ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: FROM BALLOT BOX SNATCHING TO TECHNOLOGICAL FRAUD, FOURTH REPUBLIC IN PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords

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Abstract

Research problem
Various forms of electoral misconduct ranging from ballot box snatching to technological fraud have undermined the integrity of the electoral process in Nigeria, posing several challenges to the consolidation of democracy in the country. Based on the above, this study examined electoral malpractices and democratic consolidation in Nigeria fourth republic focusing on ballot box snatching, technological fraud, etc.

Method/Theory
The study adopts the qualitative research approach which relied mainly on secondary data. Collected data were analyzed using qualitative desk analysis method, while the study was hinged on liberal theory of democracy.

Results
The study found that the patterns of technological fraud ranges from voter registration manipulation; biometric identity manipulation; electronic result manipulation; hacking voting machines to fake news and disinformation.

Conclusion

The various patterns and drivers of electoral technological fraud in Nigeria contravenes the principles of Liberal democratic theory and has greatly hindered the attainment of the much desired democratic consolidation in the country.

Key contribution to knowledge

The study contributes to knowledge by evaluating existing theory and crystalize discourse on elections in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Government should take pragmatic and proactive efforts to formulate and fully implement people-oriented economic policies that focus on providing employment opportunities, social security, maximum welfare of the citizenry, and sustained human and infrastructure development to reduce poverty.

Introduction

Nigeria has seen multiple military coups and dictatorships since achieving independence from British colonial authority in 1960. The Fourth Republic emerged during an extended period of military governance from 1983 to 1999. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the final military Head of State, commenced a transition program that facilitated the establishment of civilian governance. The Nigeria Fourth Republic denotes the current democratic period of the nation that commenced in May 1999.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria was enacted as the paramount legal authority, delineating the structure for the Fourth Republic. It established a presidential style of governance featuring a bicameral legislature, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives (FRN 1999). In 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military Head of State, contested as the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and secured victory in the presidential election. This signified the inaugural peaceful transfer of authority from a military ruler to a civilian administration in Nigeria's history.

The Fourth Republic has experienced an increase in the number of political parties. The predominant party in its initial years was the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which maintained power for multiple successive administrations. Nonetheless, other factions, including the All Progressives Congress (APC), have emerged as formidable competitors in following years and are currently the governing party.

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the nation has conducted seven general elections, in addition to other re-run elections and local government elections. The alarming pattern in Nigeria's fourth republic elections indicates that each general election has deteriorated compared to its predecessor (2003 was inferior to 1999; 2007 was worse than 2003; and so forth), marked by numerous instances of electoral malfeasance (Ighorojeh&Adeyeye, 2016; Iremeka, 2023).

The 1999 election was plagued by several anomalies, as evidenced by significant discrepancies between the overall voter counts at polling stations and the aggregated figures from various states (Ogbeide, 2010). The 2003 election was more overtly manipulated and defective than the prior election in 1999, and significantly more violent (Onebamhoi, 2011).

Onebamhoi (2011) asserts that the most egregious election in Nigeria's history, and maybe in Africa, was the general elections held in 2007. The election exhibited numerous irregularities, including the tardy delivery of voting materials to various polling units, inadequate polling supplies, complications with ballot papers and the voting process, the theft and destruction of ballot boxes, the absence of voting in certain polling units, voter intimidation by security forces, electoral fraud committed by government officials, and the disenfranchisement of opponents' supporters through the omission of candidate names on ballot papers (Kia, 2013). Conversely, the 2011 general elections are seen as the most relatively successful in Nigeria's political history. Nonetheless, reports indicated the theft of vote boxes, manipulation of electoral outcomes, and underage voting in certain states of the nation (Yusuf and Zaheruddin, 2015). Observers noted that the 2015 general elections were tainted by malpractices, despite being predominantly peaceful. The 2019 elections were reportedly compromised by instances of multiple voting, result manipulation, and intimidation by security forces (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015 and 2019).

The February 2023 general elections have been deemed 'a far cry from credible, free, and fair elections' due to numerous instances of electoral fraud, including ballot snatching and the malfunction of technological tools intended to ensure the election's integrity and fairness (Culture Custodian, 2023; Anyaogu, 2023; Iremeka, 2023).

