trajectory suggests a deteriorating electoral process, undermining efforts toward democratic consolidation. A key contributing factor is the apparent neglect by political elites of the critical role that free and fair elections play in fostering democratic growth and national development.

Many Nigerian voters have become increasingly vulnerable to vote-buying, often trading their votes for money or material goods. This trend is largely driven by widespread poverty, the government's failure to provide basic social services, and a deep lack of trust in political leaders³.

In a proper democracy, elections should be conducted freely and fairly, with outcomes that genuinely reflect the people's choice. However, Nigeria's electoral history since independence has often fallen short of this standard. Electoral commissions—both past and present—have sometimes conducted elections in ways that favor the ruling party.

Common issues include poor logistics, deliberate voter suppression in opposition strongholds, late delivery of voting materials, and delays in the arrival of electoral officials.

The presidential election held on April 16, 2011, was the fourth since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999. Unlike previous elections, which were often marred by fraud and irregularities, the 2011 election was widely regarded as credible by both local and international observers⁴. Despite this, the legitimacy of the process was tainted by violent protests that erupted after the results were announced. The post-election violence resulted in many deaths, large-scale displacement, and destruction of property. While election-related violence had occurred in the past, the scale and severity of the 2011 violence were particularly alarming⁵. It began in Bauchi and Gombe States and quickly spread to other northern states such as Kano, Adamawa, Niger, and Kaduna.

In contrast, the 2015 general elections marked a significant milestone in Nigeria's democratic development. For the first time, an opposition party defeated the ruling party at the federal level through a relatively peaceful and credible election. This outcome surprised many political analysts who had feared widespread violence. Several factors had contributed to the tense atmosphere before the election: the emergence of a strong opposition capable of challenging the ruling party; the ruling party's use of government resources to maintain its hold on power; concerns over INEC's poor handling of the voter registration process; a campaign season marked by ethnic and religious divisions; and the

last-minute six-week postponement of the elections⁶. These concerns raised fears of possible unrest, but the election ultimately defied expectations.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to critically examine the role of corruption in Nigeria's electoral process, with specific reference to a comparative analysis to the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. The Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the electoral corruption and outcomes of the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria.
2. To investigate the electoral corruption and conduct of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.
3. To identify the reforms and anti-corruption mechanism implemented between 2011 and 2015, and evaluation of their effectiveness.
4. To analyze the impact of electoral corruption on voter's behavior, public trust, and the overall legitimacy of the election outcomes.
5. To offer policy recommendations aimed at minimizing electoral corruption and strengthening democratic processes in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focus on a comparative analysis of the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, exploring the corruption and electoral process.

Methodology

The paper is a research work conducted using field studies specifically qualitative method of data collection and analysis. It is a case study of 2011 and 2015 presidential Elections where data was collected from Nigeria from categories classified as follows: category A politicians, B party stakeholders, C INEC senior officials, D EFCC senior officials, E Academicians F Focus Group Discussion. In the course of research, these bodies were identified and interviewed as informants based on their possession of information relevant to the subject of study. The information collected from interviews was combined with books and articles already written on the topic. This helped to identify what previous researchers had not fully explored, especially about the 2015 general elections, which many scholars have not focused on much.

Literature Review

Corruption in Nigeria is generally understood as the misuse of public office for personal benefit⁷. The Nigerian Constitution clearly states that the government must put an end to all corrupt practices and abuse of power⁸. Also, the law that created the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) makes corruption a criminal offense. Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain⁹. While this includes the misuse of public office, corruption goes beyond that. It also covers breaking rules, ignoring proper procedures, or violating moral and social standards to achieve selfish or illegal goals¹⁰.

Even though it's hard to define corruption in one clear way, many experts agree that it involves using public power for personal gain in a way that breaks the rules¹¹.

Corruption is a major topic in Nigeria because it has given the country a bad image both locally and internationally. It is often seen as a deliberate act by leaders who use their position to avoid accountability and transparency¹². Corruption has become a normal part of Nigerian politics, where people often get benefits based on who they know rather than merit¹³.

The weak political institutions and the lack of true commitment to fight corruption have made it a major obstacle to good governance and national development¹⁴. Often, anti-corruption agencies are used as tools to silence political opponents instead of genuinely fighting corruption¹⁵.

In Nigeria, corruption has become deeply rooted in the system. It shows up in different ways like favoritism, bribery, stealing public funds, and giving jobs or contracts to friends and relatives unfairly¹⁶. It exists in every part of the government—political, administrative, and bureaucratic¹⁷.

Corruption is also seen in the way public funds are wasted by politicians, leading to poverty and poor infrastructure¹⁸. It can be classified into three types: grand corruption (involving top officials), bureaucratic corruption (within the civil service), and legislative corruption (by lawmakers)¹⁹.

One clear example is the huge salaries and allowances paid to politicians, while ordinary workers receive very little, making it hard for them to survive²⁰.

Nigeria is a democratic country today, but its electoral system has many problems. Even in developed democracies, elections are not perfect²¹. In Nigeria, corruption has deeply affected not just politics, but also the economy and the way elections are run. Political corruption includes things like using government jobs and resources as rewards for loyal supporters, and using dishonest methods during elections²².

Many Nigerian politicians and elites misuse public funds and use their positions for personal gain. They often work together like a criminal group to stay in power by manipulating the election process through vote buying and rigging election results²³. This behavior has become common, and many voters now take part in it—selling their votes or voting based on ethnic or religious bias instead of issues or qualifications.

One of the biggest challenges to holding free and fair elections in Nigeria is political corruption. Corruption has caused serious problems like a lack of trust in the government, weak political parties, underdeveloped institutions, slow economic growth, and political violence²⁴.

A major contributor to this problem is **godfatherism**—where wealthy and powerful individuals sponsor political candidates²⁵. These "godfathers" support their chosen candidates with money and expect to benefit from public contracts and government funds once their candidate wins. To ensure victory, they often use thugs, bribe election officials,

and buy votes. These actions have allowed them to control political power at various levels²⁶.

In Nigeria, political parties started forming as far back as 1922 with the introduction of limited voting rights through the Clifford Constitution. Over time, more parties emerged as the country's democracy developed. Political parties are basically groups of people with shared political goals who support candidates running for public office. According to the 1999 Constitution, a political party is an association of people that seeks votes for its candidates in elections.

Political parties are supposed to recruit qualified leaders, educate the public, spread information, and represent the interests of the people. However, in Nigeria, most parties are created and controlled by elites, who invite or even pressure others to join. The beliefs and actions of these parties often reflect the personal goals of their founders, rather than clear ideologies or national interests. For example, Isa Kaita once said that in the early days of politics, many northern politicians were "conscripted" to defend the region's interests against southern influence.

As a result, many political parties—both in the First and Fourth Republics—lacked strong ideologies. Instead, they became centered around individuals, regions, and ethnic groups. This has shaped voting patterns in Nigeria. For instance, Awolowo's parties (like the AG and UPN) consistently received strong support in the Yoruba southwest; the NPC and its successors (NPN and PDP) were favored in the north; while NCNC, NPP, and

APGA got most of their votes from the southeast (Igbo region). To maintain these “block votes,” ethnic and regional loyalties were often manipulated.

Chuba Okadigbo observed that elections in 1954, 1959, 1964, 1979, and beyond, showed that many Nigerians vote for the candidate from their region or ethnic group—what he called voting for the “son of the soil.” This goes against the law, which says that political parties should not have names, emblems, or mottos tied to any tribe or religion, nor should their activities be limited to a particular part of the country.

Over time, political parties became tools for corruption in the electoral system, using ethnicity, religion, and regional ties to manipulate votes. In 1976, Murtala Mohammed described them as little more than "armies" fighting elections in different regions. Winning elections became a “do-or-die” affair, with both fair and foul means used to gain power.

For democracy to thrive, political parties must function properly. This requires internal democracy, meaning transparent decision-making and fair candidate selection. Unfortunately, most parties in the Fourth Republic lack this. A few wealthy and influential members control everything, including who gets nominated to contest elections. For example, candidates for major parties often get selected not through popular vote, but because of the support of top party leaders.

Although the constitution allows political parties to receive funds from the government, the money is often not enough. As a result, parties raise money from members and

private donors by selling forms and organizing fundraising events. This leads to corruption, as only the rich or those with connections can afford to contest elections.

