

## Impact and Implication of the Proletariats Rendezvous in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The state of affairs over the years since Nigeria assumed the practice of democracy has been largely anti-democratic in practice, this scenario has led to an outcome of impoverishment, stagnation and the torn-stunk of the living conditions of the proletariats, which have undermined their faith and confidence in the electoral outcome and governance in Nigeria. The chunks of the Nigerian masses which represent the proletariats in Nigeria have been the most deleteriously affected group of the population in Nigeria. In view of the above, this paper examined the impact and implication of the proletariat's rendezvous in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The paper adopted the qualitative research method, while utilizing textbooks, journals, newspapers, government publications, rules of proceedings and internet materials. Also applied was the Rational Choice Theory as propounded by Adam Smith in 1770 as its theoretical framework of analysis to provide understanding, explanation and as well make predictions germane to the problematic. The paper find out and concludes that the 2023 general election in Nigeria fell short of the credibility threshold set. Based on the findings, recommendations were made that additional reforms and improvements are required to ensure that the quality of future elections in Nigeria does not further decline, and that public confidence in the capacity of INEC to conduct elections is restored, while trust in the credibility of elections is re-established.

**Keywords:** Election, Proletariats, INEC, Election apathy, Proletariat orientation, Credible Election.

### INTRODUCTION

Given the state of affairs over the years since Nigeria assumed the practice of democracy, the masses, which composed of the largest chunk of the Nigerian populace (proletariats) have been the most negatively affected in the pros and cons of every elections vis a vis the government policies and their survival in Nigeria. For the benefit of doubt, from the perspective of a layman, the proletariats refer to the lower-level skilled workers domiciled in Nigeria. This is basically an emerging class comprising of persons that live off salaried wages or income as the case may be. This group or class of people is represented in Nigeria due to its population size. Over 70%, that is 7 in 10 persons of the population is under age 30. To explain this further, over 40% of this population are under 15 years, 19.8% stem from 15 to under 25, 30.44% ranges from 25 to less than 65 years old. As such, this group is recognized as the labour force given the dominant percentage of people within the group (James, 2023). In line with the foregoing, the 2023 general election represents a missed opportunity in Nigeria's democratic development. There were hopes that the election will consolidate and improve on the gains made from the electoral reforms and innovations introduced since 2011 (Ene, 2023).

However, these expectations were dashed as several accredited election observation groups reported that the credibility of the 2023 election was greatly tarnished by numerous pitfalls. The election suffered several lingering deficiencies in election administration; including inefficient management of permanent voters' cards (PVCs) distribution, failure of operational and logistical arrangements, malfunctioning of election technology, inefficient handling of results management procedures, lack of transparent results collation and declaration process, and poor crisis communication. The high level of election violence and insecurity as well as extensive vote-buying that occurred further undermined the credibility of the 2023 election (Ene, 2023).

Like most elections in Nigeria, the 2023 general election was conducted under a deeply contentious, and disputed, atmosphere. For the first time in Nigeria's fourth republic, three main parties (the All-Progressives Congress - APC, the People's Democratic Party - PDP, and the Labour Party - LP) fought a hard, but divisive, campaign. The campaigns leading up to the 2023 general election brought to the fore the divisiveness of Nigerian politics especially along ethnic, religious and regional lines (Ene, 2023).

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The 2023 general election provided an opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate and improve on the gains it made from reforms and innovations introduced since 2011. However, organizational pitfalls, including inefficient management of permanent voters' cards (PVCs) distribution, failure of operational and logistical arrangements, malfunctioning of election technology, inefficient handling of results management procedures, lack of transparent results collation and declaration process, and poor crisis communication, dented the credibility of the election. The high level of election violence and insecurity as well as extensive vote-buying further undermined the credibility of the 2023 election (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2023).

In the midst of all these outcomes notwithstanding the preparation made for this electoral exercise which include all the efforts made by the former President; 'Muhammadu Buhari's administration' to conduct a free, fair and credible election which include and not limited to several amendments aimed at improving the legal framework for the 2023 general election and endorsed it on the 25 February 2022, following his assent to the Electoral Act of 2022, which provided adequate basis for the conduct of the election in accordance with international democratic principles and with the international instruments ratified by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2023).