Statement of Problem

The problem of electoral malpractices and the strengthening of democracy in Nigeria has been a major concern since the establishment of the Fourth Republic. Diverse manifestations of electoral malfeasance, including ballot box theft and technological deception, have compromised the integrity of the electoral process and hindered the consolidation of democracy in the nation (Ighorojeh&Adeyeye, 2016).

There is a prevalent perception, supported by compelling data, that the quality of elections in Nigeria has deteriorated with each subsequent election between 1999 to the present. Nigerian elections have historically provided the public with minimal authentic options, primarily characterised by electoral misconduct (Tsuwa, Agaigbe and Shaibume, 2017). This trend, as seen in the February 2023 general elections, has deteriorated into a scenario where results are fabricated for regions where no voting occurred (Iremeka, 2023).

Considering that Nigeria has experienced nearly three decades of democratic civilian governance, yet has failed to rectify its electoral processes to strengthen democracy, it is essential to critically analyse the nation's electoral mechanisms to identify the deficiencies contributing to electoral malpractices. This study investigates election malpractices and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, focussing on issues ranging from ballot box theft to technology fraud, particularly in the context of the Fourth Republic.

Objective

This paper aims to analyse electoral malpractices and the democratic consolidation of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, concentrating on ballot snatching and technological fraud, to identify the difficulties present in the elections of the Fourth Republic and propose remedies.

Significance

The study will benefit policymakers, as the ensuing analysis and recommendations may be pertinent in overcoming the challenges of elections in Nigeria. The study would be significant to political science as it will impart

knowledge to students, political scientists, professors, and researchers, thereby enhancing existing understanding, assessing current theories, and clarifying debate on elections in Nigeria.

Method

This study employed secondary data obtained from published articles, websites, newspapers, and various internet sources. The qualitative desk evaluation was employed to analyse the acquired data, from which results were derived and recommendations formulated.

Literature Review/Conceptual Clarifications

Electoral Malpractice

Electoral malpractice refers to the manipulation of the electoral process to benefit a specific candidate or political party, which can occur at any stage of the electoral process, from constituency delimitation to the resolution of election disputes, and even the enactment of electoral laws may be susceptible to exploitation by partisan administration or bureaucracy (Kurfi, 2009).

Electoral malpractice is classified into three categories: pre-election, election period, and post-election period (Norris, 2012; Olawole, Adewunmi, and Oluwole, 2013; Ugwuja, 2015). Pre-election malpractices refer to electoral misconduct occurring before to an election, including vote buying and disenfranchisement. Election period malpractices refer to offences occurring during an election, such as ballot box theft and manipulation of technological instruments; conversely, post-election malpractices occur after an election, exemplified by the tampering of evidence during electoral tribunal proceedings. Lehoucq (2003) contends that electoral malpractice encompasses covert and unlawful actions intended to manipulate election outcomes. This approach emphasised a major characteristic of electoral fraud: its illegal and intrusive nature.

Based on the contributions of these many experts, it may be inferred that electoral malpractice constitutes any unlawful intervention with the democratic process to achieve a specific electoral result, vote box snatching is a prevalent kind of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, wherein persons unlawfully seize vote boxes to alter the election results. This legislation infringes upon citizens' voting rights and diminishes the integrity of the democratic process. It frequently results in violence and engenders a feeling of insecurity during elections. Technological fraud, as a type of electoral malpractice, encompasses the manipulation of voting machine software to introduce malicious code that modifies vote totals or benefits a specific candidate; the alteration of voting machine hardware to change vote totals or favour a candidate; and the misuse of administrative access by election officials, which may enable individuals to cast multiple votes. In Nigeria's electoral system, certain voting technologies utilised in the Fourth Republic include Smart Card Readers, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and portals of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation focusses on fortifying political institutions, including political parties, legislatures, and electoral overseers. It pertains to governmental administration concerning accountability, transparency, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and bureaucracy. It encompasses comprehension of the acceptability and adherence to both formal and informal democratic institutions (Manesh, 2013).

Democratic consolidation occurs when power is exchanged between competing

parties, support for the system persists during economic adversity, insurgents are subdued and penalised, the regime maintains stability amid party system restructuring, and there is an absence of significant anti-system sentiment (Okoye, Egboh and Chukwuemeka, 2012).

