

# Voters Education and Electoral Fraud in the 2023 Presidential Election in Oyo State

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## Abstract

*In Nigeria, persistent electoral fraud, despite institutional reforms and technological innovations, continues to undermine public trust and democratic consolidation. This study shifts focus from institutional actors to voters, examining their direct and indirect roles in facilitating or resisting electoral fraud within the electoral system while assessing the effectiveness of political education provided by the National Orientation Agency, the extent to which social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and WhatsApp influenced electoral fraud; and how demographic features such as educational level and employment status shaped voters' involvement in or resistance to electoral fraud; all guided by the Systems Theory and Rational Choice Theory. Using a descriptive survey research design. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts and tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87), provided the primary data analyzed with descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that voters in Oyo State actively facilitated electoral fraud primarily through inducements and patronage exchanges. Although a majority of voters acknowledged electoral fraud as wrong, many did not view it as harmful. The National Orientation Agency's (NOA) political education had limited impact, with many unaware of its programs. Social media played a dual role, as most used it for election information and to uncover fraud, yet many also encountered misinformation. Education emerged as the strongest predictor of resistance to fraud, whereas employment status had a weaker influence. The study concludes that electoral fraud persists due to entrenched patronage networks, cultural acceptance, and weak institutional oversight. It recommends culturally grounded civic education and responsible social media engagement.*

**Keywords:** Voter, Electoral Fraud, Political Education, Social Media, Presidential Election

## Introduction

The conceptualization of democracy as synonymous with the conduct of elections has become a dominant, yet analytically insufficient, paradigm in contemporary political discourse. While elections are widely regarded as the institutional cornerstone of democratic governance facilitating representation, accountability, and leadership succession this procedural reduction obscures the substantive conditions required for democratic consolidation (Dahl, 1971; Afrobarometer, n.d.). Historical experience demonstrates that elections, in and of themselves, do not guarantee democratic outcomes, as they may coexist with or even enable authoritarian rule, as evidenced in cases such as the 1933 German elections (International IDEA, 2024). Consequently, the central concern in democratic practice is not merely the occurrence of elections, but the integrity, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process through which political authority is constituted. Elections perform critical normative and functional roles within democratic systems. They serve as mechanisms for translating citizen preferences into political authority, legitimizing governance, and reinforcing political stability (Eulau et al., n.d.). However, these democratic functions are contingent upon the credibility of electoral processes. Where elections are undermined by fraud and manipulation, they cease to function as instruments of democratic accountability and instead become tools for elite entrenchment. Electoral fraud manifested through practices such as vote buying, ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and result manipulation distorts voter preferences and erodes public trust in democratic institutions (Lehoucq, 2003; Collier & Vicente, 2012). The consequence is a

legitimacy deficit that not only weakens governance but also heightens the risk of political instability and conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Salihu, 2024).

Nigeria's post-1999 democratic trajectory illustrates this paradox of electoral democracy. Despite over two decades of uninterrupted civilian rule, electoral processes in the country have been persistently characterized by systemic irregularities, violence, and fraud, thereby undermining the credibility of electoral outcomes. Empirical evidence from successive electoral cycles indicates that election outcomes have frequently failed to reflect the genuine will of the electorate, contributing to declining voter turnout, electoral apathy, and recurrent violence (Vanguard, 2024). Furthermore, the prevalence of electoral malpractice has had broader socio-economic implications, including policy instability, weakened investor confidence, and constrained development outcomes (World Bank, 2022). In response to these challenges, electoral reforms in Nigeria have increasingly emphasized institutional strengthening and technological innovation. The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) during the 2023 general elections was intended to enhance transparency, improve voter authentication, and reduce opportunities for manipulation (INEC, 2023). Nevertheless, reports of irregularities including vote buying, voter intimidation, and procedural inconsistencies persisted during the electoral process (Punch, 2023; Ezeabasili, 2025). Similarly, experiences from subnational elections, such as the 2022 Osun gubernatorial election, indicate that technological interventions alone are insufficient to eliminate electoral malpractice (Guardian, 2023). These developments raise critical questions regarding the underlying drivers of electoral fraud and the limitations of current reform strategies.