On the bedrock of the above expositions, the paper adopt the qualitative research design, basically the secondary sources of data were employed to seek the impacts and implications of the proletariats' engagements in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2023 General Election in Nigeria

The conduct of general election in Nigeria has always been a critical topic of discussion, given the country's history of electoral challenges and issues. The 2023 general elections, which encompassed the presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative elections, marked another significant milestone in the nation's democratic journey. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the key findings and analysis from reports, and media sources related to the conduct of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

The 2023 general election is the seventh election in the series of general elections held since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. The election was conducted in two parts – the federal election (to elect the president, vice president and members of the National Assembly) was held on 25 February 2023, while the state election (to elect governors, deputy governors, and members of the State Houses of Assembly) was conducted on 18 March 2023. The presidential election consisted of 1,462 legislative elections representing 109

Senate seats and 360 House of Representatives seats while the governorship elections was conducted in 28 states of the Federation, and 993 State House of Assembly seats. On 15 April 2023, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted a supplementary election to conclude elections in 96 constituencies in 23 states of the federation where elections were inconclusive (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2023).

The Situation Room, a forum of civil society groups collaborating to deliver effective engagement and responses to the challenges of elections and governance in Nigeria, was actively involved in observing the elections. The Situation Room deployed a total of 2,410 observers, with at least 3 observers per Local Government Area (LGA) in every state of the federation, to monitor the 2023 general election. The Situation Room provided a broad platform for information sharing among civic groups, real-time analyses of field reports by election observers, objective insights into the challenges of election management, rapid response to crisis and emergencies - especially election violence, and constructive engagement between civil society and other election stakeholders. On the election days, the Election Situation Room served as the main hub for receiving data and reports from the field, which were analyzed and disseminated through statements and reports (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2023).

### Pre-Election Preparations and Voter Education

Different reports have highlighted the importance of adequate pre-election preparations and voter education in ensuring free and fair elections. Studies have examined the initiatives taken by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders to enhance the electoral process. The review highlights areas such as voter registration, distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), and public awareness campaigns to educate voters about their rights and responsibilities.

Candidly, INEC extensively made logistical preparations for the upcoming General Election. The commission procured and organized all necessary materials for deployment to the polling units. Non-sensitive materials were delivered to the Registration Area/Ward and Polling Unit levels, while sensitive materials were transported to Local Government Area offices, putting them only one or two levels away from the Polling Units. The commission learnt from past logistics challenges and has arrangements in place with transport unions to ensure smooth movement of personnel and materials to the Polling Units (This Day Live, 2023).

Additionally, the commission established 56,872 new Polling Units, expanding voter access by over 32%. However, some Polling Units remained without voters, leading the commission to relocate voters

from congested to less populated Polling Units. The majority of voters were unaffected by this movement and still voted in their usual Polling Units. The commission made efforts to inform and assist affected voters in locating their new Polling Units through SMS and other means (This Day Live, 2023).

The commission trained its staff, particularly Collation and Returning Officers, emphasizing the importance of neutrality and dedication throughout their assignments. Performance was closely monitored, and recognition or sanctions was applied as necessary (This Day Live, 2023).

Furthermore, the commission conducted successful testing of the technologies to be used, such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV). A mock accreditation exercise for the BVAS was carried out, and its performance was positively assessed by various observing groups. Lessons from this exercise informed the training of Registration Area Technical Support Staff (RATECHS) to ensure smooth deployment of the BVAS (This Day Live, 2023).

Overall, INEC made significant commitment to conducting a well-prepared and technologically supported General Election while emphasizing transparency, voter education, and the importance of staff neutrality and dedication (This Day Live, 2023).

The basic argument here is that INEC made significant commitment towards the preparations of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The strength of the argument is that INEC made sure to see that their efforts matched the reality while the weakness of this argument is that there was failure to clearly state irrespective of the education of voters, some voters voted in a wrongly which led to a void vote.

