



## EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FOREIGN ELECTION OBSERVER MISSIONS TO CREDIBILITY OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

**Christian Chidi OKEKE, Ph.D**

Department of Political Science

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Email: [co.chidi@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:co.chidi@unizik.edu.ng)

Tel: +2347037000279

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5361-2436>

**Jude Chukwuemeka OKAFOR, Ph.D**

Department of Political Science

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Email: [ud.okafor@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:ud.okafor@unizik.edu.ng)

Tel: +2348038741057

**Chisom Henry OBI**

Department of Political Science

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Email: [obihenry2021@gmail.com](mailto:obihenry2021@gmail.com)

Tel: +2348034173852

### Abstract

*This study investigated the contributions of foreign election observer missions to the credibility of 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Election observation has gained traction as an important mechanism that helps ensure credibility of the electoral process. The study, therefore, sought to determine ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examine how foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation, as well as how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission in the election. Anchored on the Theory of Institutionalism, the study adopted descriptive design as well as documentary method to collate secondary data. Content analysis method was adopted for data analysis. Findings by the study revealed that regardless of their presence, global reach, and the fact that the foreign election observer missions produce independent assessment of the electoral process with far-reaching implications, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant allegations of result falsification, intimidation of voters and noticeable bias within the Independent National Electoral Commission. Consequently, the study, among other things, recommended the need for urgent legislation recognising assessment by foreign observer missions as one of the legal bedrocks for election-related litigations and prosecution of offenders.*

**Keywords:** Elections, Nigeria, Foreign Election Observer Missions, Election Credibility, Independent National Electoral Commission

### 1.0 Introduction

Regardless that elections are fundamental in democracies, an important benchmark for democracy has often been described as an election that is credible. This means elections where, among other things, rules, regulations and laws governing the electoral process are followed such that there is political competition, non-suppression of opposition, lack of manipulation of electoral laws and institutions, lack of control of media and information as well as evidence of transparency and accountability, devoid of external interference (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). Equally, regardless of



the fact that elections are an internal matter for states, they generate interests that go beyond national boundaries such that the international community is now interested in elections and sends election observers to observe elections.

Foreign election observation has been institutionalized through various instruments such as the United Nations Declaration of Principle for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers of 2005, the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Mission of 2002, Economic Community of West African States Guideline for Election Observation and Monitoring, as well as the Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring by the Independent National Electoral Commission of 2014 (updated in 2018) (Akolade & Oluwatobiloba, 2024). As such, the June 12 Presidential election of 1993 marked the beginning of election observation in Nigeria when 3000 local and international observer groups appeared on the electoral scene to observe the said election. Though the idea was considered to be completely unusual then, it has since thrived to become part and parcel of the country's electoral process (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). Equally, during the 27 February 1999 presidential election, close to 12,000 accredited election observers assessed the election out of which about 2,000 foreign observers were drawn from various organisations. In the same vein, the 2003 General Elections were also observed by more foreign observers than the previous ones. By many accounts, the 2007 General Elections were witnessed by many international observers with poor electoral outcomes (Ayodeji, 2015).

Nigeria's 2023 general election cycle was not different as an appreciable number of foreign election observers participated actively in it (Nwankwo & Dode, 2024). The general elections took place on 25th February and 11th March, 2023. In all, 25 foreign observer groups were accredited for the 2023 general elections. The observer groups included the 40-member delegation of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) led by Joyce Banda and Ambassador Mark Green, 90 African Union (AU) observers with five-member expert team led by Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, 16-member Commonwealth Election Observation Mission led by Thabo Mbeki and the 126 European Union (EU) observers led by Barry Andrews. Others included a core team of 11 analysts and 40 long-term observers deployed to all the six geopolitical zones of the country. For the first round of election on February 25, the European Union Election Observer Mission was boosted with 54 locally recruited short-term observers bringing the total to 110 observers from 25 European Union Member States, as well as from partner countries Canada, Norway and Switzerland and including a seven-member delegation of the European Parliament, led by Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament from Sweden. For the 18 March election day, the European Union Election Observer Mission was reinforced with 16 locally recruited short-term observers (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Independent National Electoral Commission, 2024; African Union Election Observer Mission Report, 2023; International Republican Institute/National Democratic Institute International Election Observer Monitoring Report, 2023; Commonwealth Observer Group Report, 2023). It is in line with this participation in Nigeria's electoral process that this study sought to examine the contributions of the foreign election observer missions to the 2023 general elections.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The increased interest shown by foreign missions in observing elections in Nigeria is necessitated by the fact that since the return of democracy in 1999, elections in the country have been fraught with integrity deficit (Gromping, 2017). Regardless of the fact that election observation is crucial to the electoral process as it enhances public confidence and contributes to the integrity of the elections and more importantly has the potential of exposing irregularities and fraud, it appears that the role of international election observers is constrained and their impact is hardly felt in the real conduct of elections in Nigeria (Omilusi, 2013; Akolade & Oluwatobiloba, 2024). For instance, the country's political culture that is notorious for electoral corruption and violence makes election observation difficult and risky. One then wonders whether their continual presence



during elections as well as their reports on the conduct of the elections could really prevent electoral corruption and ensure transparency (Ayodeji, 2015).