A critical gap in the literature lies in its predominant focus on elite-driven explanations of electoral fraud, emphasizing the roles of political actors, electoral institutions, and security agencies. While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they often neglect the agency of voters in the production and reproduction of electoral malpractice. Existing studies have largely treated voters as passive victims of manipulation, thereby overlooking the complex ways in which voter behavior may actively sustain or resist fraudulent practices (Collier & Vicente, 2012). This analytical limitation is significant, as electoral fraud can occur not only through institutional and elite mechanisms but also through direct voter participation, including vote selling and complicity in manipulation (Alvarez et al., 2008). Beyond institutional reforms, political education has increasingly been recognized as a critical mechanism for strengthening electoral integrity and democratic participation. Political education equips citizens with the knowledge, values, and competencies necessary for meaningful participation in democratic processes and informed political decision-making (Galston, 2001; Branson, 1998). Also, recent studies have shown that civic and voter education enhance political awareness, political efficacy, and citizens' participation in democratic processes (Adeyemi & Salawudeen, 2021; Chanda, 2024). Political education can reduce voters' susceptibility to misinformation, manipulation, and vote buying by improving their understanding of electoral procedures and democratic norms.

In Nigeria, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) serves as the principal government institution responsible for civic enlightenment and voter sensitization through programmes designed to promote democratic values, national consciousness, and responsible citizenship. Despite these efforts, limited empirical attention has been devoted to assessing the extent to which political education initiatives influence voter attitudes toward electoral malpractice and electoral integrity.

Drawing on rational choice theory, particularly Downs' model of political behavior, the study conceptualizes electoral outcomes as the result of strategic interactions between political elites and voters. Within this framework, voter participation in electoral fraud is understood as a function of incentives, constraints, and socio-economic conditions that shape individual decision-making. Voters may engage in fraudulent practices due to material inducements, coercion, or rational cost-benefit calculations, or

alternatively, they may resist such practices and uphold electoral integrity. Focusing on the 2023 presidential election in Oyo State, this study investigates the extent to which voters directly facilitated electoral fraud and examines the factors influencing such behavior. Specifically, it evaluates the effectiveness of political education initiatives particularly those implemented by the National Orientation Agency in shaping voter attitudes, and analyzes how demographic characteristics such as educational attainment influence voter involvement in or resistance to electoral malpractice. By integrating these dimensions, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the micro-level dynamics of electoral fraud.

Oyo State was selected for this study based on both theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, the state presents a politically vibrant and highly competitive electoral environment, making it a suitable context for examining issues surrounding electoral fraud (Adejumobi, 2000; & Danjibo, 2022). Its diverse population, comprising urban, semi-urban, and rural communities, also provides an opportunity to explore how differences in social and demographic characteristics shape voters' attitudes and behaviours toward electoral malpractice. Practically, the state offers a relevant setting for the study because the 2023 presidential election was conducted under newly introduced electoral technologies, particularly the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), which were designed to enhance transparency and electoral credibility (Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2023). Despite these innovations, reports by election observers and electoral stakeholders indicated the persistence of practices such as vote buying, voter inducement, and other forms of electoral malpractice during the election period. Given these characteristics, Oyo State provides a valuable case through which the role of voters in facilitating or resisting electoral fraud can be better understood, while also offering insights into broader electoral experiences across Nigeria.

The contribution of this study is in two folds. First, it challenges the dominant elite-centric paradigm in electoral studies by foregrounding voter agency as a critical variable in explaining electoral malpractice. Second, it provides empirically grounded insights into the socio-political and behavioral drivers of electoral fraud in Nigeria, thereby informing more comprehensive policy interventions. By moving beyond institutional and technological solutions to incorporate voter behavior and socio-economic context, the study advances a more holistic framework for understanding electoral integrity and democratic consolidation in emerging democracies.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Electoral Fraud***

There is no universally accepted definition of electoral fraud, as its interpretation depends on historical, political, and legal contexts. What one country considers a fraudulent manipulation of the electoral process may be deemed lawful elsewhere, and these perceptions evolve over time (Norris, 2022). The understanding of electoral fraud is deeply rooted in each country's cultural and political environment. For instance, in the United States, campaign finance laws permit groups and individuals to make direct contributions to political campaigns, a practice that is legally sanctioned (Norris, 2022). However, in other nations, similar financial contributions could be classified as election fraud. In Nigeria, for example, any individual or entity donating more than ₦1,000,000 to a candidate faces a maximum fine of ₦500,000 or imprisonment for up to nine months, as stipulated in Section 91(9) of the 2010 Electoral Act. From a legal perspective, electoral fraud includes substantive irregularities related to voting, such as bribery, intimidation, and forgery actions that compromise the integrity of an election. Electoral fraud is defined as conduct intended to corrupt the process of ballot distribution, marking, or tabulation, as well as the certification of election results or voter registration procedures. It involves deliberate actions designed to distort the electoral process, including manipulating vote casting and counting to provide an unfair advantage to a political actor. Electoral fraud differs from electoral malpractice, which refers to

administrative errors or inefficiencies that occur without intentional deception (Birch, 2018). Common forms of electoral fraud include ballot stuffing, voter registration tampering, falsifying vote counts, and misreporting results. Such practices proliferate in regions where local officials are susceptible to coercion or where international monitoring is lacking (Asunka et al., 2019). Scholars generally concur that electoral fraud constitutes a deliberate criminal act only when it contravenes a jurisdiction's codified electoral laws. Some other common forms of electoral fraud include Vote buying and selling, ballot manipulation, voter intimidation and suppression, election administration fraud, misuse of state resources.