In Nigeria, once a person joins a party, they are considered a politician, whether they are educated or not, honest or not, or even interested in serving the people. Many see political parties as simply a means to gain personal benefits like money, power, or influence. Mahadi once said that only about a hundred Nigerians are truly committed politicians. The rest are in politics for selfish reasons.

Because of this, many politicians use religion, ethnicity, or regional identity to win support. If that doesn't work, they use money, threats, or violence to manipulate voters. This creates stiff competition, thuggery, and election fraud. Walter Schwarz once noted that in poor countries like Nigeria, government jobs are one of the few ways to survive. So politics becomes ruthless, as winning office means financial security for the politician and his entire network(family, village, and tribe).

Another major issue is the rise of **godfathers**, wealthy and powerful individuals who sponsor politicians and often control them once in office. Godfathers help their chosen candidates win elections through money, manipulation, and even violence. After winning, the politician becomes a "tenant" to the godfather, who acts like a "landlord," expecting benefits in return. This has turned politics into a business venture, where people invest money in campaigns with the hope of making profits later.

Because political parties and their leaders often act like landlords, elected officials, especially presidents and governors, use their power to keep themselves and their parties

in control. This includes using government resources, the police, media, and even the judiciary to favor their own party. Opposition candidates are sometimes arrested or disqualified to clear the path for ruling party victories. Since 2003, the ruling party in the Fourth Republic has used this "incumbency power" to dominate national elections, while other parties (like ANPP, AD, and AC) have done the same in the states they control, especially during local government elections.

However, the success of elections in any democratic system depends largely on how well the electoral process is managed. This process is known as *electoral governance*, which involves creating and maintaining the structures and systems that allow voting and fair political competition.

In Nigeria, the first electoral body was established in 1935 under the leadership of Mr. Wraith. Since then, the commission has been renamed and restructured multiple times. The current commission was established in 2010 under Professor Attahiru Jega. Despite the reforms, Nigeria's elections have continued to suffer from poor organization, high levels of conflict, limited voter participation, and questionable results.

The electoral body in Nigeria is responsible for many important tasks, including registering political parties, drawing electoral boundaries, setting up polling units, printing and securing ballot materials, and conducting the elections themselves. To function effectively and fairly, the commission needs to be independent in its structure, composition, funding, and day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, this independence has

never been fully realized since independence, and the commission's activities often create opportunities for electoral fraud.

One of the main challenges is that the President has the exclusive power to appoint the Chairman and members of the electoral commission, with only limited input from the Council of State. The President also has the power to remove them. This means that electoral commissioners may feel pressured to serve the interests of the president or the ruling party. Even though commissioners are supposed to have five-year terms, they can be removed early if they refuse to cooperate. This has led to frequent reshuffling of the commission. Additionally, some commissioners have been known to be loyal members of the ruling party. For example, during the preparation for the 2003 and 2007 elections under Dr. Abel Guobadia and Professor Maurice Iwu, several commissioners were openly associated with the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP).

INEC has also been accused of being partisan. For instance, it reportedly disqualified opposition candidates to create an advantage for the ruling party.

Furthermore, the funding of the commission comes from the executive arm of government. Since it depends on the presidency for financial support, the electoral body is vulnerable to manipulation. During preparations for the 2003 and 2011 elections, INEC's procedures were allegedly influenced by the presidency to favor certain outcomes. At that time, both the presidency and lawmakers were involved in disputes about the electoral process, each trying to protect their chances of re-election.

In some cases, INEC was also accused of colluding with powerful individuals by locating polling units in their personal residences, thereby influencing election outcomes in those areas.

Traditional rulers are individuals who hold titles and lead communities based on long-standing customs and traditions. Their authority is not based on modern political systems but on practices that have been accepted over time. They are often respected figures in their communities, expected to remain neutral and not participate in party politics, to preserve their dignity and the trust people have in them.

However, before they were officially banned from taking part in politics, traditional rulers were closely involved with politicians, especially during Nigeria's First Republic. Many politicians relied on their influence to gain and hold onto power. Because traditional rulers are seen as community leaders and act as a bridge between the people and the government, they became important players in the political process. In doing so, they also contributed to corruption in the electoral system.

This involvement in politics has made some traditional rulers appear biased. For example, during the 2011 elections, many voters were angry at certain chiefs who openly supported opposition parties, and this led to tension in some communities.

Chapterization

This study is divided into five chapters:

CHAPTER ONE: Background to the study.

This chapter produces an insight of the study, giving a general introduction on the “Corruption and Electoral Process: A Comparative Analysis of the 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria”. It explains what the study aims to achieve, the scope of the study also giving an overview of the concept and nature of corruption in Nigeria, the Electoral body, political parties, politicians Traditional rulers and how they contribute to Corruption in Nigeria. Also, this chapter delves into the manifestations and Methodology and the Theoretical framework (Clientelism).

CHAPTER TWO: THE 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND PATTERNS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE.

The 2011 presidential election was seen as a test of Nigeria’s democratic resilience following flawed polls in previous years. Despite peace accords and public commitments by governors to uphold credible elections, widespread violence broke out, especially after the results were announced. This chapter provides a regional overview of the major patterns of electoral violence during the 2011 elections.

CHAPTER THREE: THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA.

This chapter talks on the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, highlighting it as a watershed moment in the country’s democratic history where, for the first time, an incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, was defeated by an opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari of the APC, who secured 54% of the vote against Jonathan’s 45%. Voter turnout dropped by 25% compared to 2011, and APC gained control of the presidency, a majority in both chambers of the National Assembly, and 21

out of 36 states. Despite notable improvements in electoral credibility, such as the use of Smart Card Readers and issue-based campaigns, the elections were marred by widespread corruption. These included the diversion of \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement to fund PDP's campaign, ₦23 billion allegedly distributed to INEC officials as bribes, rampant vote-buying ranging from ₦500 to ₦1000 per vote, and blatant violations of campaign spending limits, with PDP spending over ₦8.7 billion on media alone, far exceeding the ₦1 billion legal threshold for presidential candidates.

CHAPTER FOUR: FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA.

This chapter talks on how electoral violence and corruption undermine Nigeria's democratic process. Factors such as excessive political ambition, ethnic divisions, high unemployment, and the monetization of political offices create intense competition and fuel violence. Corruption worsens the situation through vote buying, ballot rigging, and manipulation of results. A major case was the diversion of \$2.1 billion meant for arms to fund the 2015 elections, weakening security and deepening mistrust. These practices erode public confidence, compromise justice, and encourage impunity in the political system.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This final chapter provides a summary of the entire study. It presents the main findings and draws conclusions based on the research objectives. It also gives practical recommendations for reducing electoral corruption and improving Nigeria's democratic process. Finally, it suggests areas where future research can be carried out.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND PATTERNS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE.

Introduction

This chapter will examine the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the patterns of electoral violence that followed the announcement of results. It will explore the political atmosphere leading up to the election, including the emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as the PDP candidate, the role of INEC under Professor Attahiru Jega, and efforts by stakeholders to promote a peaceful process. The chapter will highlight how electoral violence manifested across the six geopolitical zones, identifying key actors, causes, and consequences of the unrest. It will also consider the institutional responses to the crisis and reflect on the broader implications for Nigeria's democratic development.

Political Background of the 2011 Presidential Election

The 2011 presidential election took place against a backdrop of political uncertainty, following the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in May 2010 and the constitutional succession of Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as president. While Jonathan was legally permitted to contest the 2011 election, his candidacy under the People's Democratic Party (PDP) stirred controversy, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where political elites accused him of violating the informal zoning arrangement,

inflaming ethnic and regional sentiments and created sharp divisions within the ruling party, leading to defections, internal opposition, and a surge in ethno-regional political activism. These tensions deepened existing mistrust in Nigeria's fragile political system, where identity politics often trumps ideological considerations, and where power struggles are closely tied to ethnic representation and access to state resources. In the midst of this volatility, Professor Attahiru Jega, a respected academic and former university vice-chancellor, was appointed Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a move that inspired cautious optimism among citizens and civil society groups about the possibility of electoral reforms and credible elections¹. Under Jega's leadership, INEC introduced new measures including the biometric registration of voters, restructured election timetables, and a more transparent results collation process, aimed at reducing the manipulation that characterised previous polls.