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria came with a lot of hope and high level of enthusiasm which resulted in massive number of people registering to vote in the elections. The expectations of the citizens, particularly the youths, on the outcome of the election were unprecedented in the history of the country. However, whether the participation of foreign observers helped to achieve electoral credibility in the poll has not received the necessary scholarly interrogation. The key concerns of the study are therefore to determine ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, to examine how foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria, and to examine how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Thus, this formed the basis of this study.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The following questions guided the study:

1. In what ways has previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. How has foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria?
3. How has the global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically speaking, by examining the contributions of foreign election observer missions to credibility of elections in Nigeria, the study contributes to the body of existing literature on the subject matter of the roles of the observer missions in achieving credibility in elections. Literature on it remains inadequate and begs to be enriched. More angles to the subject matter therefore remain welcome in literature, in particular this study which sought to determine ways in which independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examined how the presence of foreign election observers deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria, as well as how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The discourse focusing on these areas is a valuable addition to scholarship and profoundly helpful to the needs of academics, historians, civil society groups, political analysts as well as researchers who search for data in their work on election matters. Practically, officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Intergovernmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, philanthropists, academics, historians, civil society groups, political analysts as well as other relevant stakeholders on election matters will find this study, particularly its recommendations quite useful in proffering solutions to Nigeria's perennially troubled elections. With practical contributions of the study, the search for credible elections in Nigeria has received a boost.



## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Perspectives on Foreign Election Observation**

In the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, international election observation is acknowledged as an accepted means of providing accurate and impartial assessments about the nature of electoral processes (Griffith, 2013). It is generally accepted as a means of contributing to voter confidence and assessing the relative legitimacy of an electoral process and its outcome. It is also an important mechanism that helps ensure neutrality, integrity, accountability and transparency of the electoral process as well as part of the systems that protect the viability and honesty of election administration and the participation by political parties, candidates and interest groups in a way that encourages compliance with the legal framework. This means that its purpose is to have elections whose outcomes are a reflection of the will of the people. It is for this reason that Nwankwo and Dode (2024) contended that the presence of foreign election observers is to help ensure free, fair and credible elections.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (2014) identified the role performed by (foreign) election observers to include three main activities, namely: to observe processes and activities organised during elections to collate facts and observations; to interpret the facts gathered against the laws governing elections as well as basic democratic standards, in order to see whether or not the elections meet the threshold of credibility as defined by law and accepted by the international community; and to outline the findings so collated and the interpretation based on them in a document or report. Thus, the importance of foreign election observation is almost universally accepted (Hyde & Kelly, 2011). Involving foreign observer missions in election processes has been acknowledged as one of the rational steps in addressing election problems that plague emerging democracies. It has become so popular that refusing to invite foreign observers is seen as a signal that a regime has something to hide.

Generally speaking, the first election to witness international monitoring was in 1857 when French, British, Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Turkish representatives oversaw a plebiscite in Moldavia and Wallachia (Ayodeji, 2015). The post-World War II paved the way for more and aside the monitoring of elections by the United Nations (UN) in Korea and Germany, the decolonisation process accelerated it in the 1950-60s. The second-generation election monitoring has evolved and become more widespread with the end of the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period, the number of regions, Africa in particular and post-Communist Eastern Europe which engaged in multiparty elections has made foreign election observation to become much more entrenched (Hyde & Kelly, 2011).

#### **2.1.2 Importance and Characteristics of Credible Elections**

Basically, credible election presupposes trustworthiness, believability and acceptability of an election, meaning that the laid down rules and democratic processes and procedures that enhance mass participation are judiciously followed in the exercise. It further means that the elections are devoid of all sorts of electoral malpractices, intimidations, violence etc (Simon & Okonkwo, 2020). What this also means is that in an environment where credible election is the goal, there must be procedures in place guaranteeing candidates the right to compete, be entitled to vote, and votes are counted accurately with the winning candidates selected based on pre-existing rules and conditions to meet for candidates to gain electoral victory (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). In essence, an election can be said to be credible if its conduct is guided by a transparent electoral process conducted within a competitive participatory political environment where balloting is done in secret with visible conditionalities such as unbiased electoral umpire, public counting of votes and instant announcement of the true results at the polling units after voting is concluded met (Nwaubani, 2012; Okeke, 2018).

Credible elections are characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and competitiveness since they are conducted in accordance with the existing electoral rules with every



contestant given equal opportunity to win. For election to be credible, it must be conducted in a democratically acceptable manner and process, with equal opportunity given to electorate to make real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation (Asadu, 2017; Gabriel, 2022). In essence, free and fair election is both ideal and beneficial.