Scholarly explanations of electoral fraud generally fall into two broad categories: structural and behavioural perspectives. Structural explanations attribute electoral fraud to weak institutions, ineffective electoral administration, poor enforcement of electoral laws, and entrenched systems of political patronage. Studies have shown that electoral manipulation is more likely to occur where accountability institutions are weak and electoral governance mechanisms lack the capacity to effectively deter malpractice (Norris, 2022; Fika, 2022). Behavioural explanations, on the other hand, focus on the motivations and actions of political actors and voters who engage in fraudulent practices to secure political or economic benefits. In their influential work, Alvarez, Hall, and Hyde (2008) classify electoral fraud into two broad categories: fraud perpetrated by election officials and political actors through the manipulation of electoral procedures and outcomes, and fraud committed by voters through practices such as multiple voting, voter impersonation, vote selling, and other forms of electoral misconduct. This distinction is particularly important because it demonstrates that electoral fraud is not solely an elite-driven phenomenon but may also involve the active participation of citizens. While much of the literature emphasizes the role of political elites in orchestrating electoral malpractice, recent studies increasingly recognize voters as active participants in practices such as vote selling and inducement-driven voting behaviour (Bandama, 2023). This shift highlights electoral fraud as a product of strategic interactions between political actors and citizens rather than merely a consequence of institutional failure. Furthermore, contemporary scholarship argues that the persistence of electoral fraud reflects the combined influence of institutional weaknesses, political incentives, and behavioural choices made by both elites and voters, thereby requiring explanations that integrate structural and agency-based factors.

### ***Electoral fraud in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria***

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, the seventh since the return to democratic rule in 1999, was characterized by intense political competition among the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Labour Party, culminating in the victory of Bola Ahmed Tinubu; however, the process was significantly undermined by widespread allegations of electoral fraud and institutional weaknesses. Evidence from the European Union Election Observation Mission indicates that the election was marred by vote-buying, illegal acquisition of Permanent Voter Cards, and the use of both cash and digital financial mechanisms to influence voters, despite policy efforts such as currency redesign aimed at curbing such practices. Pre-election and election-day dynamics revealed systemic vulnerabilities, including the seizure of ₦32 million linked to inducement activities by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, as well as arrests in multiple states, yet inducement through food distribution, goods, and monetary incentives remained pervasive. Additional irregularities included underage voting, inaccuracies in the voter register, ballot box snatching, and alleged collusion between electoral officials, security personnel, and political actors, alongside widespread voter intimidation and election-related violence across at least sixteen states. Although enforcement agencies demonstrated some level of responsiveness, weak institutional oversight, inadequate voter register auditing, and ineffective deterrence mechanisms collectively compromised electoral credibility. These findings reinforce broader patterns in Nigeria's electoral history, where fraud, violence, and manipulation persist as entrenched features of the political process, underscoring the urgent need for reforms to strengthen electoral integrity,

transparency, and accountability (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Ezeabasili & Chibuzo, 2025; Moshood & Sesa, 2024).

### ***Political Education***

Historically, the significance of political education became particularly evident during the Enlightenment era when thinkers like John Locke argued that an informed electorate is essential for establishing legitimate and effective governance (Locke, 1689). It is a multifaceted concept that has been defined in numerous ways by scholars across disciplines. Political education is often defined as the process by which individuals acquire political knowledge and develop an understanding of governmental structures, policies, and political ideologies (Dewey, 1916). This definition aligns with the traditional view of education as an instrument for disseminating information about political systems, institutions, and laws. According to Dewey, education should prepare individuals for active participation in public life by fostering a deep understanding of democratic processes.

A broader interpretation of political education considers it as a mechanism of political socialization, shaping individuals' political attitudes, values, and behaviors (Dalton, 2020). This perspective views political education as a lifelong process influenced by family, schools, media, and social interactions. Almond and Verba argue that political education plays a crucial role in nurturing a civic culture, where citizens develop a sense of political efficacy and responsibility. Freire (1970) offers a critical perspective on political education, defining it as a tool for emancipation and social transformation. Channels of Political Education in Nigeria includes, mass media, social media, Government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), community and town hall meetings, election campaigns, Workshop and seminars.