The consolidation of democracy involves reducing democratic uncertainties by normalisingbehavioural and institutional changes. Normalisation necessitates the enhancement of citizen access, the cultivation of democratic citizenship and culture, the diversification of leadership recruitment and training, along with other roles fulfilled by civil society. However, above all, and with utmost urgency, it necessitates political institutionalisation (Isma'ila and Othman 2016).

Nigeria Fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria denotes the present democratic period in the nation's political history. The event commenced on May 29, 1999, subsequent to the conclusion of military governance and the swearing-in of Olusegun Obasanjo as President of Nigeria. This signified a pivotal shift from many years of military rule to a democratic governing structure. Nigeria has seen multiple military coups and dictatorships since achieving independence from British colonial authority in 1960. The Fourth Republic emerged during an extended period of military governance from 1983 to 1999. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the final military Head of State, commenced a transition program that facilitated the establishment of civilian governance.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the liberal theory of democracy, which provides a heuristic framework for analysing the paper's primary issues. The liberal thinkers John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu, and others, whose philosophies advocate for individual liberty, natural rights, social justice, the rule of the majority, and private property (Oddih, 2007).

The fundamental tenets of liberal democratic thought include the endorsement of capitalism. Unencumbered, equitable, and regular elections predicated on universal suffrage, Focus on civil liberties or individual rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. Competitive party system as opposed to a single-party system, interest groupings. Principle of legality, The division of governmental authority and the system of mutual oversight. Aversion to a revolutionary method for altering the government (Abimbola and Adesota, 2012).

The fundamental principle of the liberal theory of democracy is the establishment of a political framework that fosters civic virtue and individual participation. Abimbola and Adesote (2012) contend that in a liberal democracy, the electoral process invariably facilitates the establishment of entities referred to as political parties. These organisations are expected to possess certain essential characteristics, including political ideology, authentic political manifestos, party discipline, and strong internal democracy, among others. Consequently, competition among various political parties is regarded as a fundamental aspect of democracy, as it enhances the quality and scope of their public service. Consequently, electoral scholars such as Agbaje (2006) and Omotola (2007), as cited by Adesote and Abimbola (2014), assert that the presence of free and fair elections, characterised by the absence of all forms of electoral fraud, is essential for the consolidation of democracy.

This theory is appropriate for this study due to its capacity to analytically evaluate the challenges of sustaining democracy or democratic consolidation while developing a systematic framework for an efficient democratic political system. The utility of the

liberal theory of democracy lies in its ability to elucidate expectations from any political system, particularly by underscoring the necessity of credible elections free from electoral fraud, a critical factor in fostering political stability and enduring legitimacy for democratic consolidation.

Review of Literatures on Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria Fourth Republic

Tsuwa, Agaigbe, and Shaibume (2017) examine the influence of electoral fraud on political stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study utilised secondary data collection methods. The article contended that political instability in Nigeria from 1999 to the present is attributable to the absence of free, fair, and credible elections. Credible, free, and fair elections can facilitate the consolidation of democratic norms, promote human rights, and enhance security. The report advocated for a coordinated effort to integrate new technology into our democratic process. Ughulu and Ihaza (2023) evaluated electoral reforms in Nigeria, emphasising the insights other African nations can derive for sustainable development. The study employed secondary data and utilised a qualitative approach to examine the acquired data. The research utilised the resource mobilisation theory and identified that the elements of Nigeria's electoral reforms encompass financial independence of the electoral authority; implementation of electronic procedures; prohibition of political appointees from serving as voting delegates or candidates; and ongoing enhancement through reforms. The report indicates that the adoption of elements from Nigeria's election reforms by African countries will significantly enhance the credibility and resilience of Africa's electoral processes. The report advises diverse stakeholders (electorate, candidates, government officials, members of the Election Management Body, and the public) to collaborate effectively for enhanced elections in Africa.

Agbu (2016) examines the conditions that necessitated the implementation of the smart card reader, the controversies associated with its utilisation, its efficacy during the 2015 presidential elections, and its prospects for future electoral processes. The research employed secondary data and implemented a desk evaluation procedure. The study contended that the implementation of the card reader contributed to diminishing the prior inclination to manipulate elections, hence undermining the electoral system.