To promote peace and defuse mounting tension, the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF), chaired by Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara State, convened a critical meeting in Abuja on February 8, 2011, bringing together all 36 state governors to sign a peace pact in support of free, fair, and non-violent elections. The pact included a series of pledges: to discourage the use of ethnicity or religion in campaigns, to refrain from political thuggery, to publicly condemn electoral violence, to promote internal democracy, and to respect the outcome of the election as determined by the ballot². This undertaking was widely publicized and hailed as a progressive step towards democratic maturity. However, behind the scenes, political parties were already mobilizing loyalists, including jobless

youths and local militia, for electoral manipulation and possible post-election resistance. The pre-election campaigns across the country were coloured by provocative speeches, veiled threats, and hostile rhetoric from politicians and party surrogates, further stoking insecurity and public anxiety. Though some civil society groups, international partners, and electoral monitors noted improved electoral logistics and better coordination by INEC compared to previous elections, the underlying political climate remained combustible, particularly in states where opposition to Jonathan's candidacy was strongest. The combination of regional resentment, unresolved zoning disputes, aggressive campaigning, and widespread public distrust in Nigeria's democratic institutions created a volatile environment that set the stage for the violent outbursts that would follow the announcement of election results³.

Patterns and Regional Distribution of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence during the 2011 presidential election was not evenly spread across Nigeria. It assumed varied forms, intensity, and triggers depending on the geopolitical region. While post-election violence in the northern part of the country received widespread attention due to its severity and scale, all six geopolitical zones recorded incidents of violence either during the campaign period, the election itself, or in the immediate aftermath. These incidents included political assassinations, physical attacks on party supporters, arson, destruction of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, and the intimidation of voters and electoral officials. The South-West, for instance, experienced considerable pre-election violence, especially in states like Ondo, Ogun, and

Ekiti, where clashes between rival party supporters were frequent. In Oba, Ondo State, three individuals were shot dead, while several others sustained injuries during a violent confrontation between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) supporters just days before the election⁴. Similar tensions erupted in Ekiti State where the killing of PDP supporters Ayo Kehinde Faluyi and Michael Ipindola led to widespread outrage and protests. Ogun State was also engulfed in confusion and violence stemming from disputes over parallel PDP candidate lists, with campaign rallies marred by sporadic clashes and deaths⁵.

In the South-South zone, electoral violence reached alarming levels, particularly in Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Edo States. Akwa Ibom witnessed some of the deadliest violence of the election cycle as campaign rallies between the PDP and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) devolved into large-scale confrontations, leading to loss of life and property destruction. In Uyo and Ikot Ekpene, vehicles were torched, campaign offices were set ablaze, and at least fifty-one individuals were arrested in connection with the mayhem. Similar incidents in Delta State, especially during senatorial primaries, resulted in gunfire exchanges and attempts to lynch party officials over allegations of rigging. Edo State was no exception, with electoral violence emerging from protests linked to disputed party primaries⁶. In Cross River and Bayelsa States, while violence was less widespread, isolated incidents of attacks on aspirants and destruction of materials still occurred.

The South-East zone, historically known for intense political competition, was also affected. In Ebonyi State, political thugs disrupted religious gatherings and attacked

worshippers following a campaign rally, while in Enugu, campaign billboards were vandalised and opposition homes were reportedly targeted. In Abia and Imo States, several campaign events were violently disrupted by armed gangs, while tension ran high in communities where dominant parties clashed over territorial control and candidate endorsements⁷. The violence here, although not on the scale of the North, reflected a pattern of using intimidation and disruption as electoral tools.

In the North-Central region, political violence was widespread and, in some instances, fatal. In Benue State, an ambush on the Deputy Governor's convoy by suspected thugs resulted in injuries and property damage, while in Niger State, the Christian Corpers Fellowship Secretariat was set ablaze, displacing dozens of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members and forcing their emergency relocation. Violence in Plateau and Nasarawa States, though less reported, followed similar patterns, with intra-party disputes leading to riots and loss of life⁸.

The North-West and North-East zones, however, experienced the most devastating post-election violence, especially after the announcement of Goodluck Jonathan's victory. In Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, and Gombe States, mobs took to the streets attacking INEC facilities, churches, homes, and symbols associated with the ruling PDP. In Kano, over forty-seven suspects were arrested following coordinated attacks that included the burning of PDP offices, churches, and homes of traditional leaders, while in Katsina, youths destroyed party offices and vehicles. The violence in Bauchi State was particularly tragic, as ten youth corps members serving as INEC ad hoc staff were

brutally murdered by irate mobs, prompting national outrage¹⁰. The death toll in the northern violence was estimated in the hundreds, with thousands displaced and properties worth millions destroyed. These violent outbursts demonstrated how quickly political frustration, identity mobilisation, and weak law enforcement can escalate into widespread conflict during elections.

Triggers of the 2011 Electoral Violence

The outbreak of violence following the 2011 presidential election was not a spontaneous reaction, but rather the result of several interwoven structural and immediate triggers rooted in Nigeria's political, ethnic, and socio-economic context. One of the most prominent causes was the controversial emergence of President Goodluck Jonathan as the PDP presidential candidate, which many in Northern Nigeria interpreted as a violation of the zoning arrangement. This perceived breach fuelled feelings of political marginalisation and betrayal, especially among northern political elites and youth. As such, the announcement of Jonathan's victory over Muhammadu Buhari who enjoyed massive support across the North was met with widespread anger, resentment, and rejection. The North's historical dominance in federal leadership and their expectation of power return after Yar'Adua's death had solidified regional hopes, which were dashed with Jonathan's win, triggering a collective backlash in the form of violent protest¹².

Ethno-religious polarisation also served as a deep underlying cause. In several northern states, the framing of the election was cast not only in political terms, but in religious and ethnic dichotomies – Christian versus Muslim, South versus North. Politicians, religious

figures, and community leaders in some areas were accused of using inflammatory rhetoric to provoke identity-based hostilities. Rumours and unverified claims that the election had been rigged or manipulated in favour of Jonathan further incited already aggrieved communities, especially among CPC supporters who believed their candidate had been robbed of victory¹³. The speed with which the violence spread suggests that these sentiments were already simmering beneath the surface and only required a spark to explode. In this case, the official announcement of results was the trigger.

Another key factor was the widespread perception of injustice and distrust in electoral institutions. While INEC under Jega was widely credited with improving transparency compared to previous elections, deep-rooted public scepticism towards electoral outcomes persisted, particularly in areas where people felt excluded or marginalised. Many citizens viewed elections not as a means of legitimate political choice, but as elite-manipulated contests with predetermined outcomes. Consequently, for supporters of losing candidates, especially in politically tense zones, violence became a form of protest and expression of political frustration¹⁴. In addition, poor security preparedness during and after the elections enabled riots to spread unchecked. Security forces in some areas were either overwhelmed, complicit, or slow to respond, allowing mobs to destroy properties and target perceived political opponents with little immediate consequence.

The high rate of youth unemployment and the proliferation of small arms also played a catalytic role. Many of the young people who participated in the violence were jobless, easily mobilised, and already engaged in political thuggery during the campaign period.

The recruitment of unemployed youth by political actors in the pre-election period, often with promises of cash or protection, had created an army of ready enforcers who were difficult to demobilise once the elections ended. Combined with the easy availability of illegal firearms and the absence of accountability mechanisms, these conditions turned political grievance into violent insurgency at the community level¹³.

Key Actors and Organisers of Violence

The 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria was not solely the product of public outrage; it was actively fuelled and executed by a variety of actors, many of whom had either direct or indirect affiliations with political stakeholders. Foremost among these were unemployed youths and politically sponsored thugs who had been recruited during the pre-election period to intimidate opponents, enforce territorial dominance, and disrupt rival campaigns. These same groups later transformed into agents of violence once the presidential results were announced. In many northern states, particularly Kaduna, Bauchi, Kano, and Katsina, these youth groups were reported to have taken to the streets in coordinated attacks, targeting individuals perceived to have supported the ruling PDP or President Jonathan¹⁴. Their actions included arson, assault, destruction of homes, burning of churches and mosques, and attacks on electoral offices and personnel. In Bauchi State, the killing of ten National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members who had served as INEC ad hoc staff stood out as a grim symbol of how youth violence had crossed into brutal criminality¹⁵.