### ***Political Education and Electoral fraud***

Chen and Madni (2024) examined the influence of state-led political education on political participation in China and found that formal political socialization through school curricula, party training, and state propaganda significantly encouraged citizens to engage in state-sanctioned political activities such as voting in local elections and attending party meetings. Their findings suggest that political education can cultivate civic responsibility and political engagement by transmitting norms that reinforce participation. However, the study's emphasis on government-approved forms of participation limits its explanatory power, as it overlooks dissenting political behaviours and informal civic activism. Furthermore, the authoritarian context within which the study was conducted raises concerns regarding self-censorship and the extent to which reported participation reflects genuine political commitment rather than compliance with state expectations. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that political education can serve as a powerful mechanism for shaping political attitudes and behaviour, particularly when embedded within broader institutional structures. Similarly, Willeck and Mendelberg (2022) explored the relationship between education and political engagement in democratic societies and identified cognitive development, social networking, and institutional access as the principal pathways through which education promotes participation. Their analysis extends conventional understandings of political participation by demonstrating that educational experiences are not uniformly transformative. Rather, variations in educational quality, content, and accessibility produce different participatory outcomes among citizens. While higher educational attainment generally enhances political knowledge, civic skills, and democratic engagement, the authors argue that education alone cannot eliminate political inequalities because structural barriers such as economic deprivation, social exclusion, and institutional constraints continue to shape citizens' political choices. This perspective is particularly relevant to developing

democracies where educational gains may coexist with persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities that undermine democratic participation.

The implications of these studies become more significant when situated within the broader discourse on electoral fraud. Contemporary scholarship increasingly suggests that electoral malpractice is not merely an isolated occurrence during election cycles but a deeply institutionalized phenomenon embedded within political systems characterized by patronage networks, ethnic mobilization, and weak accountability mechanisms. Evidence indicates that political actors frequently exploit institutional deficiencies to manipulate electoral outcomes, while citizens often perceive such practices as normal features of political competition. Consequently, electoral fraud becomes self-reinforcing, eroding public trust in democratic institutions and weakening prospects for democratic consolidation. Recent comparative studies further reveal that these patterns transcend national boundaries, occurring across diverse political systems where institutional weaknesses create opportunities for vote buying, voter suppression, ballot manipulation, and administrative interference (Brosché et al., 2020; Bandama, 2023). Adding further complexity to this challenge is the growing influence of digital technologies in contemporary electoral processes. Emerging evidence demonstrates that social media platforms, encrypted messaging applications, and digital financial systems have transformed the nature of electoral manipulation by facilitating the rapid dissemination of misinformation, coordinating vote-buying networks, and enabling sophisticated forms of political inducement (Dudáš, 2024; Molina, 2024). These developments suggest that electoral fraud is no longer confined to traditional forms of manipulation but increasingly operates through technologically mediated channels that are difficult to regulate and monitor. Consequently, electoral integrity is shaped not only by institutional capacity and voter behaviour but also by the governance of digital information ecosystems.

Against this backdrop, significant scholarly disagreement persists regarding the extent to which political education can mitigate electoral malpractice. Proponents of civic and political education argue that increased political awareness enhances citizens' understanding of democratic norms, strengthens political efficacy, and equips voters with the capacity to resist manipulation and inducement. From this perspective, politically informed citizens are less likely to exchange their votes for material rewards or participate in fraudulent electoral practices. Conversely, critics maintain that the effectiveness of political education is frequently undermined by broader structural realities. In societies characterized by poverty, unemployment, and pervasive patronage politics, immediate economic incentives often outweigh democratic considerations. Consequently, politically educated individuals may still engage in vote selling or tolerate electoral malpractice when confronted with severe economic hardship. This argument highlights the limitations of explanations that attribute electoral fraud solely to voter ignorance or inadequate civic awareness. This debate is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where extensive voter sensitization efforts by institutions such as the National Orientation Agency and the Independent National Electoral Commission coexist with persistent reports of vote buying, voter inducement, and other forms of electoral malpractice, raising important questions about the extent to which political education influences electoral behaviour in contexts characterized by socio-economic vulnerability and patronage politics.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Systems Theory and Rational Choice Theory as complementary analytical frameworks for explaining voter participation in electoral fraud. Systems Theory provides a macro-level perspective by viewing the electoral process as an interconnected system comprising electoral institutions, political parties, security agencies, media organizations, political education agencies, and voters. According to David Easton (1965), political systems function through the interaction of inputs, conversion processes, outputs, and feedback mechanisms, with the stability of the system depending on the effective

performance of its constituent parts. Within this system, electoral outcomes are shaped by the interaction of various actors and institutions, and weaknesses in any component may create opportunities for electoral malpractice. Recent studies have similarly shown that deficiencies in electoral governance, accountability mechanisms, and institutional oversight increase the likelihood of electoral manipulation and undermine electoral integrity (Norris, 2022; Obiagu et al., 2025). Political education initiatives implemented by institutions such as the National Orientation Agency and the Independent National Electoral Commission, as well as information disseminated through traditional and social media, constitute important inputs that shape voter attitudes and behaviour.