Transition to Technological Fraud; Emergence, Patterns, Drivers in Nigeria Fourth Republic Elections

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria has experienced a notable enhancement in the application of technology across several facets of governance, particularly in elections. Technological improvements can improve openness and efficiency, but they have also created new opportunities for possible fraud. Electoral technological fraud denotes the exploitation or alteration of technology inside the electoral process to undermine the integrity of elections. The rise of technological electoral fraud in Nigeria can be attributed to the implementation of technology in the voting process during the Fourth Republic. Various manifestations of electoral technical fraud may arise, including:

a. Voter Registration Manipulation: Deceptive alteration of voter registration databases to incorporate ineligible voters or omit valid ones. INEC implemented the Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) to enhance the electoral procedures in Nigeria in anticipation of the 2015 elections. At the registration stage, INEC implemented a digital voter capture, an initiative widely regarded as an enhancement over previous methods. Nonetheless, there

were numerous instances of duplicate registrations and double voting. The card reader, utilised in 2019, aimed to deter duplicate votes; nonetheless, it proved to be inadequate. The card reader did not consistently authenticate registered voters. This resulted in the use of incident forms, which effectively required manual accreditation of voters, hence facilitating potential manipulation (Anichukwueze, 2023).

b. Biometric Identity Manipulation: Altering biometric identity systems to facilitate impersonation and enable multiple votes. The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) was implemented as an enhancement to the card reader for voter accreditation. The BVAS device will authenticate a registered voter by either a fingerprint scan or facial recognition before to permitting them to vote. The BVAS reportedly malfunctioned, resulting in unaccredited voters and widespread disenfranchisement (Anyaogu, 2023 & Amata, 2023).

c. Electronic Result Manipulation: Modifying the electronic transmission of election results to favour specific candidates. There are compelling signs that the BVAS and the iRev did not pass the necessary stress testing; in numerous instances, the iRev could not be evaluated by both the electorate and election officials (Iremeka, 2023).

d. Compromising Voting devices: Altering electronic voting devices to modify or eliminate votes. In certain states, voting machines are compromised to interfere with the electoral process when a favoured candidate is believed to be losing (Culture Custodian 2023).

e. Fabricated Information and Misinformation. Disseminating misinformation via digital media to manipulate voter behaviour. The dissemination of misinformation regarding political adversaries via the internet and social media is a prevalent phenomenon in Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections. As reported by Redaction Africanews, Taylor and Eshokeme (2023) assert that misinformation and disinformation are "plaguing elections," with political actors promoting their dissemination as a strategic advantage. Nigerian politicians covertly compensated social media influencers with sums reaching 20 million Nigerian naira ($43,000) or offered government contracts and political positions to disseminate disinformation regarding their adversaries. Additionally, some influencers are being enlisted to "situation rooms" to oversee the proliferation of false information, as stated in the report (Salako, 2023).

The factors contributing to electoral technological fraud in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are various.

a. Deficient Institutional Framework: Insufficient legal and regulatory structures, coupled with ineffective enforcement procedures, may foster a climate favourable to fraud. Nigeria lacks particular legislation addressing many election offences, merely covering related acts such as arson, assault, and murder. Furthermore, the sanctions for actions related to election violence, such as assault and arson, are typically inadequate; often resulting in only a few years of incarceration at most (Okwong, 2012). This has fostered a culture of impunity and highlights the necessity to reevaluate the existing legislation.

b. Insufficient transparency in the application of technology for elections may facilitate manipulation. Voter unawareness regarding the appropriate application of technology and the potential for fraud renders them vulnerable to manipulation (Agbaje&Adejumobi, 2006).