Behind these frontline actors were the political sponsors prominent politicians and local power brokers who allegedly mobilised and financed these violent responses. While direct links are often difficult to establish, several reports from both civil society organisations and the media suggested that some political elites had incited the violence through inflammatory remarks and covert support. In many cases, local politicians provided logistics, money, and weapons to their supporters, either as an insurance policy in case of electoral defeat or as a means to demonstrate political strength. The pattern of attacks targeting known political opponents, burning party offices, and looting homes indicated strategic coordination rather than spontaneous anger¹⁶. Additionally, the use of vigilante groups and party-affiliated militias in some regions further pointed to a structure of organised violence tied to the political class.

Religious and community leaders also played a role either by their silence, endorsement, or outright participation. In certain communities, the violence was preceded by sermons, town hall meetings, or broadcast messages that framed the election in divisive and emotionally charged terms. In Kaduna and Kano, for example, allegations emerged that some local leaders had failed to use their platforms to de-escalate the tension, thereby contributing to the unchecked rage that followed the election outcome¹⁷. Their inaction, or in some cases tacit support, allowed attackers to act with moral confidence, believing they were defending their community's interests.

Compounding the situation was the role of security agencies, whose responses were inconsistent and, in some instances, deeply compromised. In some areas, the police and

military were overwhelmed or absent altogether during the height of the violence. In others, they were accused of partisanship, refusing to intervene as mobs attacked perceived political opponents. This failure of state protection not only emboldened the perpetrators but also contributed to the scale and spread of the violence¹⁸. The inability of the state to immediately contain or punish the violence signalled institutional weakness and reinforced the culture of impunity that has long undermined Nigeria's electoral credibility.

Consequences of the Violence

The aftermath of the 2011 post-election violence left a trail of destruction that exposed the fragility of Nigeria's democratic institutions and the high cost of electoral instability. The human toll was staggering. Hundreds of lives were lost within days of the presidential result announcement, with Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, and Gombe recording some of the highest fatalities. In Bauchi alone, the brutal murder of ten National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members sent shockwaves across the country and prompted calls for the reform of youth involvement in elections. Many of the victims of the violence were non-indigenes or individuals perceived to have voted for the ruling party. Houses were razed, churches and mosques torched, and families displaced in retaliation attacks that quickly spiralled out of control. In several northern towns, the violence took on ethno-religious dimensions, targeting specific communities based on their identity or political affiliation¹⁹.

In addition to the human casualties, the economic and material losses were immense. Public infrastructure, electoral materials, government buildings, and private businesses were destroyed in a matter of hours. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported the loss of several local offices and equipment in affected states, which not only disrupted the collation of results but further weakened public confidence in the commission's ability to conduct safe and credible elections²⁰. Schools, transport networks, and local markets were shut down in some areas for weeks due to security concerns. For many of the displaced, particularly women and children, the violence led to long-term economic dislocation and psychological trauma. Camps had to be set up in places like Zonkwa and Kaduna South to house internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom never returned to their homes²¹.

The violence also strained the already weak relationship between citizens and the Nigerian state. In many communities, there was a growing perception that the government lacked both the will and the capacity to protect its citizens in times of crisis. This perception eroded trust in democratic processes and deepened the culture of impunity, as very few perpetrators of the 2011 election violence were arrested or prosecuted. The inability of security agencies to prevent, contain, or respond swiftly to the crisis reinforced public cynicism about the neutrality and effectiveness of state institutions. Furthermore, the targeting of NYSC members created a national crisis that forced the government to re-evaluate the safety of deploying young graduates to politically volatile areas during elections²². In the months that followed, human rights

groups, civil society organisations, and international observers condemned the scale of the violence and called for justice and reform.

State Response and Institutional Review

In the wake of the widespread violence that followed the 2011 presidential election, the Nigerian government was compelled to respond to growing domestic and international pressure for accountability and institutional reform. On April 20, 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan addressed the nation in a sombre broadcast, condemning the violence and drawing a striking parallel between the post-election unrest and the events that had plunged Nigeria into civil war decades earlier. He lamented the unnecessary loss of lives and property, noting that the actions of the rioters were not only anti-democratic but also a threat to the unity of the country²³. His speech was intended to calm tensions and reaffirm the government's commitment to peace and stability, but for many victims, words were not enough. What was needed was tangible justice and reform.

To that end, the federal government inaugurated a 22-member panel of inquiry chaired by respected Islamic scholar Sheikh Ahmed Lemu, with retired Justice Samson Uwaifo serving as vice chairman. The panel was mandated to investigate the causes of the violence, assess the scale of human and material losses, identify the perpetrators, and recommend steps to prevent future occurrences²⁴. The composition of the committee was widely seen as inclusive, drawing from diverse backgrounds such as academia, the judiciary, religious institutions, and civil society. The committee toured all affected states, conducted hearings, and received memoranda from victims, witnesses, security personnel,

and political stakeholders. Their findings revealed widespread complicity at multiple levels from local politicians who incited supporters, to security agencies that failed to act, and community leaders who stood by silently as mobs ransacked their neighbourhoods²⁵.

Among the panel's recommendations were the prosecution of individuals found culpable, the strengthening of INEC's independence, the regulation of hate speech and inflammatory political messaging, and reforms to the security sector to ensure better election-time preparedness. The Lemu Report, as it came to be known, also called for the creation of a code of conduct for political parties and candidates, increased voter education, and a national peace architecture that could serve as an early warning mechanism against electoral conflict²⁶. However, despite the comprehensiveness of its recommendations, the implementation record was dismal. Very few arrests were made, and even fewer convictions were recorded. No political figure was prosecuted, and most of the structural reforms proposed were not fully enacted. This lack of enforcement only reinforced public perception that Nigeria's political elite operated above the law and that electoral violence remained a viable tool for political mobilization.

International responses were equally critical. Observer missions from the European Union, African Union, and the United Nations, while commending INEC's improvements in electoral procedure, expressed concern over the violence and urged the Nigerian government to hold perpetrators accountable and address the systemic factors enabling such unrest²⁷. Civil society organisations within the country also intensified their advocacy for democratic consolidation, electoral justice, and the depoliticisation of

the security sector. Yet, in the absence of real political will, many of these calls were ignored or met with token gestures.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Introduction

This chapter examines the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, widely regarded as a turning point in the country's democratic history. For the first time, an incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was defeated by an opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), who won 54% of the vote. The chapter explores the significance of this peaceful transfer of power and highlights key innovations introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), such as the use of Smart Card Readers and Permanent Voter Cards. However, despite these improvements, the elections were marred by widespread corruption, including the diversion of public funds, bribery of INEC officials, vote-buying, and violations of campaign finance laws. This chapter will analyze these corrupt practices and assess their impact on the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

Overview of the 2015 General Election

The 2015 general election stands as one of the most significant political events in Nigeria's post-independence history. For the first time, the country witnessed a peaceful democratic transition of power in which an incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was defeated at the ballot box. Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), won with

approximately 15.4 million votes (54%) against Jonathan's 12.9 million votes (45%), ending the PDP's 16-year hold on federal power since the return to civilian rule in 1999.¹ The elections were originally scheduled for February 2015 but were postponed by six weeks due to official concerns over security challenges posed by the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast.² When they were eventually held in March and April, they involved over 800,000 electoral officials, 68 million registered voters, and more than 150,000 polling units across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.³

Despite high anticipation and intense political rivalry, the elections were relatively peaceful, especially when compared to the violence and irregularities that marred previous cycles. Voter turnout, however, was significantly lower than expected. Only 43.6% of registered voters participated in the presidential election, representing a sharp decline from the 53.7% recorded in 2011. Nonetheless, the APC achieved sweeping victories beyond the presidency. The party secured majorities in both chambers of the National Assembly and won governorship positions in 21 of the 36 states, thereby altering the political landscape at both federal and subnational levels.

The role of electoral institutions and civil society was crucial in shaping the credibility of the process. Domestic and international observer groups including the European Union Election Observation Mission, the Commonwealth Observer Group, and the Situation Room Nigeria praised INEC's overall management of the elections, especially its commitment to neutrality, the deployment of new technologies, and improved logistics.

These endorsements elevated public confidence and contributed to the widespread acceptance of the election results.