### **Electoral Security and Violence Mitigation**

Given Nigeria's history of electoral violence, research on the 2023 general elections focuses on electoral security measures and the effectiveness of violence mitigation strategies. Scholars have analyzed the role of security agencies, deployment of personnel, and the use of technology to monitor and prevent incidents of violence during the elections (Qosim, 2023).

Electoral security is critical for ensuring a peaceful, credible, and transparent electoral process. It involves the protection of voters, candidates, election officials, and election materials from any threats of violence, intimidation, or disruption. Maintaining electoral security is crucial to fostering public confidence in the electoral process and upholding democratic principles (Premium Times, 2023).

In Nigeria, security agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian Security and Civil

Defence Corps (NSCDC) play a central role in providing electoral security. They are responsible for maintaining law and order during elections, preventing violence, and responding to any security threats that may arise (Premium Times, 2023).

During the 2023 general elections, security personnel were deployed to polling units, collation centers, and other critical locations to deter potential troublemakers and ensure the safety of voters and election officials. The number and distribution of security personnel are determined based on risk assessments and the security situation in different regions (Premium Times, 2023).

The argument here is that securities were provided during the 2023 general elections. The strength of the argument is that the securities played a significant in maintaining peace and order during the election. There is weakness in the argument here is that it failed to point out the security measures failed in some polling units.

### **Technological Innovations in Electoral Process**

The 2023 general elections saw increased use of technology, such as electronic voting machines and biometric authentication. Studies have examined the impact of these innovations on the efficiency and integrity of the electoral process. Additionally, the review discusses the challenges and criticisms related to the adoption of new technologies.

Nigeria's vast geographical expanse and diverse terrain posed challenges to implementing technological innovations, especially in remote and rural areas. Inadequate infrastructure and poor internet connectivity hindered the smooth functioning of electronic voting machines and communication systems, leading to delays and disruptions (Vanguard, 2023).

Furthermore, the successful adoption of technology in elections heavily relies on the digital literacy of both voters and election officials. Ensuring that voters understand how to use electronic voting machines and other technological tools was essential. Voter education initiatives may be required to familiarize citizens with the new voting methods and address concerns about the integrity and security of the technology (Vanguard, 2023).

Technical malfunctions, software bugs, and hardware failures are common challenges when using technology in any process. In an election setting, even minor glitches can have significant consequences, leading to confusion and delays in voting or result transmission. During the 2023 general elections, there were cases of technical malfunctions with the Bvas machine and also the INEC portal. As a result, people lost trust in transparency of the electoral process (Vanguard, 2023).

The argument here is that INEC deployed technological innovations during the 2023 general elections. The strength of the argument is that to a large extent the technology deployed work in some polling units while the weakness of the argument is that it didn't point out whether INEC made provisions for technical malfunction of the machines or provided backup machines.

### **Role of Electoral Observers**

International and domestic electoral observers play a crucial role in assessing the conduct of elections. The literature review assesses the reports and findings of various observer missions, highlighting their observations on the electoral process, transparency, and adherence to electoral guidelines. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) pointed out that although the elections showed the commitment of Nigerians to democracy, it also exposed enduring systemic weaknesses and therefore signal a need for further legal and operational reforms to enhance transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability (Premium Times, 2023)

A coalition of international election observers has blamed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for lack of transparency in the conduct of the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria (Premium Times, 2023).

The Joint Election Observation Mission (JEOM), involving the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and led by Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi, said in an official gazette released on Monday (Premium Times, 2023)

“We congratulate the people of Nigeria for their resilience and enthusiasm to participate in the process,” said Ms Banda. “Despite large crowds in some polling stations and long waits, Nigerian voters demonstrated commitment to participate in the process and a strong desire to have their voices heard” (Premium Times, 2023).

The foreign election observation group said 40 of its members were deployed across all six geopolitical regions of Nigeria to observe the voting process, noting that despite the clamours for reforms to the Electoral Act 2022, “Nigerians were mostly not impressed by the conduct of the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections (Premium Times, 2023).

“Logistical challenges and multiple incidents of political violence overshadowed the electoral process and impeded a substantial number of voters from participating,” the coalition said in its official statement. “Ongoing currency and fuel shortages also imposed excessive burdens on voters and election officials, and Nigerian marginalized groups, especially women,

continue to face barriers to seeking and obtaining political office” (Ibrahim, 2023).