### **2.1.3 Nigeria and Challenges to Credible Election**

Since gaining political independence in 1960, Nigeria's political processes have been characterised by crisis-ridden elections (Ishiekwene & Agah, 2024). The situation is so pathetic that institutionalizing credible elections in the country has remained a mirage while challenges to elections are multifaceted and deeply intertwined. Lack of democratic culture remains a major hinderance to achieving clean elections. Electoral malpractices and lack of electoral reforms remain visible such that in the 1983, 2003 and 2007 national elections, the ruling party in each case obviously exploited some lapses in the constitution and relevant electoral laws to influence electoral outcomes.

Electoral corruption in Nigeria comes in varied forms such as electoral malpractice, electoral misconduct, electoral malfeasance, electoral fraud, and electoral manipulation (Birch, 2011). It is mostly viewed as a direct sabotage of the electoral process by individuals or groups who are desirous of protecting personal or group interests against what electoral success guarantees. Among other things, the techniques of electoral corruption in Nigeria include underage voting, mass voting by unregistered citizens (neither qualified to register nor even registered to vote), snatching of ballot boxes to be stuffed with thumb-printed votes for party candidates, intimidation at the polls using thugs or even state security personnel, scaring away of genuine registered voters from exercising their franchise at polling booths, deliberate, one-sided and improper counting of votes and media manipulation of vote count/result, announcement or publication of the wrong results and the wrong candidates as winners before the proper collation of results by the Electoral Commission (Casmir, Omeh & Ike, 2023).

### **2.1.4 Empirical Review**

Attempts had been made in extant literature to call attention to the nexus between foreign election observation and general elections in Nigeria. For instance, Omolaja and Adeyemi (2024) in a study titled "Election Observation in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria" investigated domestic and foreign observers and the credibility of elections in Nigeria. Data were generated from both primary and secondary sources, and content analysis was used to examine it. The study discovered that both international and domestic observers hardly witness the entire electoral cycle in a non-partisan manner. While pre-election activities are barely observed, they are significantly more focused on actions on Election Day. Additionally, it found out that some aspects of results collation are also kept outside their purview. As a result, making judgments about the entire political process based on a selective observation could be deceptive. The study recommended that election observers should monitor all phases of the electoral process, including pre-election, Election Day, and post-election activities, in order to maintain their credibility. They should also have unrestricted access to the collation centers so they may observe every step leading up to the announcement of the final results for all contested positions.

In another study, Nwankwo & Dode (2024) in their study titled "International Election Observers' Perception of Nigeria's 2023 General Election: Lessons for 2027" assessed how international observers perceived the 2023 general elections, with a view to highlighting key areas that must be kept in focus ahead of the next election cycle in 2027. Drawing from the norm of international election monitoring, the paper argued that the role of international election observers in Nigeria – along with their post-election reports – would remain ceremonial for as long as pseudo-democrats remain in power. Baseline data constituted the primary sources of information for the paper, and analysis was done qualitatively. The paper recommended, among other things, that the international community should (collectively) investigate elections scored low by international





observers and thereafter, perpetrators can be sanctioned accordingly. That way, the work of international election observers would cease to be considered actions in futility.

Ishiekwene and Agah (2024) in their study titled “Assessing the Performance of Elections Observer’s Missions in the Conduct of the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria” assessed the performance of election observer’s missions in the conduct of the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The study further revealed that election observers during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria highlighted significant challenges related to logistics, security, political cooperation, impartiality, transparency, and technology. These findings underscored the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the effectiveness, credibility, and impact of future election observer’s missions in Nigeria. The following recommendations were therefore outlined for the study: The government through the Independent National Electoral Commission should enhance logistical support, strengthen security measures, promote political cooperation, improve transparency and accountability and enhance observer’s impartiality.

Ihemeje (2019) in a study titled “Election, International Election Monitoring Groups and Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Appraisal” examined the role of international election observers in major elections conducted in Nigeria’s fourth republic. Six international election observation bodies were sampled: National Democratic Institute (NDI), The Commonwealth Secretariat (CS), European Commission (EC), International Republican Institute (IRI), Human Right Watch (HRW) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The study unravels the essential roles of international election observers in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in Nigeria. The paper therefore averred that international election observers have performed more than expectation in correcting previous electoral malfeasances through their dynamic reports and recommendations. Their monumental roles discerned the 2011 general election from the preceding 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections which were marred by miscellaneous electoral flaws in Nigeria. Thus, the paper recommended ultimate cooperation of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society, security agency and the electorate with International Electoral Observers for the realization of sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