Nevertheless, several critical challenges persisted. These included logistical delays, underage voting in certain regions, malfunctioning biometric devices, and the late arrival of materials at some polling units. More importantly, while the election was hailed as a democratic breakthrough, it was also characterized by widespread allegations of corrupt practices, including vote buying, financial inducements, abuse of state power, and illegal campaign financing. These issues, though often overshadowed by the celebratory tone surrounding the peaceful transition, had serious implications for the integrity of the electoral process. As the following sections will show, these corrupt practices ranging from the diversion of public funds to the bribery of electoral officials exposed the persistent weaknesses in Nigeria's electoral framework and the enduring influence of money in politics.

Electoral Reforms and Innovations

One of the defining features of the 2015 general elections was the introduction of key electoral reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, credibility, and public confidence in Nigeria's democratic process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), under the leadership of Professor Attahiru Jega, implemented several innovations that marked a significant departure from the fraudulent, violent, and logistically deficient practices that had historically plagued Nigerian elections. Central to these reforms was the deployment of the **Smart Card Reader (SCR)** and the **Permanent Voter Cards**

(PVCs), which were designed to verify voters' identities through biometric authentication. This technological innovation sought to address persistent challenges such as multiple voting, underage voting, ballot stuffing, and impersonation, all of which had contributed to disputed outcomes in previous polls.⁶ By attempting to match each voter to their biometric data before accreditation, INEC aimed to create a more secure and verifiable voting process that could stand up to both domestic and international scrutiny.

Despite initial skepticism and resistance from certain political quarters particularly from segments of the then-ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) the Card Reader technology eventually proved to be a deterrent to electoral malpractice in many areas. While its deployment encountered several challenges, including frequent technical failures, battery issues, and lack of network connectivity in remote areas, its symbolic and practical significance was undeniable. In many urban polling centers, the biometric verification process was successful in identifying legitimate voters and preventing cases of double registration or impersonation.⁷ Civil society groups and election monitors, including both local and international observer missions, acknowledged that the system helped to limit the inflation of voter numbers and forced a higher level of procedural discipline on electoral officials. Nevertheless, the uneven performance of the Card Readers particularly in rural and underserved regions led to delays and, in some cases, a reversion to manual accreditation, which slightly compromised uniformity in implementation.⁸ These technical setbacks highlighted the need for stronger logistical coordination and infrastructural investment in future elections.

Beyond technological innovation, the 2015 general elections also featured other reforms aimed at professionalizing the electoral process and improving the democratic environment. One important shift, at least in theory, was a growing emphasis on **issue-based campaigns**, particularly by the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC). The APC's campaign narratives were dominated by pressing national concerns such as insecurity (notably the Boko Haram insurgency), corruption, economic stagnation, and youth unemployment. While the use of ethnic and regional rhetoric remained prevalent especially in the South-South and South-East geopolitical zones there was a discernible attempt to frame political contests around substantive national challenges.⁹ This marked a modest yet important departure from Nigeria's traditional electioneering style, which had historically relied on patronage networks, identity politics, and inflammatory rhetoric. In parallel, INEC made notable improvements in the training of ad hoc staff, particularly National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, and significantly improved the logistical deployment of electoral materials across the country.

Additionally, the Commission intensified efforts to broaden civic engagement by expanding voter education and promoting citizen participation in the electoral process. Media campaigns, jingles, town hall meetings, and collaborations with non-governmental organizations helped to raise awareness about voter rights, the function of the Smart Card Readers, and the importance of peaceful participation.¹⁰ These measures contributed to a generally well-informed electorate in urban areas, although their reach was still limited in remote regions. Collectively, these reforms and innovations led domestic and

international observers including the European Union Election Observation Mission and the National Democratic Institute to describe the 2015 elections as the most credible and competitive in Nigeria's recent democratic history. However, as the previous and subsequent sections of this chapter have shown, these administrative improvements coexisted with deep structural problems, particularly corruption, political manipulation, and institutional compromise, which ultimately limited the full realization of a free and fair electoral process.

Manifestations of Corruption During the 2015 Elections

Despite the institutional reforms and technological innovations that defined the 2015 general elections such as the introduction of biometric Smart Card Readers and extensive voter education campaigns the electoral process remained deeply compromised by systemic and well-entrenched forms of corruption. While these reforms were lauded by domestic and international observers as progressive steps toward enhancing electoral credibility, they proved insufficient in curbing elite-level abuse of state power and resources. A major example was the \$2.1 billion arms procurement scandal, widely known as "Dasukigate." This involved the alleged diversion of funds by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), led by Colonel Sambo Dasuki, which were intended to bolster Nigeria's military response to the escalating Boko Haram insurgency. Instead of being allocated to defense procurement, these public funds were reportedly distributed among top officials of the ruling **People's** Democratic Party (PDP), party-aligned media organizations, and political consultants to fortify the re-election campaign of then-

President Goodluck Jonathan.¹¹ This misuse of security funds underscored the vulnerability of public institutions to political capture, where national emergencies were exploited as cover for campaign financing. Although some key actors were arrested and charged, many Nigerians viewed the anti-corruption response as selective and politically motivated, particularly because the most aggressive prosecutions occurred after the All Progressives Congress (APC) assumed power. The lack of comprehensive institutional mechanisms to ensure accountability for public fund misuse not only undermined the credibility of the 2015 elections but also eroded public trust in democratic oversight.

Beyond elite-level graft, the election also witnessed widespread forms of transactional politics at the grassroots level. Vote-buying, in particular, became an entrenched and highly visible form of electoral corruption. While the practice of exchanging money or goods for votes was not new, it assumed an unprecedented scale during the 2015 polls. Both major political parties the APC and PDP were widely reported to have deployed cash inducements ranging from ₦500 to ₦1,000 per voter in multiple constituencies.¹² In many rural areas and marginal constituencies, where poverty was acute and political loyalty was fluid, this tactic became a central campaign strategy. Community leaders and party agents were allegedly tasked with compiling voter lists, distributing funds, and ensuring compliance, effectively turning citizens into commodities within a monetized political marketplace. A particularly controversial episode involved the alleged disbursement of ₦23 billion by then-Petroleum Minister Diezani Alison-Madueke, funds which were reportedly funneled through intermediaries to electoral officers of the

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to influence outcomes in politically sensitive states.¹³ While official investigations led to the prosecution of some INEC staff, broader questions remained about the institutional integrity of the electoral umpire and the systemic loopholes that allowed such large-scale bribery to occur.

Corruption during the 2015 elections was not limited to vote-buying and misuse of security funds; it also extended into campaign finance violations on a massive scale. The Electoral Act imposed a maximum spending limit of ₦1 billion for presidential candidates, but evidence emerged showing that the PDP spent over ₦8.7 billion on media and publicity alone, far exceeding the legal ceiling.¹⁴ These expenditures covered political advertisements, campaign jingles, newspaper inserts, and sponsored content aimed at shaping public perception and mobilizing voter support. Although the APC was also accused of exceeding the legal limits for campaign spending, fewer official probes were launched into the opposition's finances, raising concerns about the selective enforcement of electoral laws. Moreover, most political parties failed to submit accurate or timely reports of their campaign expenditures to INEC, as required by law. The electoral commission itself lacked the forensic auditing capacity and political independence necessary to sanction high-level offenders. This failure to ensure compliance with campaign finance regulations not only distorted the electoral playing field but also entrenched a culture of impunity that undermines the democratic ideal of fair competition.

A joint report by USAID and UKAID disclosed that, both APC and PDP used public treasury in sponsoring their campaigns at all levels and they have spent above limit. For instance, the 2010 Electoral Act specifies the following as maximum spending limit for elective offices.

Table 1: Showing spending limits of candidates according to 2010 Electoral Act

Position	Spending Limit
Presidential Candidate	N1Billion (\$3, 183, 870.91)
Governorship Candidate	N200Million(\$636, 774.18)
Senatorial Candidate	N40Million (\$127, 354.84)
Member Federal House of Representatives	N20Million (\$63, 677.42)
State House of Assembly Members	N10Million (\$31, 838.71)
L G Chairmanship Candidate	N10Million (\$31, 838.71)
LG Councillorship Elections	N1, 000,000 (\$3, 183.871)

The above table while identifies clearly the maximum limit that each contestant of a given political office should spend at maximum, the USAID/UKAID report indicated that, the Presidential candidates alone for PDP and APC spent in media campaign alone talk less of other campaign finances above their maximum financial spending. The table below revealed the assertion above.