The argument here is that the both foreign and local observers played significant roles in vetting the electoral process during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The strength of the argument is the observers made significant observations that will help INEC that properly plan for their next election while the weakness of the argument is that to point out whether INEC will take cognizance of the observations made by the foreign and local observers and effect changes where necessary.

### **Political Participation and Voter Turnout**

An essential aspect of any democratic election is the level of political participation and voter turnout. Researchers have analyzed factors influencing voter turnout in Nigeria, such as political mobilization, voter apathy, and electoral violence. The review also considers the impact of voter turnout on the legitimacy of elected representatives.

Out of the total 93.47 million registered voters, only 24.9 million persons voted in the just concluded presidential and National Assembly elections. This represents a meagre 26.72 percent voter turnout, the lowest since the return to democracy in 1999. Voter turnout here refers to the share of the total votes cast over the total number of registered voters (Dataphyte, 2023).

On February 25, Nigeria conducted its 7th general election. The result of the election, which was announced in the early hours of Wednesday by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), shows that only 24.9 million persons out of the 93.47 million registered voters voted in the election. This represents 26.72 percent voter turnout. Compared to the voter turnout of 34.74 percent in the 2019 general election, the turnout in the just concluded election declined by 8.03 per cent (Dataphyte, 2023).

Besides the low turnout, which has now become a trend in Nigeria's recent elections, the turnout in the 2023 election was far from the 50 percent mark targeted by INEC for the election.

Among the 36 states, Adamawa and Jigawa were the only states that recorded up to 40 percent voter turnout. Plateau, Osun, and Gombe followed with 39.83 percent, 38.71 percent, and 33.87 percent, respectively (Dataphyte, 2023).

The basic argument here is that the impact of voters was felt during the elections. The strength of the argument is that the impact of the voters was recognized while the weakness of the argument is that it failed to mention the reason why some states recorded low turnout of voters.

## Media and Election Coverage

The role of the media in shaping public opinion during elections is of significant interest to researchers. The literature review evaluates the media's coverage of the 2023 general elections, exploring themes like impartiality, accuracy, and the prevalence of misinformation.

A casual observation of media coverage of the 2023 general election since it became clear APC was set to win the presidential election, inexorably leads one to the conclusion that the mainstream media, particularly Channels and Arise TV, is committed to doing everything possible to delegitimize the election because it could not accept the victory of APC's Muslim/Muslim ticket. The Muslim/Muslim ticket has confounded media pundits and flies in the face of a certain ideological-cum-sectarian worldview, deeply rooted in Nigeria's mainstream media (PR Nigeria, 2023).

The media coverage of the presidential election continues to be terribly one-sided without any semblance of balance and objectivity. If one were to judge the quality of the election by what is reported in the mainstream media only and not by what is actually happening on the ground across the nation, one would think APC is the only party guilty of electoral offences and that the 2023 general election was the worst election ever in Nigeria, worse than Prof Maurice Iwu's election of 2007. Yet, the truth is, APC appears to be the only party in the election that failed to benefit from its incumbency both at the national and sub-national levels. Fuel scarcity, the Naira redesign policy and internal friction between the federal centre and APC-controlled states in the middle of the elections extracted a heavy electoral price on the Party both at the Federal and State levels (PR Nigeria, 2023).

The basic argument here is that the 2023 general elections were recorded by the media houses. The strength of the argument the media houses were transparent while discharging their duties while the weakness of the argument is that it failed to mention that some media houses were intimidated and threatened to sack some of their staff who criticize the government.

## Electoral Integrity and Credibility

Scholars have focused on assessing the overall integrity and credibility of the 2023 general elections. This includes examining the transparency of the electoral process, the handling of election disputes, and the legitimacy of the election outcomes. In its reaction to the 2023 poll, the European Union Election Observation Mission observed that while fundamental freedoms of assembly and movement were largely respected, the full enjoyment of the latter was impeded by insufficient planning, insecurity and the prevailing naira and fuel shortages. It stated that INEC lacked efficient planning and transparency during critical stages of the electoral process, while on election day, trust in it further reduced

due to delayed polling processes. It added that the abuse of incumbency by various political office holders distorted the playing field and there were widespread allegations of vote buying (The Nigerian Tribune, 2023).