### **2.1.5 Gap in Literature**

Regardless of the fact that the activities of foreign election observer missions in general elections in Nigeria and in 2023 have attracted considerable scholarly attention, yet the review of the existing literature revealed some gaps. The first identified gap is the excessive focus on the report of the foreign observer missions rather than the impact of their activity. It appears the available literature was in mere search for evidence with which to support the conclusion that elections in the country were incredible or otherwise. The scholars appeared so much engrossed with the content of the observers’ report rather than the relevance of the observers in elections. A missing gap is the failure by the available literature to examine the relevance of the foreign observer missions in search for credible elections in Nigeria. In essence, there is noticeable lack of literature which interrogated ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results particularly 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examined how the presence of foreign election observers deterred voters’ intimidation during the election, and examined how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. In other words, the relevance of foreign election observer missions in elections in Nigeria, particularly in the 2023 general election has not been interrogated by scholars. How their previous roles helped the cause of the 2023 general elections or otherwise remained un-investigated. It is this gap that this study sought to fill.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on Theory of Institutionalism popularized by Finnemore (1996) and which after analyzing interactions between diverse norms in several areas admitted that states’ identities and interests change, subject to prevailing norms at a particular point in time. In relation



to international election observation, the theory contends that what started in the West, especially in Britain and Americas has become an export commodity of the new system of interests (Santa-Cruz, 2005). Thus, it is the contention of the theory that election observation is important in upholding participatory rights and in maintaining strong Western ties (Gillis, 2013).

The Theory of Institutionalism adopted in this study as framework of analysis is therefore apt since credible elections have become accepted as a part of democratic norms, pushed by the West. The emphasis has always been on a transparent electoral process conducted within a competitive participatory political environment devoid of such ills as manipulation of election results, voters' intimidation and unbiased electoral umpire. It is in line with this norm that elections are observed to determine the extent to which they meet the threshold, in essence against set standards, especially by an independent and impartial body of foreign observers with the aim of identifying whether the elections conform to accepted guarantees of democratic participation, identifying flaws and challenges, and also making recommendations on how the process can be improved in the future for the sake of ensuring credibility of elections. Nigeria still struggles in her elections and has consistently failed to conduct credible elections. Eager to ensure that elections in the country possess the required credentials, a set of international observers are deployed by or under the authority of intergovernmental agencies, international organisations and other nongovernmental organisations not based in the country for the purpose of gathering information regarding the electoral process and making informed judgments on the conduct of such a process. The sole aim is to make Nigeria's elections conform to the globally-acceptable norm of electoral credibility.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study adopted descriptive research design. It chose the design since the study is purely qualitative in nature, with data available in various documents. It adopted documentary method for data collection and essentially relied on secondary sources abundant in documents such as elections reports by some foreign election observer missions such as International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Commonwealth of Nations. Others are publications by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Data from the foreign election observer missions and the Independent National Electoral Commission were sourced from the websites of the various organisations whereas the rest of the secondary data were collated from both e-libraries and public libraries visited. Content analysis method was adopted for data analysis in line with the research objectives and hypotheses of the study.

### **4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis**

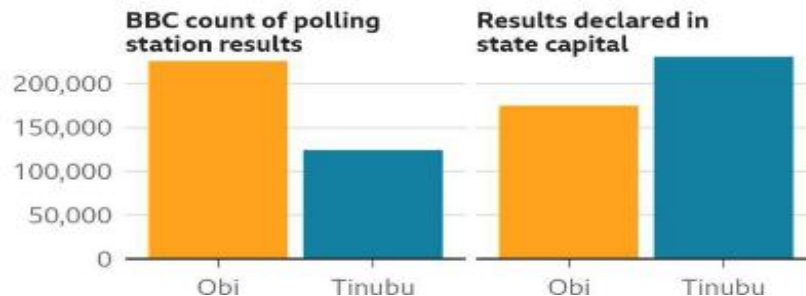
#### **4.1 Independent Assessment of Electoral Process by Foreign Observer Missions and Manipulation of Results of 2023 General Elections in Nigeria**

Basically, foreign election observation expresses the interest of the international community in the achievement of democratic elections as part of democratic development including respect for human rights and the rule of law. It assesses election processes in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections and domestic law, while however recognizing that it is the people of a country who ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of an election process (Onyia & Ugbor-Kalu, 2021).

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant allegations of result falsification, which created a contentious environment that threatened the integrity of the democratic process. Accusations of tampering with vote counts, altering results at collation centers, and deliberately manipulating figures to favor specific candidates were widespread. These issues were documented in various reports by international election observer groups. Organizations like the European Union Election Observation Mission, The National Democratic Institute, the Centre for Democracy and Development, and the African Union were among those that highlighted discrepancies in the official results announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Independent reports



indicated that figures from the collation centers did not match those gathered by monitors at polling units, suggesting a deliberate effort to alter outcomes, which ultimately led to numerous legal challenges (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2023). YIAGA Africa, a non-governmental organisation which did a parallel tabulation of the results from many states reported variations between its results and those of INEC in Rivers state and Imo state. These two states were also flagged by the media and some of the opposition parties for significant levels of electoral irregularities. Evidence abound that the Presidential election result in Rivers State may have been manipulated (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). 48 hours after the Presidential Election and National Assembly Elections ended in many parts of the Nigeria, there were criticisms by the United States, the European Union, Common Wealth and International Observers Groups about the exercise and allegations of rigging and manipulations of the results (Kingsley et al., 2023). Figure 1 represents discrepancy in election results in Rivers state.