Table 2: Media Spending of two Major Political Parties in the 2015 General Elections:
APC and PDP

Campaign Expenses	PDP Presidential Candidate	APC Presidential candidate
Campaigns and Rallies	1, 280, 374, 870.00	671, 062, 200.00
Expenses on Billboards	473, 160, 000.00	190, 380, 000.00
Electronic Media Campaign	532, 100, 000.00	410, 050, 000.00
Electronic Media advert	3, 988, 822, 125.00	1, 064, 706, 805.00
Print Media Campaign	2, 475, 228, 301.00	5 79, 647, 687.00
TOTAL	8, 749, 685, 296.00	2, 915, 846, 737.00

Source: (USAID & UKAID, 2015).

Taken together, these manifestations of corruption whether through elite appropriation of state resources, pervasive vote-buying, or unregulated campaign finance paint a sobering picture of the 2015 electoral process. They reveal how institutional reforms, no matter how technologically advanced or procedurally sound, cannot guarantee electoral integrity in the absence of political will, robust oversight, and legal enforcement. The pervasiveness of these corrupt practices suggests that Nigeria's electoral challenges are not merely technical but deeply structural, rooted in a political culture that prioritizes power acquisition over democratic accountability.

Impact of Corruption on the Electoral Process

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria, though hailed for marking a peaceful political transition, were significantly marred by systemic corruption that undermined the legitimacy of the democratic process. Despite the historic concession of defeat by an incumbent president and the introduction of technological innovations such as biometric

verification, deep-rooted corruption eroded public trust and distorted the electoral playing field. Perhaps the most emblematic scandal was the diversion of \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement into campaign funding under the Jonathan administration, an episode widely referred to as “Dasukigate.”¹⁵ In parallel, allegations that ₦23 billion was distributed to INEC officials to influence electoral outcomes further diminished confidence in the impartiality of the electoral body.¹⁶ These abuses not only contravened Nigeria’s electoral laws but also weakened the principle of fair competition, casting doubt on the validity of results, especially in closely contested regions. While the 2015 elections represented a milestone in terms of political alternation, the pervasive use of state resources for partisan advantage rendered the process flawed and far from free or fair.

Corruption also gravely affected the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and associated oversight institutions. Although INEC received praise for its logistical preparedness and the real-time transmission of results in some states, its image suffered greatly following revelations that several of its staff accepted bribes to compromise the integrity of the vote.¹⁷ Investigations by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and media exposés revealed how funds were routed through various channels to manipulate collation outcomes, delay result announcements, or inflate figures in favor of the ruling party.¹⁸ This institutional complicity not only raised concerns about electoral transparency but also highlighted the failure of internal safeguards and ethical standards within Nigeria’s electoral management

bodies. Moreover, security agencies that were expected to enforce compliance with electoral laws were frequently accused of selective enforcement or collusion with political actors.¹⁹ In such an environment, the rules of electoral engagement became negotiable, and accountability mechanisms were rendered ineffective, setting a dangerous precedent for future polls.

Beyond institutional failures, the corruption witnessed during the 2015 elections had a damaging effect on public perception and voter confidence. Initial enthusiasm for the elections, driven by hopes for political change and reform, gradually gave way to widespread disillusionment as allegations of vote-buying, bribery, and illicit campaign finance gained prominence in public discourse.²⁰ Civil society organizations, media outlets, and election observers highlighted the extensive use of cash inducements and gift-giving to sway voters, especially in rural areas where poverty made electorates more susceptible to manipulation.²¹ The notion that political influence could be bought contributed to growing apathy among segments of the electorate, especially young voters who felt disempowered by a system that seemed to reward corruption. The resulting cynicism and distrust in democratic institutions weakened civic engagement and reduced voter turnout in subsequent elections.²² Over time, this erosion of trust risks consolidating a political culture in which elections are viewed as rituals of elite competition rather than vehicles for genuine democratic participation.

Finally, the long-term impact of electoral corruption in 2015 extends to Nigeria's broader quest for democratic consolidation. When illicit practices go unpunished and electoral

institutions fail to hold perpetrators accountable, a culture of impunity takes root.²³ This not only emboldens political actors to replicate such tactics in future elections but also diminishes the electorate's belief in the rule of law. Legal frameworks regulating campaign finance, vote-buying, and electoral conduct remain inadequately enforced, leaving loopholes for abuse.²⁴ The judiciary, though constitutionally empowered to adjudicate electoral disputes, has often been hampered by delays, capacity constraints, or political interference, further weakening deterrence. If corruption continues to be tolerated within the electoral process, it threatens to reverse the modest democratic gains Nigeria has achieved. Therefore, meaningful reform must target not only the technical aspects of election administration but also the deep-seated political economy of corruption that sustains these practices.²⁵ Only then can elections serve as authentic expressions of the people's will and contribute to building a resilient democratic state.

Conclusion

The 2015 general elections marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's democratic evolution, distinguished by a combination of credible reforms, peaceful power transition, and heightened public participation. The introduction of technologies such as the Permanent Voter Cards and Smart Card Readers, alongside improved logistical arrangements and issue-driven campaigns, contributed to enhanced transparency and competitiveness. However, these advancements were tempered by persistent challenges, including institutional weaknesses, political interference, and entrenched corruption that continued to undermine the integrity of the electoral process. While the outcome was

historic—ushering in a change of government through democratic means—the deeper structural issues that constrained Nigeria’s democratic progress remained unresolved. As such, the 2015 elections should be seen not as the culmination of democratic consolidation, but as a crucial moment of transition that revealed both the possibilities and limitations of reform within the Nigerian context.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA.

Introduction

Electoral processes are the cornerstone of democratic governance, providing citizens the legitimate avenue to choose their leaders and participate in shaping the policies that govern them. In theory, elections are expected to be competitive, transparent, and peaceful, reflecting the will of the electorate. However, in Nigeria, electoral processes have often been characterized by violence, manipulation, and widespread corruption. This recurring trend undermines not only the credibility of electoral outcomes but also the stability of the democratic system itself¹. Despite successive constitutional reforms, the establishment of electoral commissions, and the presence of security agencies during elections, the Nigerian political landscape continues to witness a disturbing interplay between corruption and violence. These factors have entrenched systemic distrust among the populace and have frequently led to the erosion of democratic values.

Electoral violence in Nigeria is not a novel phenomenon. From the First Republic in the early 1960s to the most recent general elections, the country's electoral history has been marred by pre-election intimidation, ballot box snatching, vote buying, and post-election unrest². In many instances, such violence is not spontaneous but strategically orchestrated by political actors who perceive elections as a zero-sum contest for control of state

resources. The influence of corruption in this process is equally profound. Electoral corruption fuels manipulation of voter registers, rigging of results, intimidation of opposition candidates, and collusion with security agencies to subvert the democratic process³. Together, these dynamics have created a political culture where the integrity of elections is persistently compromised, and the electorate's faith in democracy is steadily eroded.

This chapter examines two interconnected aspects of Nigeria's electoral crisis: the **impact of corruption on the electoral process** and the **factors responsible for electoral violence**. By analyzing historical and contemporary evidence, with specific reference to events such as the 2011 and 2015 general elections, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how corruption and violence interact to undermine Nigeria's democratic experiment. It will also discuss the broader implications for governance, social stability, and the rule of law, concluding with observations on the urgent reforms required to address these persistent challenges.

Understanding Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Electoral violence refers to acts of physical harm, intimidation, or destruction aimed at disrupting electoral processes before, during, or after elections⁴. In Nigeria, such violence manifests in various forms, ranging from pre-election harassment of opponents and destruction of campaign materials to post-election riots triggered by disputed results. The phenomenon has deep structural and historical roots. Scholars argue that Nigeria's colonial experience institutionalized ethnic and regional divisions, which political elites

have since exploited for electoral gain⁵. This structural manipulation often makes elections less about issues and more about identity politics, increasing the likelihood of violent confrontation.

One significant feature of electoral violence in Nigeria is its cyclical nature. It often follows a predictable pattern: heightened political tension during campaigns, localized outbreaks of violence during voting, and large-scale unrest after results are announced. For example, the 2011 presidential election, though initially described by observers as relatively credible, was followed by severe post-election violence in Northern Nigeria, resulting in over 800 deaths and the displacement of thousands⁶. The violence was fuelled by perceptions of electoral fraud, regional marginalization, and manipulation by political elites. Similarly, the 2019 elections witnessed both lethal and non-lethal violence in states such as Rivers, Kano, and Bayelsa, with allegations of ballot box snatching and intimidation by armed thugs linked to political parties⁷.