On its part, the United States government said it was deeply troubled by the disturbing acts of violent voter intimidation and suppression that took place during those polls in Lagos, Kano, and other states. The United States government found "the use of ethnically charged rhetoric before, during, and after the gubernatorial election in Lagos particularly disturbing" and commended all Nigerian political actors, religious and community leaders, youths and citizens who have chosen to reject and speak out against such violence and inflammatory language, affirming Nigerians' commitment to and respect for the democratic process. It called on the Nigerian authorities to hold accountable and bring to justice individuals found to have ordered or carried out efforts to intimidate voters and suppress voting during the election process (The Nigerian Tribune, 2023).

The basic argument here is that the 2023 general elections lacked electoral transparency. The strength of the argument is that the international observers such as European Union Election Observation Mission pointed out the areas where the electoral exercise and process lack transparency while the weakness of the argument is that it failed to state whether Nigerian government will honour the suggestion made by the foreign observers.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, the Rational Choice Theory was utilized and applied in providing useful insight to this study. The Rational Choice Theory was propounded by Adam Smith. He proposed the idea of an "invisible hand" moving free-market economies in the mid-1770s, is usually credited as the father of rational choice theory. Smith discusses the invisible hand theory in his book "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," which was published in 1776 (Akhilesh, 2023).

Rational choice theory states that individuals use rational calculations to make rational choices and achieve outcomes that are aligned with their own personal objectives. These results are also associated with maximizing an individual's self-interest. Using rational choice theory is expected to result in outcomes that provide people with the greatest benefit and satisfaction, given the limited option they have available (Somers, 2023).

Rational choice theory is based on the assumption of involvement from rational actors. Rational actors are the individuals in an economy who make rational choices based on calculations and the information that is available to them. Rational actors form the basis of rational choice theory. Rational choice theory assumes that individuals, or rational actors, try to

actively maximize their advantage in any situation and, therefore, consistently try to minimize their losses (Suzanne, 2023).

Rational choice theory is associated with the concepts of rational actors, self-interest, and the invisible hand. The key premise of rational choice theory is that people don't randomly select products off the shelf. Rather, they use a logical decision-making process that takes into account the costs and benefits of various options, weighing the options against each other (Akhilesh, 2023). The main goal of rational choice theory is to explain why individuals and larger groups make certain choices, based on specific costs and rewards. According to rational choice theory, individuals use their self-interests to make choices that will provide them with the greatest benefit. People weigh their options and make the choice they think will serve them best (Suzanne, 2023).

Applying the rational choice theory to the reality of 2023 general election in Nigeria, During which the proletariats exercised their electoral rights and privileges based on rational choices and expected outcomes that are aligned with their own personal objectives. Out of the 18 political parties that had their candidates aspiring for the esteemed number one position of the citizen of Nigeria – the president, three political parties (All Progressive Congress, People's Democratic Party and Labour Party) specifically stood out and the electoral battle were fought among them. The proletariats had their choices and expected outcome among the three candidates from the aforementioned parties. Based on the foregoing they voted their individual choices. Voting their individual choice during the election was basically and significantly dependent on their self-interests which will provide them with the greatest benefits when their presidential candidates win the election at the end of the day. The proletariats weighed their options and made the choice they think will serve them the best.

Notwithstanding the utility of the Rational Choice Theory in being helpful to explain individual and collective behaviors in this study, the Rational Choice Theory has been criticized in the sense that individuals do not always want to make rational choices. In reality, people are often moved by external factors that are not rational, such as emotions. Individuals do not have perfect access to the information they would need to make perfect rational decision every time.