Rational Choice Theory complements this perspective by providing a micro-level explanation of how individual voters respond to these influences. The theory assumes that individuals make decisions by comparing expected benefits with potential costs and selecting the option that maximizes their utility (Downs, 1957; Becker, 1976). Consequently, voters may resist electoral fraud when political education enhances civic awareness and increases the perceived costs associated with electoral malpractice. Empirical evidence suggests that civic and voter education programmes improve political knowledge, democratic values, and citizens' willingness to participate responsibly in electoral processes (Adeyemi & Salawudeen, 2021; Chanda, 2024). Conversely, where poverty, unemployment, patronage politics, and weak law enforcement reduce the perceived risks and increase the expected benefits of electoral misconduct, voters may rationally choose to accept inducements, sell their votes, or participate in other fraudulent activities (Stockemer & Amaechi, 2024). Social media may further influence these decisions by serving as a channel for political information, voter education, mobilization, misinformation, and inducement campaigns, thereby shaping electoral attitudes and behaviour (Dudáš, 2024; Molina, 2024). Thus, Systems Theory explains the institutional and environmental conditions within which elections occur, while Rational Choice Theory explains how voters make strategic decisions within those conditions. Together, the two theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how political education, social media influence, and individual voter calculations interact to shape participation in or resistance to electoral fraud.

## Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of information relating to the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of voters without manipulating the study environment. This design was considered appropriate given the study's objective of examining the extent of voter involvement in electoral malpractice and the factors influencing such behaviour. While the study primarily utilized quantitative data generated through structured questionnaires, the design also facilitated the examination of relationships among key variables such as political education, social media influence, socio-economic characteristics, and voter behaviour.

The study population comprised registered voters who participated in the 2023 presidential election in Oyo State. A sample size of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations at a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error. To ensure adequate representation of the state's socio-spatial diversity, five Local Government Areas were selected: Ibadan North and Ibadan North-West representing urban communities; Lagelu and Akinyele representing semi-urban communities; and Ibarapa Central representing a predominantly rural community. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on clearly defined eligibility criteria, including participation in the 2023 presidential election and willingness to provide information relevant to the study objectives. The use of purposive sampling was considered appropriate because electoral fraud is a sensitive phenomenon that requires the participation of respondents with direct electoral experience and sufficient contextual knowledge.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of five sections designed to capture demographic characteristics, voter involvement in electoral fraud, perceptions of political education programmes, the influence of social media, and the effects of socio-economic factors on electoral behaviour. To ensure content validity, the instrument was subjected to expert review by specialists in Political Science and Research Methodology. Their observations informed revisions to the questionnaire, ensuring that the instrument adequately measured the concepts under investigation. Following validation, a pilot study involving ten respondents from a neighboring area outside the study locations was conducted. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 and indicating a high level of internal consistency. Given the objectives of the study, descriptive were employed in the analysis of data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and weighted means, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses.

Ethical considerations and data quality assurance measures were also prioritized throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents after explaining the purpose and procedures of the study. To minimize social desirability bias and encourage honest responses, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no identifying information was collected. Questions relating to electoral misconduct were carefully worded to reduce discomfort and fear of disclosure. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These measures enhanced respondent confidence, reduced potential response bias, and improved the overall quality and credibility of the data collected.

## Results

Table 1: Demographic Data Analysis of Participants (N = 300)

| Variable                | Category      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender                  | Male          | 105       | 35         |
|                         | Female        | 195       | 65         |
| Age (years)             | 18 – 25       | 33        | 11         |
|                         | 26 – 35       | 81        | 27         |
|                         | 36 – 45       | 108       | 36         |
|                         | 46 and above  | 78        | 26         |
|                         |               |           |            |
| Education Qualification | Primary       | 6         | 2          |
|                         | Secondary     | 57        | 19         |
|                         | OND/NCE       | 72        | 24         |
|                         | Bachelors     | 141       | 47         |
|                         | Postgraduate  | 24        | 8          |
| Employment Status       | Employed      | 69        | 23         |
|                         | Self-employed | 165       | 55         |
|                         | Unemployed    | 12        | 4          |
|                         | Retired       | 36        | 12         |
|                         | Student       | 18        | 6          |