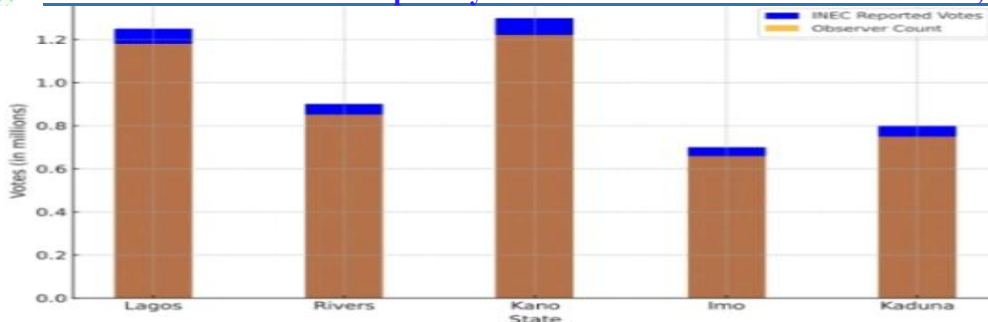
**Figure1: Discrepancy in Results Collated by INEC and that of the British Broadcasting Corporation**

**Source:** Ekwuribe & Edet (2023)

The figure shows wide discrepancy between British Broadcasting Corporation's count of polling station results and the results declared in Port Harcourt, Rivers state capital. In the former, presidential candidate of Labour Party, Mr. Peter Obi led in the result with score exceeding two hundred thousand votes, while the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Bola Tinubu trailed behind with about 100, 000 votes. However, in the result announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, Tinubu was ascribed more votes than Obi. This sharp discrepancy underscored the incredibility of the 2023 presidential election. This aligned with the report of the joint election observation mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), led by former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda which declared that the election fell short of the reasonable expectations of Nigerians. According to the 40-member delegation of the two United States Institute: at the close of the polls, challenges with electronic transfer of results and their upload to a public portal in a timely manner undermined citizens confidence at a crucial moment of the process (Azimezi, et al 2023). According to Paul (2023), five days after the 2023 Presidential election and 24 hours after declaring the Presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu as the winner of the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission is yet to upload all the election results. The transparency and credibility of the 2023 Presidential election result was affected largely by the non-transmission of the Presidential election results to the IREV in most places in the country (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). International observers raised concerns that these practices undermined the principle of free and fair elections.

Table 2 further illustrates the discrepancies between the Independent National Electoral Commission announced results and the independent observer counts.





**Figure 2:** Discrepancies between Independent National Electoral Commission Reported votes and Observers Counts in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.

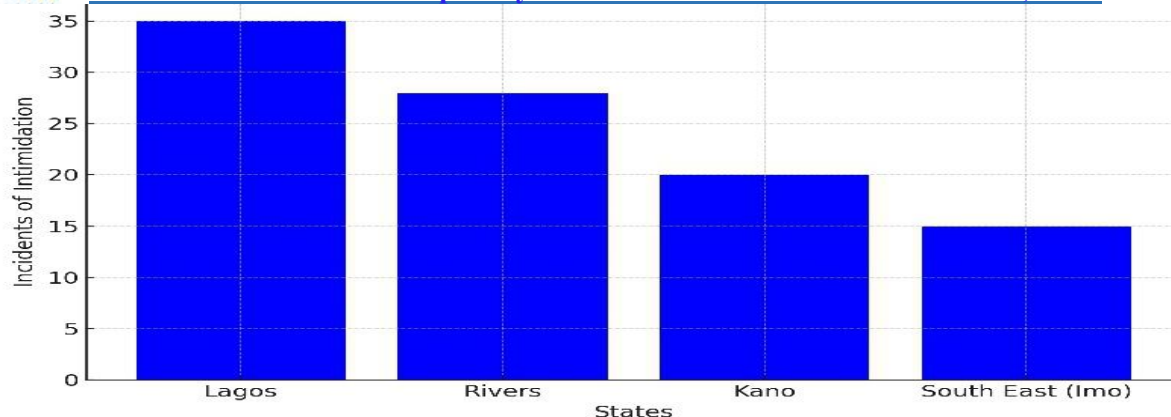
**Source:** (National Democratic Institute & Situation Room, 2023).

Table 2 demonstrated a pattern that was pointed out by various observer groups where in Rivers State, the observer count reported 850,000 votes for Candidate A while the Independent National Electoral Commission figures showed 900,000, a significant discrepancy of 5.9%. Similar patterns were observed across other key states, leading to suspicions of deliberate tampering (National Democratic Institute, 2023). Such differences are critical as they raise fundamental questions about the credibility of the election process, further supported by video evidence and testimonies collected by observer missions (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

#### 4.2 Foreign Election Observers' Presence and Voters' Intimidation during 2023 General Election in Nigeria

The presence of election observers creates the atmosphere of confidence in the electorate who would have ignored voting as an exercise in futility as their votes may not count. In other words, it has been established that the presence of election observers, especially the international ones, increases greater as well as wider political participation, thereby reducing electoral corruption (Ayodeji, 2015). Nevertheless, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant challenges, with voter intimidation emerging as a critical issue that undermined the democratic process and had profound implications for the country's international reputation. Various reports indicated that intimidation tactics were employed by political actors to secure favorable outcomes. The Transition Monitoring Group documented over 200 incidents of voter intimidation across Nigeria, particularly in states like Lagos, Rivers, and Kano, which experienced the most significant levels of electoral violence (Transition Monitoring Group, 2023).