### **Role of the Proletariats in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria**

The proletariats played a significant role in sensitizing their fellow citizens about the need to acquire their voter's card. At every nook and cranny, awareness about the importance of the 2023 general election were made known. The proletariats took their social media handles crave the indulgence about the need for their

fellow citizens to take their participation in 2023 general election very serious as their life, future and survival heavily depends on it. This awareness is not unconnected to already experienced level of sufferings meted out to the proletariats by the past administrations. Since the democratic genesis of Nigeria, the proletariats have known hardship. Each new administration attains power with its version of "shege"- a local parlance and understanding of suffering and hardship in layman's language in Nigeria. As a result of the foregoing, towards the end of President Muhammadu Buhari regime, the proletariats vowed to change the narrative and nature of the usually known Nigerian elections. Given the fact that the proletariats are now fed up with the status quo, they resolved to create awareness and whatever it will legitimately demand to exercise their electoral rights and privileges through the process of voting (Punch, 2023).

### **Impact of the Proletariats in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria**

#### **Increased Voter Registration**

This year's election saw an increased voter registration of 11 percent compared to 2019. Continuing the upward trend since 2015. This clearly shows the impact of voter education and sensitization. Plus, an improved interest in good governance and active citizen participation. More and more people are interested in who governs them, seeing as it is a transaction that must happen whether they participate or not. Citizens realize that the earlier they participate, the better their chances of negotiating the best deal of the social contract (Vanguard, 2023).

#### **Massive Youth Involvement**

Nigeria's youth demographic accounts for about 70 percent of the country's population. And without a doubt, it is expected that such a number will play a critical role in the country's economy, projection, infrastructure, and of course, the elections, which are largely determined by numbers. Youth comprised about 40 percent of the total registered voters in this election cycle (Vanguard, 2023).

#### **Active Citizen Participation**

More than ever, citizens were keen and determined to vote. As such, it is not just to vote but also to protect it. This was one of the key messages of the Project 100 campaign (Get Your PVC, vote, and protect your vote). In times past, seeing how elections have been marred by violence, vote buying, and rigging, it became paramount for citizens to be more involved in the process. Not just vote and return home but stay and protect their votes. Given this, people lived up to the expectation, as seen from multiple videos on the internet where Nigerians patiently waited into the dark hours of the night in some polling units and counted and ensured that the results collated represented the people's choices (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Largely Peaceful Election**

Irrespective of the pockets of violence reported in different locations, this election seems the most peaceful in recent years. Since Nigeria returned to a democratic government in 1999, over 1,200 people have died in election-related violence nationwide. In 1999, about 80 people lost their lives. In 2003, 100 deaths were recorded; in 2007, the number increased to 300. This peaked in 2011, with about 800 people killed. After 2011, these numbers drastically reduced, with the next two election cycles recording about 250 deaths. Presently, there's been little to no reports of death related to violence which is highly commendable. However, it is important for security operatives to be on high alert as over 60 percent of election-related killings occur post elections (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Democratic Consolidation**

The proletariats significantly contributed to the continuity and sustenance of democracy. They did this by encouraging other citizens to actively get involved in the political activities. Given that the unfavourable conditions they experienced during the President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, the proletariat was very enthusiastic to encourage the existence of democracy (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Interest in Electoral Process**

The involvement of the proletariats positively influenced the 2023 general elections in the sense that it increased the interests of the Nigerian citizens in the electoral process. People who didn't have originally have interest in electoral affairs in Nigeria began to invest their interest in it because they wanted the 2023 general elections to be a departure from the old ways (the already known status quo). As such, this attracted massive involvement of people in the electoral process (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Strong Belief in the Electoral Process**

The proletariats significantly influenced people to cultivate and exercise strong belief system in the electoral process. Given that people have experienced the old ways of conducting elections which includes vices such as election rigging, thuggery, violence and so on and so forth, they felt that the 2023 general elections should be different. As such, there was a strong belief system that INEC will do will discharge their duties to the best of their knowledge and make their votes count (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Funding Political Campaigns with Personal Funds**