*Source: Researcher's Field Work*

The study analyzed data from 300 respondents, providing a robust empirical basis for examining voter behavior in the 2023 presidential election in Oyo State. The sample was predominantly female (65%), with the largest age group between 36 and 45 years (36%). A substantial proportion of respondents possessed tertiary education (71%), while the majority were self-employed (55%). These characteristics reflect a relatively informed and economically active electorate, suggesting that electoral behavior in the study context is shaped by more complex socio-political dynamics rather than simple deficits in awareness or economic capacity.

Table 2: Voter Involvement in Electoral Fraud and Inducement Exposure

| Variable                                        | Percentage (%) | Interpretation                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Denied receiving inducements                    | 71             | Majority claimed non-participation in electoral inducement practices |
| Observed financial inducements                  | 57             | Nearly half witnessed vote-buying through cash incentives            |
| Observed distribution of material goods         | 52             | Material inducements such as food and clothing were common           |
| Observed promises of employment/future benefits | 45             | Political actors frequently used future promises to influence voters |
| Agreed electoral fraud is wrong                 | 59             | Most respondents morally disapproved of electoral fraud              |
| Perceived electoral fraud as not harmful        | 54             | Significant normalization of fraudulent electoral practices          |

The findings indicate that voter involvement in electoral fraud is largely indirect, complex, and predominantly incentive-driven rather than coercive. While 71% of respondents denied receiving inducements, a significant proportion reported exposure to such practices, with 48% observing financial inducements, 47% witnessing the distribution of material goods such as food and clothing, and 45% acknowledging exposure to promises of employment or future benefits. This divergence between self-reported non-participation and observed prevalence suggests the presence of social desirability bias and highlights the socially embedded nature of electoral malpractice. Furthermore, a notable normative contradiction emerged: although 59% of respondents agreed that electoral fraud is wrong, 54% simultaneously perceived it as not harmful. This reflects a process of cultural normalization in which repeated exposure transforms fraudulent practices into accepted political behavior, consistent with cost-benefit driven decision-making patterns associated with rational choice assumptions.

Table 3: Effectiveness of National Orientation Agency (NOA) Political Education Programmes

| Variable                     | Percentage (%) | Interpretation              |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Familiar with NOA activities | 26             | Low public awareness of NOA |

|                                                                  |    |                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------|
| No knowledge of NOA activities                                   | 49 | Nearly half lacked awareness of the agency |
| Exposed to NOA political education programmes                    | 21 | Limited programme penetration              |
| Found NOA messages clear and understandable                      | 50 | Moderate communication effectiveness       |
| Reported NOA programmes influenced perception of electoral fraud | 31 | Limited behavioural impact                 |
| Disagreed that NOA programmes influenced perception              | 45 | Majority indicated little or no influence  |

The analysis also reveals the limited effectiveness of political education initiatives implemented by the National Orientation Agency (NOA). Awareness of the agency was low, with only 26% of respondents indicating familiarity, while 49% reported no knowledge of its activities. Similarly, only 21% of respondents confirmed exposure to NOA political education programs. Although 50% of respondents acknowledged that NOA messages were clear and understandable, this did not translate into meaningful behavioral change, as only 31% reported that these programs influenced their perception of electoral fraud, while 45% explicitly disagreed. These findings point to weak institutional reach, inadequate dissemination strategies, and insufficient grassroots engagement, indicating that information-based interventions alone are insufficient to alter entrenched political behaviors in contexts where electoral fraud is normalized.

Table 4: Influence of Social Media on Electoral Fraud

| Variable                                               | Percentage (%) | Interpretation                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Use social media for electoral information             | 74             | Social media is a major source of electoral information |
| Social media improved awareness of electoral fraud     | 52             | Majority experienced enhanced awareness                 |
| Social media enabled reporting/exposure of malpractice | 61             | Platforms facilitate transparency and monitoring        |
| Exposed to misleading or biased political content      | 50             | High prevalence of misinformation                       |
| Dissatisfied with responses to online fraud reporting  | 50             | Weak institutional responsiveness to report             |

Social media emerges as a significant yet paradoxical factor in shaping electoral behavior. On the positive side, 74% of respondents reported using social media for electoral information, 52% indicated that it improved awareness of electoral fraud, and 61% stated that it enabled reporting or exposure of malpractice. However, these benefits are counterbalanced by notable negative effects, as 50% of respondents reported exposure to misleading or biased political content, and another 50% expressed dissatisfaction with institutional responses to online fraud reporting. This coexistence of positive and negative outcomes illustrates a “digital paradox,” where social media simultaneously enhances access to information and transparency while also facilitating misinformation and weakening electoral integrity.