The methods of intimidation varied widely, including armed threats, physical violence, harassment at polling stations, and coercive messaging via social media. Such tactics created a climate of fear that significantly deterred voters from exercising their democratic rights. Reports indicated that voters were approached by armed groups urging them to vote for specific candidates under the threat of violence, resulting in many individuals choosing to stay away from polling stations entirely due to fear of retribution (United States Department of State, 2023). One of the most glaring examples of voter intimidation was observed in Lagos State, where reports indicated that voters were physically attacked, threatened, or coerced by armed individuals stationed near polling units. For instance, a report by the Centre for Democracy and Development, revealed that in several polling units in Lagos Island, thugs were seen instructing voters to support a particular political party, with warnings of violent repercussions if they failed to comply (Saheed, 2023 cited in Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). Table 3 provides a detailed overview of voter intimidation cases reported across key states during the 2023 elections.



**Figure 3: Voter Intimidation Incidents During 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.**

**Source:** (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023)

Figure 3 shows that voters' intimidation was high in Lagos, Rivers and Kano but less in Imo which, however, witnessed similar challenge. The implications of voter intimidation for electoral participation during the 2023 general elections were severe. According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission, voter turnout for the 2023 general elections dropped to approximately 25% in areas most affected by intimidation, compared to a national average of 35% (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2024). This decline in voter participation highlights the detrimental effect of intimidation on public confidence in the electoral process. Furthermore, the intimidation disproportionately affected specific demographics, including women and youth, who reported feeling particularly vulnerable in the face of aggressive tactics. The fear of violence or retaliation led to a significant underrepresentation of these groups in the electoral outcomes, exacerbating existing inequalities and undermining the democratic principle of inclusivity (National Democratic Institute, 2023).

The issue of voter intimidation during the 2023 elections attracted significant international attention and concern. Observers from the European Union and the African Union issued statements condemning the violence and intimidation tactics employed during the elections, emphasizing the need for a free and fair electoral process. Such statements underscored the international community's expectation that Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa and a key player in regional stability, uphold democratic standards. The reported incidents of voter intimidation raised serious questions about the credibility of the electoral process and, by extension, Nigeria's image on the global stage (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

#### **4.3 Global Reach of Foreign Election Observer Missions and Neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.**

The Independent National Electoral Commission plays a crucial role in organizing and conducting elections in Nigeria, ensuring that the electoral process is free, fair, and credible. However, the 2023 general elections exposed significant inefficiencies within the Commission which became a subject of concern both domestically and internationally. Reports from various local and international election observer missions, including the European Union Election Observation Mission, National Democratic Institute, and the African Union highlighted logistical issues, delays, technological failures, and allegations of bias. What was in doubt was the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the human resources in terms of the INEC staff as well as INEC ad-hoc staff. INEC failed to adhere to its own statements and guidelines (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). These inefficiencies raised questions about Nigeria's ability to conduct transparent elections, which is essential for its credibility as a leader within the African region (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2023).

One of the most significant issues reported during the 2023 elections was the failure of technology intended to streamline the electoral process. Independent National Electoral Commission introduced the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to improve voter



identification and reduce the chances of electoral fraud. Despite these innovations, there were widespread complaints about BVAS malfunctioning at various polling units, leading to delays and disruptions (African Union, 2023). Observers from the Centre for Democracy and Development noted that, in several key states, the devices failed to authenticate voters' biometrics, causing long queues and frustration among voters (Centre for Democracy & Development, 2023).

The inefficiencies witnessed during the 2023 general elections have broader implications beyond the domestic sphere, particularly concerning Nigeria's aspirations as a regional leader in Africa. Nigeria has often positioned itself as a champion of democracy on the continent, playing a key role in regional organizations like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States. However, the inability to ensure a smooth and credible electoral process in its own elections has led to criticism and scepticism from the international community (African Union, 2023; Economic Community of West African States, 2023). For instance, the African Union and Economic Community of West African States, both of which have received support from Nigeria in their efforts to promote peace and democracy in other African nations, expressed disappointment at the conduct of the 2023 elections. Observers from these organizations highlighted the disparity between Nigeria's advocacy for democracy in other nations and the reality of its electoral processes. This contradiction weakens Nigeria's diplomatic leverage when addressing issues of governance and election integrity within the region.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The study was necessitated by the need for credible elections in Nigeria in the face of the perennial shortcomings which always characterise elections in the country. The broad objective of this study was to examine the contributions of foreign election observer missions to credibility of 2023 general elections in Nigeria or otherwise. In essence, in what ways has previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria? How has foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria? How has the global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria? The study made some findings which include the fact that the elections were marred by significant allegations of result falsification which thrived regardless of the fact that foreign observers were to produce a far-reaching independent assessment of the electoral process which could threaten the integrity of the democratic process in the country. It also revealed that the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by severe voters' intimidation such that voter turnout dropped to approximately 25% in areas most affected by intimidation, compared to a national average of 35% despite the presence of foreign election observers. Also, it was revealed that the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the human resources in terms of the INEC staff as well as INEC ad-hoc staff was in doubt during the 2023 general elections with implications which resonate across the country's borders.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