Underlying these violent episodes are socio-economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, and the monetization of politics, which create a pool of disenfranchised youth easily mobilized as political thugs. Additionally, the lack of accountability for perpetrators of electoral violence perpetuates a culture of impunity. Political actors, aware that they are unlikely to face prosecution, continue to sponsor violence as a strategic tool for electoral victory⁸. Therefore, electoral violence in Nigeria cannot be understood in isolation from the broader context of political corruption and institutional weakness.

Impact of Corruption on the Electoral Process in Nigeria

Electoral Malpractice and Manipulation

Corruption runs through every stage of Nigeria's electoral process, from candidate selection to the declaration of results. Political parties often subvert internal democratic norms by imposing candidates favored by party elites, sidelining grassroots preferences. This imposition of candidates alienates party members and sometimes triggers intra-party violence⁹. During elections, electoral officials have been implicated in practices such as altering vote counts, deliberately misplacing sensitive materials, and colluding with politicians to disenfranchise voters. Such practices erode the credibility of elections and deepen political polarization.

One of the most notorious manifestations of electoral corruption is the manipulation of voter registers and results. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has often been accused of failing to ensure the accuracy of the voter register, thereby enabling underage and multiple voting¹⁰. This manipulation is frequently accompanied by the physical snatching of ballot boxes, especially in rural areas where security presence is weak. For example, during the 2015 general elections, multiple reports emerged of ballot box snatching in states such as Rivers, Delta, and Akwa Ibom, often with the alleged complicity of security personnel¹¹.

Corruption also plays a role in influencing the behavior of electoral tribunals. The judicial process meant to resolve electoral disputes is often compromised through bribery and political interference. This not only delays justice but also undermines the rule of law,

reinforcing the perception that electoral outcomes are determined by wealth and political connections rather than the will of the people¹². Over time, such practices erode public trust in both the electoral system and the broader democratic framework.

Vote Buying and Monetization of Politics

Vote buying has become a defining feature of Nigerian elections, reflecting the deep monetization of politics. This practice involves offering money, goods, or other inducements to voters in exchange for their support at the polls. It not only undermines the integrity of the electoral process but also distorts democratic choice, as citizens are encouraged to prioritize immediate financial gain over long-term governance considerations¹³. Vote buying is facilitated by the high poverty rate in Nigeria, which makes many voters susceptible to short-term incentives. Political actors exploit this vulnerability by deploying vast financial resources to secure votes, often in open defiance of electoral laws.

The problem is exacerbated by the weakness of enforcement mechanisms. Although the Electoral Act prescribes penalties for vote buying and other electoral malpractices, enforcement is sporadic and often selective. For instance, during the 2019 general elections, there were widespread reports of vote buying in states like Osun, Ekiti, and Kano, yet few arrests were made, and even fewer prosecutions followed¹⁴. This lack of accountability emboldens political actors to continue engaging in corrupt practices with little fear of consequences. Moreover, the cost of running for political office has escalated

dramatically, making politics a preserve of the wealthy and increasing the pressure on elected officials to recoup campaign expenses through corrupt means once in office¹⁵.

Monetization of politics also reinforces the role of “godfathers” — influential political figures who sponsor candidates in exchange for loyalty and control over public resources. Godfatherism entrenches corruption in governance by ensuring that political officeholders are beholden to their sponsors rather than to the electorate. This arrangement perpetuates a cycle where political office is seen primarily as a means of personal enrichment rather than public service, further eroding the quality of democratic governance in Nigeria¹⁶.

Abuse of State Resources and Institutions

Another major way corruption affects the electoral process is through the abuse of state resources and institutions by incumbents. State machinery — including the police, military, media, and public funds — is often deployed to favor ruling parties and disadvantage opposition candidates. This misuse of state power undermines the principle of a level playing field in democratic contests. For example, during the 2011 general elections, there were multiple reports of security forces being used to intimidate opposition strongholds and restrict their campaign activities¹⁷.

The misuse of state-controlled media is another tactic. State broadcasting services often provide disproportionate coverage to ruling party candidates while ignoring or misrepresenting opposition campaigns¹⁸. Similarly, public funds are sometimes diverted to finance election campaigns, blurring the line between state resources and party coffers.

Such practices amount to indirect electoral corruption, as they provide unfair advantages to incumbents and distort the electoral competition.

The role of security agencies in particular has drawn concern. While security forces are meant to ensure safety and order during elections, in practice, they have sometimes been complicit in acts of voter suppression and electoral fraud. Allegations of police officers aiding in ballot box snatching, preventing opposition agents from accessing polling units, or failing to respond to violent attacks have been persistent across election cycles¹⁹. This institutional bias not only compromises electoral integrity but also deepens citizens' mistrust in state institutions.

Factors Responsible for Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty and unemployment form a critical socio-economic backdrop to electoral violence in Nigeria. With an unemployment rate that has hovered between 23–33 percent in the past decade, a large segment of the population — particularly young men — remain economically marginalized and vulnerable to political manipulation²⁰. Political actors take advantage of this vulnerability by recruiting these individuals as political thugs to intimidate opponents, disrupt voting, or carry out targeted attacks.

The use of unemployed youth in electoral violence is facilitated by the promise of quick monetary gain or future political patronage. In many cases, these youths have no stable income and see political thuggery as a viable source of livelihood during election

seasons²¹. This dynamic has been observed in several high-profile cases, such as the 2007 elections in Rivers State, where violence was linked to competing political godfathers who mobilized armed gangs to assert dominance in the oil-rich region²². The persistent cycle of poverty thus serves as both a cause and a consequence of electoral violence, as instability discourages investment and undermines economic development.

Ethno-Religious Polarization

Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity, while potentially a source of strength, has often been exploited by politicians to mobilize support along divisive lines. Electoral competition frequently degenerates into identity-based contests, where candidates appeal to ethnic or religious loyalties rather than policy issues²³. This strategy not only polarizes communities but also increases the risk of electoral violence, especially in regions where ethnic groups are in competition for political dominance.

The post-election violence of 2011 offers a stark illustration. Following the announcement of Goodluck Jonathan's victory, protests erupted in several northern states, where opposition supporters claimed the election had been rigged. The violence quickly took on an ethno-religious character, targeting perceived supporters of the ruling party, many of whom were from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This episode underscores how ethnic and religious polarization can amplify electoral tensions and escalate disputes into large-scale violence²⁴.

Weak Electoral Institutions and Legal Framework

A fundamental factor that perpetuates corruption and electoral violence in Nigeria is the weakness of electoral institutions. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), constitutionally mandated to conduct elections, has often been criticized for lacking full independence from the executive arm of government²⁵. This dependence can manifest in biased decision-making, such as delays in releasing voter registers, failure to prosecute electoral offenders, and perceived favoritism toward ruling parties.

The legal framework for elections, although improved in recent reforms, has historically contained loopholes that politicians exploit. Ambiguities in the Electoral Act regarding timelines for dispute resolution, the admissibility of certain forms of evidence, and sanctions for electoral offences have often allowed violators to escape accountability. Furthermore, electoral tribunals — the primary forum for addressing grievances — are frequently undermined by corruption, political interference, and lengthy litigation processes. In some instances, court decisions have overturned election results months or even years after the contested polls, which undermines public confidence in both the judiciary and the democratic process²⁶.

Political Godfatherism and Patronage Networks

Political godfatherism is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's political culture, influencing candidate selection, campaign financing, and governance outcomes. Godfathers are wealthy and influential individuals who sponsor candidates in exchange for political loyalty and access to state resources²⁷. Their involvement in elections often distorts the

democratic process, as candidates are selected based on personal connections rather than merit or popular support.

This system fosters a transactional form of politics, where loyalty to a godfather outweighs accountability to the electorate. In return for financial and logistical backing, sponsored candidates are expected to channel state resources back to their benefactors once in power. This patron-client relationship not only entrenches corruption but also fuels electoral violence, as godfathers may resort to coercion, bribery, and intimidation to ensure their candidates' success. A notable example is the 2003 elections in Anambra State, where political godfathers allegedly attempted to kidnap a sitting governor when he resisted their influence²⁸.