Table 5: Influence of Education on Electoral Behaviour

| Variable                                                         | Percentage (%) | Interpretation                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education improved understanding of electoral fraud consequences | 66             | Education strengthens civic awareness                      |
| Education enhanced recognition of fraudulent practices           | 75             | Strong relationship between education and fraud detection  |
| Education improved response to inducements                       | 67             | Educated voters are better equipped to resist manipulation |
| Felt empowered to report or resist electoral fraud               | 39             | Awareness does not necessarily translate into action       |

The findings further demonstrate that educational attainment is a strong and consistent determinant of voter behavior, while employment status shows weaker and less predictable influence. A majority of respondents indicated that education enhanced their ability to understand the consequences of electoral fraud (66%), recognize fraudulent practices (75%), and respond appropriately to inducements (67%)

Table 6: Influence of Employment Status and Economic Factors on Electoral Fraud

| Variable                                              | Percentage (%) | Interpretation                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employment situation increased vulnerability to fraud | 31             | Minority linked employment status to vulnerability             |
| Disagreed that employment increased vulnerability     | 47             | Larger proportion rejected this relationship                   |
| Accepted inducements due to financial hardship        | 21%            | Most respondents rejected financial hardship as a major factor |

In contrast, only 31% reported that their employment situation increased vulnerability to fraud, while a larger proportion (47%) disagreed, and most rejected the notion that financial hardship compelled them to accept inducements. These results challenge conventional assumptions that poverty is the primary driver of electoral fraud, instead highlighting the role of cultural norms, personal values, and institutional trust. Despite the positive influence of education, only 39% of respondents felt empowered to report or resist electoral fraud, indicating a persistent gap between awareness and action in a context characterized by weak institutional enforcement and fear of reprisal.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced and theoretically grounded understanding of voter involvement in electoral fraud in Oyo State during the 2023 presidential election, revealing a system that is less coercive and more structurally embedded in inducement-driven and socially normalized practices. Across the different analytical strands, a consistent pattern emerges in which electoral malpractice is sustained not merely by elite manipulation but by a complex interaction of voter incentives, normative

beliefs, institutional weaknesses, and evolving digital dynamics. At the core of the analysis is the transformation of electoral fraud from overt coercion to subtle, incentive-based participation. While most respondents denied direct involvement, substantial proportions reported witnessing inducements in the form of money, goods, and promises of future benefits. This divergence between self-reported behavior and observed practices indicates the presence of social desirability bias and underscores the embedded nature of fraud within everyday political interactions. The evidence points to a system of “rationalized complicity,” where voters, acting within the logic of cost-benefit calculations, tolerate or engage in malpractice when immediate gains outweigh perceived long-term democratic costs. This aligns with the theoretical propositions of Anthony Downs (1957), while also reinforcing Sarah Birch’s (2011) argument that contemporary electoral fraud operates through informal and socially embedded mechanisms rather than direct coercion.

A critical contribution of the study lies in identifying a normative paradox in voter attitudes: although a majority of respondents recognize electoral fraud as morally wrong, a comparable proportion do not consider it harmful. This contradiction signals a process of cultural normalization in which repeated exposure to malpractice reduces its perceived severity and embeds it within accepted political behavior. Such normalization reflects broader characteristics of hybrid or competitive authoritarian systems, where formal democratic norms coexist with informal practices that undermine institutional integrity. The findings further suggest that moral disengagement plays a central role in sustaining this system, as individuals reconcile ethical disapproval with practical participation. The study also demonstrates the limited effectiveness of civic education, particularly interventions by the National Orientation Agency (NOA), in reshaping voter behavior. Despite moderate acknowledgment of message clarity, awareness and exposure to NOA initiatives remain low, and their influence on attitudes toward electoral fraud is minimal. This disconnect highlights structural deficiencies in civic education delivery, including weak grassroots penetration, inadequate engagement with culturally relevant institutions, and the absence of continuous, participatory communication strategies. Consistent with critiques by Salahu (2023), the findings indicate that information dissemination alone is insufficient to alter entrenched behaviors in contexts where inducement politics is normalized and institutionally tolerated. Effective civic reorientation therefore requires not only content clarity but also social embeddedness, trust-building, and integration with enforcement mechanisms.