In view of the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Need for urgent legislation stipulating severe sanction such as life imprisonment without an option of fine for persons found guilty of undermining the credibility of the country's elections by way of manipulation of election results, voter intimidation and sabotage of the process by the electoral commission. National Assembly should be encouraged to enact the law for the president's assent before the next general election as a way of ensuring that future elections meet credibility threshold and receive positive assessment by foreign election observer missions.
2. Foreign election observation in the country to be strengthened and supported with every logistical and legislative framework needed for a truly independent assessment of the electoral process. The assessment of the observer missions should be considered as legal



bedrock for election-related litigations and prosecution of offenders. In achieving this, the federal government should be mandated by law to provide all the demands by the observer missions in terms of logistics, security, access and other such demands that could enable an effective observation during elections.

3. The president should be stripped of the powers to appoint national chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission. Owing to the critical nature of the responsibility of the head of the commission, necessary legal framework should be put in place to mandate leadership of reputable bodies such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Nigerian Bar Association to make about four recommendations to the president to pick from. The same should apply to the Resident Electoral Commissioners as well as National Commissioners of the commission.

## References

- Adebisi, A. & Loremikan, S. (2013). Election observation in Nigeria: Prop or threat to democratic consolidation? *Canadian Social Science* 9(6), 140-146.
- African Union. (2023). *Preliminary statement on the presidential and national assembly elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Retrieved May 15, 2025, from <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230228/preliminary-statement-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections-federal>.
- African Union Election Observation Mission. (February 27, 2023). *Preliminary statement: 25 February 2023 presidential and national assembly elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja, 27 February 2023*. Retrieved February 27, 2025, from <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/preliminary-statement-african-union-election-observation-mission-to-the-25-february-2023-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections-in-the-federal-republic-of-nigeria-abuja-27-february-2023>.
- Akolade, O.O. & Oluwatobiloba, A.D. (2024). *Election observation in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria*. Retrieved March 13, 2025, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378067833\\_ELECTION\\_OBSERVATION\\_IN\\_THE\\_2023\\_GENERAL\\_ELECTIONS\\_IN\\_NIGERIA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378067833_ELECTION_OBSERVATION_IN_THE_2023_GENERAL_ELECTIONS_IN_NIGERIA)
- Asadu, I. (2017). *First class government for school and colleges*. Nsukka, Great AP Express.
- Ayodeji, G. I. Appraising the role of election observers in ensuring transparency and preventing electoral corruption in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 8(1), 1-14.
- Azimazi, M. J., Soliq, O. & Adanu, A. (2023). *Drama as observers, Obasanjo, Abdulsalam query election*. Retrieved May 30, 2025, from [http://www/news/drama-as-observers-obasanjo-abdulsalami-query-election](http://www.news/drama-as-observers-obasanjo-abdulsalami-query-election).
- Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral corruption*. Retrieved May 18, 2025, from [http://www.idcr.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2010/09/05\\_11.pdf](http://www.idcr.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2010/09/05_11.pdf)
- Casimir, A., Omeh, E. & Ike, C. (2013). Electoral fraud in Nigeria: A philosophical evaluation of the framework of electoral violence. *Open Journal of Political Science* 3(4), 167-174.
- Centre for Democracy and Development. (2023). *Preliminary statement on the 2023 Nigerian general elections*. Retrieved May 25, 2025 from [https://www.cddwestafrica.org/uploads/reports/file/Understanding-the-2023-Nigerian-Presidential-and-National-Assembly-Elections\\_EACReport.pdf](https://www.cddwestafrica.org/uploads/reports/file/Understanding-the-2023-Nigerian-Presidential-and-National-Assembly-Elections_EACReport.pdf)
- Commonwealth Observer Group. (February 27, 2023). *Interim statement of the Commonwealth Observer Group to Nigeria's 2023 general elections*. Retrieved March 2, 2025, from <https://thecommonwealth.org/interim-statement-commonwealth-observer-group-nigerias-2023-general-elections>.