c. Socioeconomic Factors: Elevated poverty and illiteracy rates can render voters more susceptible to manipulation and misinformation. This statement accurately reflects the current circumstances in Nigeria, characterised by rising inflation and unemployment rates, where a 'legion of

unemployed youth' has become instrumental in election fraud (Iremeka, 2023).
d. Insufficient Training: Inadequate training of election officials and other stakeholders in technology utilisation may result in errors and vulnerabilities. The election umpire team lacks sufficient skilled and educated professional engineers adept at managing advanced electoral technology. The inadequate condition of essential ICT infrastructure, logistics, and knowledge significantly contributes to electoral fraud in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Ahmad, Abdullah, and Arshad, 2015).
e. The weak institutional ability of INEC, characterised by a deficiency in independence and financial autonomy, insufficient technical and logistical preparation, and a lack of suitable organisational and administrative capabilities, significantly contributes to electoral fraud in the Fourth Republic. Moreover, inadequate technical proficiency and corrupt inclinations are evident among different levels of its personnel. The INEC's fundamental inadequacy in 'capabilities' renders elections susceptible to various rigging methods, resulting in diminished confidence and integrity among the public. It is clear that Nigeria lacks a credible, independent, and functional election Management Body (EMB) and honest election officials necessary for bolstering public confidence in the electoral process (Omodia& Nwankwo, 2020).

Implications for democratic consolidation

Nigerian politicians are widely perceived to engage in various electoral malpractices, including election rigging and voter intimidation, to undermine the electoral process. There is a prevalent perception, supported by compelling data, that the quality of Nigerian elections has deteriorated with each succeeding election since 1999 until the present. Nigerian elections have always provided the public with minimal authentic options, predominantly characterised by electoral misconduct (Tsuwa, Agaigbe and Shaibume, 2017). This trend, as demonstrated in the February 2023 general elections, has deteriorated into a scenario where fabricated results are reported for regions where no voting occurred.

During the 1999 general elections, instances of ballot box theft and the manipulation of election results occurred to benefit specific parties and people (Nwokeke and Jayum, 2011). The apathetic demeanour exhibited by Nigerians towards the election permitted the military junta to manipulate the process and transfer power to their preferred candidate.
Tsuwa, Agaigbe, and Shaibume (2017) noted that during the 2003 elections, numerous parties engaged in practices that potentially compromised the prospects for peaceful and orderly elections. To address the repercussions of prior elections, INEC implemented Nigeria's inaugural electronic voter registry for the 2011 elections. The execution of the 2011 elections encountered several obstacles prior to, during, and subsequent to the election.

In response to the extensive electoral fraud observed in the previous general elections in Nigeria, INEC implemented the Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) during the 2015 general elections to ensure a credible, transparent, free, and fair electoral process, thereby enhancing Nigeria's electoral system. The utilisation of the electronic device during the 2015 general elections elicited varied opinions among Nigerians regarding the election's authenticity. Certain states, however, documented substantial instances of underage voting in the northern region and exaggerated statistics in some states (European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), 2015 in Onapajo, 2015). Ndujihe and Kurnolu (2015) affirmed that allegations of extensive electoral fraud persisted in relation to the results of the 2015 elections in the country.

The 2019 general elections marked the sixth occurrence since the establishment of the Fourth Republic, characterised by reports of ballot box theft, vote buying, and various irregularities, including multiple voting, result manipulation, disenfranchisement of voters due to card reader failures in recognising their PVCs, and intimidation by security forces during and after the elections (Utebor, Onojeghen, and Adekunle, 2019; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015 and 2019; Amata, 2023; Ebiri, Ibrahim, &Akubo, 2019).

To mitigate voting malpractices during the 2023 elections, two complementary technologies were implemented: the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). The BVAS is the sole method of voter accreditation sanctioned by the newly enacted Electoral Act (2022), having demonstrated the ability to significantly mitigate electoral malpractices.

On February 25, during the presidential election, the BVAS technology, which INEC asserted had been tested in 105 communities and utilised in two sub-national elections in 2022, successfully transmitted the national assembly election results on the same day but utterly failed to transmit the presidential election results (Anyaogu, 2023). Analysts have speculated on the remarkable failure of the BIVAS machines and concluded that the alleged technical malfunctions served merely as a facade, enabling compromised officials of the electoral body to circumvent the transparency constraints imposed by their own technology to achieve predetermined outcomes. The execution on election day was markedly ineffective, undermining the legitimacy of the electoral process and its results. The BVAS and the IReV were implemented in a manner that did neither eradicate or substantially mitigate human intervention in the voting process. Several BVAS devices were documented as having failed or malfunctioned nationwide. There are persistent apprehensions that these incidents were either intentional sabotage or at the at least facilitated electoral manipulation (Acheampong, 2023).
Since the establishment of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has failed to execute free, fair, and credible elections, primarily due to the absence of repercussions for the misconduct of electoral officials and corrupt politicians. The electoral authority is frequently indebted to the ruling party, whose survival relies on overlooking INEC's ineptitude (Shaibu, 2023).
Udu, Nkwede, and Ezekwe (2015) assert that elections in Nigeria have been linked to irregularities and violence from the inception of the Fourth Republic. The electoral process has become a vehicle for manipulation, as the results of elections in the country since 1999 have seldom mirrored the electorate's intentions due to a plethora of electoral malpractices (Suberu, 2007; Oddih, 2007).