The proletariat massively utilized their personal funds to fund the political campaigns of Obi/Datti. This act stems from their strong belief in the personality of Peter Obi and what they feel he can do if elected and given the opportunity to rule. As a matter of fact, this feat is a phenomenon that has never occurred in the political scene and history of Nigeria since the independence and beginning of democratic regime of Nigeria. Exhibits of

political campaign posters of Obi/Datti surfaced everywhere such as massive road side billboards, lamp holder boards, banners, wall posters, social media posts, Facebook, twitter, Instagram and google advertisements. The proletariats even rented campaign buses, cars, tricycles, paid for radio and television advertisements. The awareness was massive that some Nigerians based abroad wired some funds as their own token to support the goodwill of Obi/Datti (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Confident Exercise of Electoral Rights and Privileges**

The proletariats came out in mass to exercise their electoral rights and privileges. This was motivated by the fact that they strongly believed that in the absence of their votes, no leader can emerge. The permanent voter's card served as the power of the proletariats have, to exercise their electoral rights and they decided after awful experiences with the past democratic administrations that the political state of affairs must change. Given this mindset, the proletariats confidently exercised their electoral rights (Vanguard, 2023).

### **Implication of the proletariats in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria**

#### **Disappointment in Electoral Process**

As a result of the electoral process which was riddled with election rigging, the proletariats were highly disappointed with the electoral process. One of the biggest issues in this election season has been reports of rigging across different states. This is why INEC's failure to leverage technology is even more dumbfounding. In 2023, and with the advancement of technology, there was an expectation that people's voices and votes should count. There have been reports where people recorded the results from their polling units before it was uploaded, and what was uploaded was different or doctored. At the collation center in Lagos, the Labour Party agent reported that the party representative for Badagry LGA was compelled at gunpoint to sign the result sheet. Given this, the proletariats were disappointed in the electoral process because of the selfish decision made by INEC in favour of a few political aspirants (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

#### **Loss of Hope for a New Nigeria**

The outcome of the 2023 general elections depicted the loss of hope for the proletariats. The proletariats had undergone untold harsh conditions to register and acquire their permanent voter's cards. The people's hope was high and loud. They were in high spirits very eager to visit the polling unit and exercise their electoral rights. At the end, they lost hope for a new Nigeria (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

#### **Breach of Trust**

The conduct and outcome of the 2023 general elections betrayed the trust of the proletariats. This happened because the proletariats believed that the 2023 general elections will be what INEC projected and had promised that it would be. As such, the proletariats

couldn't wait to exercise their electoral rights. At the end of the electoral exercise, when the result was announced, it was observed that an unqualified candidate won the election. Moreover, the election result was announced and winner declared at an unusual hour specifically 2am when the proletariats were fast asleep (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

### **Destruction of PVC**

The outcome of the 2023 general election led to the destruction of some PVC. It is not enough that the proletariat fully exercised their primary responsibility of voting at the polling units. They also stayed behind to see that the results of their polling units were declared before they exited their polling units. It was more worrisome for them to know that their precious effort was wasted for nothing given that the old order of doing things still reared their ugly heads and took preminent. When the unqualified political aspirant was declared winner, some proletariats destroyed their PVCs and vowed not ever vote again in their life (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

### **Violence**

During the Presidential elections that was conducted on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the proletariats were attacked by thugs during the exercise of their electoral rights and the people took hold of arms and attacked back the thugs and there was violence.

Compared to previous elections, where hundreds of people lost their lives, this election has been relatively peaceful except for reports of violence from Lagos, Imo, and other states. In this age and time, it is expected that violence and thuggery would be a thing of the past. Footages of thugs threatening voters to vote for a specific party surfaced online. In other footage, we saw videos of the electoral process being disrupted by thugs and the burning of election materials. Violence and thuggery lead to the loss of lives and properties and disenfranchise people from exercising their rights. This has been one of the reasons for low voter turnout in previous elections. It is quite shocking why the government and security personnel haven't nipped this in the bud (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