Role of Security Forces in Electoral Violence

Security forces, particularly the police and military are intended to protect voters, safeguard election materials, and maintain peace during elections. However, in Nigeria, their role has often been controversial. Reports of security agents aiding ballot box snatching, harassing opposition candidates, and turning a blind eye to acts of voter intimidation have been widespread across multiple election cycles²⁹. In some cases, security personnel have directly engaged in excessive use of force against protesters or political opponents.

One of the most troubling trends is the selective deployment of security forces. During the 2015 general elections, for instance, opposition strongholds in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States reported unusually heavy military presence, which critics argued was intended to

suppress voter turnout in those areas³⁰. Such perceived bias not only delegitimizes electoral outcomes but also heightens tensions, sometimes triggering violent confrontations between security personnel and communities.

Judicial Corruption in Post-Election Disputes

The judiciary is the final arbiter of electoral disputes, but its credibility in this role is frequently undermined by allegations of corruption and political interference. Judicial corruption can take various forms — from the manipulation of case assignments to outright bribery of judges. These practices erode public trust in the dispute resolution process and, by extension, in the democratic system itself³¹.

Lengthy litigation periods also compound the problem. In several cases, gubernatorial election disputes have been resolved years into the contested term, creating situations where incumbents govern under a cloud of legitimacy doubts. For example, in the 2007 elections, the Supreme Court nullified the election of some governors nearly two years after they assumed office, a delay that not only disrupted governance but also signaled inefficiency in the adjudication of electoral matters³².

Conclusion

Corruption continues to undermine Nigeria's electoral process in profound and multifaceted ways. From vote buying and the monetization of politics to the abuse of state resources, godfatherism, and judicial compromise, these practices erode the integrity of elections and weaken democratic governance. Electoral violence, driven by socio-

economic vulnerabilities, ethno-religious divisions, and institutional weaknesses, compounds the problem by creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust.

For Nigeria to consolidate its democracy, reforms must go beyond legislative amendments to address the socio-economic, institutional, and cultural roots of electoral malpractice. Strengthening the independence of INEC, enforcing electoral laws without bias, ensuring accountability for security agencies, and reducing the influence of political godfathers are essential steps toward restoring public confidence in the electoral process. Without such measures, the cycle of corruption and violence in Nigerian elections is likely to persist, with far-reaching consequences for governance and national stability.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Electoral violence remains one of the gravest challenges confronting Nigeria's democracy. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has made commendable progress in institutionalizing democratic governance, yet elections have too often been marred by violence, intimidation, and fraud. The persistence of electoral violence reveals deep-seated structural, institutional, and socio-economic problems that continue to undermine democratic consolidation. From the 2011 to the 2015 general elections, Nigeria's experience has shown that the culture of violence is not an isolated occurrence but a reflection of the broader weaknesses in its political system, institutions, and leadership ethics.

At the heart of Nigeria's electoral crisis lies the excessive struggle for political power, which is viewed not as a means of service but as a gateway to wealth and personal gain. Politics has become commercialized, and political offices are seen as investments that must yield returns. This monetization of politics has encouraged corruption and desperation among candidates, leading to the recruitment of thugs, manipulation of results, and the use of violence to secure victory. Elections have therefore become a do-or-die affair, where losing is perceived as political extinction. This unhealthy competition has created a political environment dominated by fear, mistrust, and lawlessness.

A major dimension of the problem is the high level of poverty and unemployment that pervades Nigerian society. With millions of unemployed youths and limited economic opportunities, many young people are easily mobilized by politicians as tools for violence. The promise of quick monetary reward or future political favor often lures them into

engaging in acts such as ballot box snatching, intimidation of voters, and destruction of electoral materials. For many of these young men, political thuggery becomes a temporary source of livelihood during election periods. This cycle of manipulation thrives in an environment of economic deprivation and social inequality, where the basic needs of the population are unmet and survival becomes a daily struggle.

The weakness of Nigeria's democratic institutions has also contributed significantly to the perpetuation of electoral violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which bears the constitutional responsibility of organizing free and fair elections, has often faced challenges relating to logistics, credibility, and independence. In several instances, allegations of partisanship and incompetence have eroded public trust in the Commission. When electoral institutions fail to inspire confidence, citizens are more likely to perceive elections as predetermined events rather than genuine democratic exercises. Consequently, they may resort to violence as a means of expressing frustration or contesting unfair outcomes.

Equally worrisome is the compromised role of the security agencies. Security forces such as the police and the military are expected to maintain peace and order during elections, safeguard polling units, and protect both voters and electoral officials. However, in practice, security personnel have sometimes acted in ways that compromise the neutrality of the state. Reports of police officers assisting in ballot box snatching, intimidating voters, or turning a blind eye to violent attacks have been widespread. In some cases, the selective deployment of security forces to opposition strongholds has created perceptions of bias and further heightened political tensions. These practices have undermined public confidence in the impartiality of security institutions and have made elections appear as

contests between state power and the opposition rather than between competing political ideas.

The judiciary, as the final arbiter of electoral disputes, has also not been insulated from criticism. Delays in adjudicating election petitions and allegations of corruption among judicial officers have weakened the effectiveness of the courts in safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. In some instances, court rulings have come years after elections, long after those declared winners had already spent a significant portion of their tenure in office. Such delays not only disrupt governance but also diminish the people's faith in the justice system. When citizens believe that the courts cannot provide timely and impartial redress, they are more likely to express dissatisfaction through protests or violent means.

Another entrenched factor in Nigeria's electoral culture is political godfatherism. Wealthy and influential individuals—popularly referred to as godfathers—exert enormous influence over the political process by sponsoring candidates in exchange for loyalty and control over state resources. This patron-client relationship undermines internal democracy within political parties and fosters corruption. Once in office, godfather-sponsored politicians often prioritize the interests of their sponsors over those of the people, thereby weakening governance and accountability. The competition among rival godfathers for control of the state frequently spills into violent confrontations, further destabilizing the electoral environment.

Given these realities, it is evident that tackling electoral violence in Nigeria requires a holistic approach that addresses both institutional weaknesses and socio-economic conditions. Government must take deliberate steps to reform the political system and

make public office less financially attractive. The current high salaries and allowances of political officeholders have made politics a lucrative enterprise rather than a platform for service. Reducing these financial incentives would help to discourage opportunists who seek power solely for personal enrichment and attract those genuinely committed to public service.

Economic empowerment, especially through job creation and youth development, must be prioritized. When citizens—particularly young people—are gainfully employed and economically secure, they are less likely to be manipulated by politicians. Job creation initiatives, skills acquisition programs, and youth entrepreneurship schemes should be expanded to absorb the growing unemployed population. A society that provides opportunities for its youth is less prone to political violence and instability.

Furthermore, public enlightenment and civic education should be strengthened. Many Nigerians lack proper understanding of the democratic process and the peaceful mechanisms available for resolving disputes. Voter education campaigns should emphasize tolerance, non-violence, and the importance of accepting electoral outcomes in good faith. Citizens must be made to understand that democracy is built on compromise, participation, and respect for the rule of law, not on violence or vengeance.

Institutional reform is equally vital. INEC should be granted full autonomy to operate without executive interference. Transparent recruitment of officials, effective logistics planning, and the adoption of modern technologies can enhance the credibility of elections. The judiciary should also be reformed to ensure the speedy resolution of electoral cases, while judges handling political matters must be insulated from political

pressure. Security agencies, for their part, should undergo training on electoral conduct and human rights standards to ensure neutrality and professionalism.

Ultimately, the success of democracy in Nigeria depends on the collective will of both leaders and citizens to uphold democratic values. Political elites must rise above selfish ambitions and see leadership as a call to service. Civil society organizations and the media should continue to play watchdog roles by exposing electoral malpractices and holding institutions accountable. The general public must also remain vigilant, demanding transparency, justice, and accountability at all levels of governance.

In essence, electoral violence and corruption have remained persistent obstacles to Nigeria's democratic growth. They thrive in an environment characterized by poverty, institutional weakness, and moral decay. Addressing them requires not only political reforms but also a transformation of attitudes and values. Democracy cannot flourish in the midst of fear, intimidation, and impunity. Therefore, Nigerians must collectively commit to building a society where the ballot, not the bullet, determines leadership; where elections are seen as a civic duty, not a battle; and where government exists to serve the people rather than dominate them. Only through such commitment can Nigeria achieve a truly stable, transparent, and peaceful democratic order capable of guaranteeing national unity and sustainable development.

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