Corruption, a significant impediment to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, involves the misuse of public positions, resources, and authority for personal gain, resulting in poverty. Obayelu (2007) defines corruption as the pursuit of riches or power using illicit methods for personal advantage at the expense of the public, or the abuse of public authority for private gain. Political corruption is defined by Gyekye (1997) as the “illegal, unethical, and unauthorised exploitation of one’s political or official position for personal gain or advantage.” The above description indicates that political corruption include electoral fraud, such as ballot box tampering and manipulation of technological devices, as well as favouritism, nepotism, and unlawful acquisition of political power. Thus, the consolidation of democracy is profoundly fragile due to pervasive political corruption in the nation. A typical Nigerian links corruption to democracy through the concept of "sharing

the national cake" (Ugwuala, Kalu & Elechi, 2020).

Poverty, resulting from insufficient socioeconomic growth, hinders democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The pervasive corruption in the country has relegated many residents to abject poverty, hence exacerbating the incidence of electoral fraud during elections. A person lacking essential resources cannot engage successfully in a democratic democracy. Poverty has been determined to be the primary factor for youths being exploited as thugs by politicians to seize vote boxes during elections in the Fourth Republic (Ighorojeh&Adeyeye, 2016).
The absence of sufficient legal and regulatory frameworks, coupled with ineffective enforcement mechanisms, constitutes a significant obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. Nigeria lacks explicit legislation addressing some election offences, and the punishments for electoral fraud are often inadequate, fostering a culture of impunity and highlighting the necessity for a revision of existing laws (Okwong, 2012). A robust democracy requires a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework, along with an effective enforcement mechanism, to address election fraud perpetrators.

The lack of free and fair elections constitutes a significant obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The prevalence of vote box theft and the manipulation of technical gadgets during elections has dissuaded many qualified persons from participating in any electoral process. Participation is rendered futile when votes are undermined for the benefit of a select few (Ugwuala, Kalu & Elechi, 2020). In a nation where candidates are forced contrary to the will and choice of the populace by election frauds such as ballot box theft and technological manipulation, the consolidation of democracy is exceedingly difficult.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research investigated ballot box theft and technology fraud as electoral misconducts that hinder the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study contended that the advent of technical electoral fraud in Nigeria can be attributed to the incorporation of technology in the administration of elections under the Fourth Republic. The study identified that the patterns of technical fraud encompass voter registration manipulation, biometric identity manipulation, electronic result manipulation, hacking of voting devices, as well as the dissemination of fake news and disinformation. The study identified that the elements contributing to electoral technological fraud in Nigeria's 4th Republic include a fragile institutional framework, insufficient transparency and civic education, socioeconomic influences, poor training, and the limited institutional capability of INEC. The diverse patterns and catalysts of electoral technology fraud in Nigeria violate the ideals of liberal democratic theory and significantly impede the achievement of the sought-after democratic consolidation in the nation. The research consequently advocates the subsequent recommendations:

The government should undertake pragmatic and proactive measures to devise and comprehensively execute people-centric economic policies aimed at creating employment opportunities, ensuring social security, providing adequate welfare for citizens, and fostering sustained human and infrastructure development to alleviate poverty.
The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and pertinent agencies, including the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should initiate robust educational and value-oriented programs to realign democratic institutions and the populace. Party politics should be rendered less lucrative, particularly with salaries and other compensations associated with public service.
All efforts must be mobilised to eradicate

electoral fraud by promoting electoral justice to achieve the complete consolidation of Nigeria's democracy.

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