### **Chaos/Anarchy**

Since the announcement of the 2023 general elections, election tribunal case has been ongoing at the Federal Appeal Court in Abuja. The case was filed by Labour party against APA and INEC. Every new day comes with new evidence against APC and INEC with each of them having lacking adequate backup and left with nothing significant to defend themselves. Looking the political atmosphere, everywhere is highly tensed awaiting the final verdict of the Federal Appeal Court judgement to know what will be the next line of action. Also, the proletariats are aware that whoever wins at the Federal Appeal Court will also win at the Supreme Court. Since the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2023 when the president elect, Bola Tinubu assumed power and removed fuel subsidy,

there has been geometric increase in virtually everything in the economy ranging from transport to food stuffs, electronic gadgets, building materials and so on and so forth. There has been groaning pains as a result of difficult times experienced by the proletariats. Given the manner in which the electoral court has been going, the president Bola Tinubu has expressed his concerns that if he is removed through the judiciary as a president, there will be anarchy. Nevertheless, what he fails to understand is that the proletariats have been fed up and are waiting to explode as a result and outcome of the election. People massively came out to their polling units in the midst of cash crunch and scarcity and fuel hike to exercise their electoral right and privileges and to be betrayed. At the moment, the hope of the proletariats lies in the hand of the judiciary to uphold justice. In the midst of all these events, if by any means, the judiciary fails to live up to expectations and return the old ways of the unfavourable accustomed order, there will be chaos which will not be easily contained this current administration (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

### **Low Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout has steadily declined since the 2007 elections (57 percent). The 2019 elections had a 35 percent voter turnout, and with all indications from the present predicament, the 2023 elections were the time when the tide would turn, and for many good reasons. For the presidential elections, the incumbent has served the maximum tenure, and it is expected that this will drive more people to the polls. Not forgetting the economic hardship Nigerians have had to endure in recent months (Premiumtimesng, 2023).

Going by the number released by INEC, 24 million people out of the registered 93 million voters voted. This puts the figure at 27 percent. The worst since 2003. As much as numbers are a good yardstick, sometimes, it doesn't give the whole picture. Specifically, during this election, we saw cases where voters were technically disenfranchised due to the inadequacies of the electoral commission. People reported being unable to vote because the electoral officials got to their polling unit very late. Some reported as late as 3 pm.

Another peculiar challenge the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, complained about was difficulty getting cash to pay transporters to distribute election materials effectively. We also had INEC's National Commissioner for Information and Voter Education, Dr. Festus Okoye, highlight the difficulty it took the commission to get to some parts of the country. Seeing how election materials are transported from Abuja to different parts of the country days before the elections. This logistics challenge also hindered and disenfranchised some voters (Premiumtimesng, 2023).



## CONCLUSION

Based on observation and analysis of the 2023 general election indicate that the election fell short of the credibility threshold set. It was expected that the innovative reforms introduced by INEC, in furtherance of the new Electoral Act 2022, will lead to efficient and accountable election management, together with effective monitoring of political parties and campaign process, improved access to polling units, hitch-free accreditation and voting, and effective violence mitigation.

Contrary to these expectations, the 2023 general election was marred by very poor organization, severe logistical and operational failure, lack of essential electoral transparency, substantial disruption of voting, and several incidents of violence. As a result, the process cannot be considered to have been credible. Given the lack of transparency, particularly in the result collation process, there can be no confidence in the results of the election. In addition, there was very poor communication from INEC on challenges with its processes on election day.

## RECOMMENDATION

In the light of these shortcomings above, there is need for additional reforms and improvements to the Nigerian electoral legal frameworks, like the Electoral Act, to ensure that the quality and outcome of future elections in Nigeria does not further decline. Also, stringent measures should be put in place to decrease voter apathy, like organizing workshops and seminars to educate the ‘common man’ on the importance and benefits of electoral participation. Also, the government, civil groups/societies, and NGOs should organize constant orientations of proletariats and the general public on the benefits of electoral participation, pre and post election period. The government should be proactive in creating a fair ground for elections to boost the public’s confidence in electoral institutions like INEC. By adopting the above recommendations, the public’s confidence in the capacity of INEC to conduct elections shall be restored, while trust in the credibility of elections shall be re-established.

The Constitution should be amended to replace the position of Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) with State Directors of Elections who will be appointed as employees of INEC and subject to its control and direction.

To improve election administration, the National Assembly should be more vigorous in undertaking its oversight role over INEC and the electoral process. Pre-and post-election legislative scrutiny of the implementation of the Electoral Act and other legislations by INEC should be conducted regularly.

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