- Ekwuribe, U. O. & Edet, J. T. (2023). The Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and credible elections in Nigeria: An assessment of the 2023 general elections. *Ekwe International Journal of Igbo Scholars Forum for Socio-Cultural Advancement*, 18(2), 41-75.
- Economic Community of West African States. (2023). *ECOWAS election monitoring report on Nigeria*. Retrieved May 20, 2025, from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.voaafrica.com/amp/ecowas-observation-mission-details-irregularities-in-nigeria-s-elections-/6980728.html>
- European Union Election Observation Mission (2023). *Nigeria 2023 general elections 25 February and March 18: Final report*. Retrieved March 21, 2025, from <https://www.eods.eu/library/EU%20EOM%20NGA%202023%20FR.pdf>.
- Finnemore, M. (1996). *National interests in international society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gabriel, I. A. (2022). Credible elections in Nigeria: Panacea for stability, growth and development. *Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 3(4), 20-31.
- Gilliss, L. E. (2013). *The effects of the norm of international election monitoring on voters' confidence levels in Francophone West Africa's presidential elections 1990-2011*. Retrieved May 18, 2025, from <http://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy/254>
- Griffith, B. (2013). *The importance of observers in international elections and how lawyers can get involved*. Georgia: Dream Publishers.
- Gromping, M (2017) Domestic election monitoring and advocacy: An emerging research agenda, *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 35(4), 407-423.
- Hyde, E. & Kelly, S. (2011). *The limits of election monitoring: What independent observation can (and can't) do*. Washington DC: Council of Public Affairs.
- Ihemeje, G. (2019). Election, international election monitoring groups and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Appraisal. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 8(11), 54-62.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2014). *INEC guidelines for election observation*. Abuja: Independent National Electoral Commission.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2024). *Final report on the conduct of the 2023 general elections*. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-GENERAL-ELECTION-REPORT-1.pdf>
- International Republican Institute (IRI)/National Democratic Institute [NDI]. (June, 2023). *IRI/NDI International Election Observation Mission to Nigeria Final report of the 2023 general election*. Abuja: IRI/NDI.
- Ishiekwe, A. J. & Agah, B. E. (2024). Assessing the performance of elections observer's missions in the conduct of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. *International Journal of Progressive Research in Engineering Management and Science*, 4(12), 1180-1191.
- Kingsley, N. (2023). *The world moves against Nigeria's failed polls*. Retrieved May 14, 2025, from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/02/25/the-in->
- National Democratic Institute. (2023). *Election observation report: Nigeria 2023 general elections*. Retrieved May 29, 2025, from [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/IRI\\_NDI%20Final%20Report\\_2023%20Nigeria%20EOM.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/IRI_NDI%20Final%20Report_2023%20Nigeria%20EOM.pdf)
- Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room. (2023). *Report on Nigeria's 2023 general election*. Abuja: Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room.
- Nwankwo, C.A. & Dode, R. O. (2024). International election observers' Perception of Nigeria's 2023 general election: Lessons for 2027. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 17(1), 584-602.
- Nwaubani, O. (2012). Elections, electoral malpractices and electoral reforms: Implications for sustainable democratic culture in Nigeria. In A. Akpuru-Aja & A. Ibe. *Repositioning the state for development in Africa: issues, challenges and prospects*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Okeke, C. (2018). Low voter turnout and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria: A study of 2010-2017 Anambra State governorship elections. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*. 9(3), 1-30.





- Omilusi, M. (2013). *Democratic governance in Nigeria: Key issues and challenges*. Akure: Adex Printing Press.
- Omolaja, A. O. & Adeyemi, O. D. (2024). *Election observation in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria*. Retrieved May 17, 2025, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378067833\\_ELECTION\\_OBSERVATION\\_IN\\_THE\\_2023\\_GENERAL\\_ELECTIONS\\_IN\\_NIGERIA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378067833_ELECTION_OBSERVATION_IN_THE_2023_GENERAL_ELECTIONS_IN_NIGERIA)
- Onyia, F. & Ugbor-Kalu, U. (2021). Civil society and election observation in Nigeria: Participant versus non-participant observers. *International Journal of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Essays*, 4(1), 40-58.
- Paul, M. (2023). *INEC upload, 83% of election results*. Retrieved May 18, 2025, from <https://www.vanguradng.com/2023/03/inec-uploads-83%-of-results-24hrs-after-declaring-tinubu>.
- Santa-Cruz, A. (2005). Constitutional structures, sovereignty, and the emergence of norms: The case of international election monitoring. *International Organisation*, 59(03), 663-693.
- Simon, C. O. & Okonkwo, C. N. (2020). Credibility of the 2011 general elections and the growth of democracy in Nigeria. *South-East Journal of Political Science*, 61(1) 1-29.
- Transition Monitoring Group. (2023). *Press statement on 2023 presidential and national assembly elections in Nigeria*. Retrieved May 12 2025, from <https://www.energyfocusreport.com/press-statement-by-transition-monitoring-group-tmg-on-2023-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections-in-nigeria/>
- United State Department of State. (2023). *U.S. reactions to the 2023 Nigerian elections*. Retrieved May 18, 2025, from [https://www.state.gov/2023-presidential-election-results-in-nigeria/?utm\\_source](https://www.state.gov/2023-presidential-election-results-in-nigeria/?utm_source)