The role of social media introduces an additional layer of complexity, reflecting a dual and paradoxical influence on electoral behavior. On one hand, digital platforms significantly enhance access to electoral information, increase awareness of malpractice, and enable real-time reporting, thereby strengthening participatory monitoring. On the other hand, they simultaneously serve as conduits for misinformation, propaganda, and political manipulation, which can distort voter perceptions and reinforce fraudulent practices. This “digital paradox” illustrates the ambivalent nature of technological mediation in electoral contexts, where transparency and vulnerability coexist. The findings align with recent evidence from the Institute of Development Studies (2024) and Börsting et al. (2025), emphasizing that digital platforms can both democratize information and amplify disinformation. Crucially, the absence of effective institutional follow-up on digitally reported fraud further weakens accountability, limiting the transformative potential of these platforms. From a socio-economic perspective, the findings challenge reductionist explanations that attribute electoral fraud primarily to poverty or unemployment. While economic vulnerability has some influence, education emerges as the most consistent and significant predictor of resistance to fraud. Respondents with higher educational attainment demonstrate greater capacity to recognize malpractice, understand its consequences, and resist inducements. However, the persistence of a gap between awareness and action indicates that cognitive empowerment alone is insufficient in the absence of supportive institutional and social conditions. Employment status, by contrast, shows weak and inconsistent effects, reinforcing the argument that voter behavior is shaped by a broader constellation of factors, including cultural norms, personal values, and community expectations. Importantly, the study foregrounds the role of cultural and community mediators in structuring electoral

behavior. In some contexts, inducement-based exchanges are framed as legitimate forms of reciprocal obligation, normalizing participation in electoral fraud. In others, strong communal norms and leadership structures foster accountability and resistance. This variability highlights the significance of informal institutions such as religious teachings, traditional authority, and community networks in shaping political conduct. The interaction between individual rationality and collective norms explains why similar socio-economic conditions produce divergent behavioral outcomes across communities.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Focusing on the 2023 presidential election in Oyo State, this study investigates the extent to which voters directly facilitated electoral fraud and examines the factors influencing such behavior. Specifically, it evaluates the effectiveness of political education initiatives particularly those implemented by the National Orientation Agency in shaping voter attitudes, and analyzes how demographic characteristics such as educational attainment influence voter involvement in or resistance to electoral malpractice. The findings of the study, demonstrates that electoral fraud in Nigeria is a systemic phenomenon sustained by inducement networks, cultural normalization, weak civic education, and insufficient institutional enforcement. The predominance of clientelist exchanges confirms broader patterns identified by Staffan I. Lindberg (2007), where vote buying and patronage have become central to electoral competition in many African democracies. Ultimately, the study advances the scholarly understanding of electoral fraud by shifting the analytical focus from elite-driven manipulation to voter-level dynamics of complicity and normalization. It demonstrates that electoral fraud persists not only because of institutional failure but also because it is embedded in everyday social practices and rationalized decision-making processes. Addressing this challenge therefore requires a multidimensional strategy that integrates structural reforms, culturally grounded civic engagement, digital governance, and credible enforcement mechanisms. Without such a comprehensive approach, efforts to improve electoral integrity are unlikely to disrupt the deeply entrenched transactional logic that underpins electoral behavior in the study context.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, a multidimensional approach is required to address the voter-level dynamics that sustain electoral fraud in Nigeria. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Civic and voter education programmes should be redesigned to emphasize grassroots engagement through traditional institutions, religious organizations, market associations, youth groups, and other community-based structures. Such interventions should focus on challenging the normalization of vote buying and electoral inducement by demonstrating their long-term consequences for governance, development, and democratic accountability.
- 2) Electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission, should strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning electoral inducement. This includes improved oversight of campaign financing, establishment of accessible reporting channels for electoral offences, and enhanced collaboration with security agencies to detect and prosecute pre-election inducement activities. Visible enforcement of electoral laws is essential for restoring public confidence in the electoral process.
- 3) The National Orientation Agency should be restructured and adequately funded to serve as an effective grassroots civic empowerment institution. Greater collaboration with educational institutions, faith-based organizations, and community associations will improve its outreach and

effectiveness, while performance-based evaluation measures should be introduced to assess its impact on voter awareness and democratic participation.

- 4) Digital platforms and social media should be strategically utilized to promote electoral accountability. Partnerships among electoral bodies, civil society organizations, fact-checking groups, and media practitioners should be strengthened to combat misinformation, encourage responsible digital engagement, and facilitate timely responses to reports of electoral malpractice. By combining civic education, institutional reforms, technological innovations, and credible enforcement measures, electoral stakeholders can more effectively disrupt the entrenched transactional culture that continues to undermine electoral integrity in Nigeria.

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