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**THE POLITICS OF FAKE NEWS AND SUSTAINING NIGERIA'S  
DEMOCRACY: 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN RETROSPECT**

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**ABSTRACT**

Information and its authenticity are necessary for a viable political system. This is because once 'political' news about certain issues or situations in the polity is not trusted or deemed as false, the importance of such information may be treated by the public with nonchalance. This study examines the implications of misinformation during the just-concluded 2023 general elections in Nigeria and the extent to which it has created distrust in the minds of the masses regarding the information the government disseminated to the public. It adopts the conspiracy perspective on fake news as a theoretical guide to show the prevailing situation in the nation. Data for this paper will be retrieved from secondary sources, specifically those with relevant information on the 2023 elections. These will be explained using the discourse analysis method of data analysis. Findings from the study reveal that misinformation regarding candidates and the election umpire was peddled during the 2023 general elections. This led to low voter turnout in some parts of the country. The study suggests that the government take stringent sanctions against those involved in spreading unverified news to control the damage of such information on the polity.

**Keywords:** Fake news, elections, governance, democracy, Nigeria.

**INTRODUCTION**

Democracy is regarded as the ideal system for any society, and despite its visible challenges in various countries, it continues to be upheld and practiced. One major challenge facing the 'ideal system' of government is the rise of fake news and its dissemination within the polity. Over the years, misinformation, falsehoods, and unverified information have adversely impacted Nigeria's democracy.

This phenomenon of fake news has become a significant issue in global politics, including the Nigerian context.

Nigeria, a country with a growing democracy and a history of political unrest and corruption, has seen misinformation and fake news shape public opinion and influence political outcomes. Fake news, often spread through social media platforms, can manipulate public perception, create divisions among different groups, and undermine the credibility of political actors or institutions. In the Nigerian context, fake news has been used to spread rumors and false information about political candidates, incite violence during elections, and fuel ethnic or religious tensions. The media landscape in the nation is diverse and polarized, which has allowed fake news to gain prominence. Some examples of these false pieces of information include doctored pictures that are paraded on various social media platforms to mislead unsuspecting citizens. With the widespread use of mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and other devices to access the internet, the reach and impact of fake news have continued to grow rapidly. Unfortunately, the spread of such false information can have serious consequences for the democratic process. It can undermine the credibility of elections, stifle public discourse, and erode trust in the government and democratic institutions.

False information may also be used as a tool by aspiring political candidates to tarnish the reputation of their opponents in the struggle to obtain more votes from the public. Furthermore, non-state groups could leverage the dissemination of falsehoods for their interests. In recent years, Nigerian authorities have implemented measures to address the problem of misinformation. Some of these steps include the establishment of the National Council on Information to coordinate government activities related to information dissemination and management, conducting and encouraging public participation in sensitization campaigns to learn how to recognize false news, promoting the practice of fact-checking by endorsing organizations that verify the truthfulness of information, and implementing regulations to oversee social media usage to limit the spread of fake news.

Additionally, by taking legal action against individuals and websites responsible for spreading fake news, the Nigerian government collaborates with tech companies with the sole aim of combating misinformation and introducing programs to enhance media literacy among the nation's citizens. All these efforts have been made to control the proliferation of fake news. Unfortunately, this has yielded few results. The 2023 general elections were marred by the widespread dissemination of false information, evident from the campaigning phase through the primaries and culminating in the general election. Various social media platforms shared information about aspirants from the numerous political parties participating in the elections. Some of this information was later discovered to be untrue. However, the negative impact of such misinformation could not be easily erased from the minds of the electorate, affecting voter turnout and the overall peaceful conduct of the polls.

This paper studies the consequences of fake news on the 2023 general elections and how it affects the nation's growing democracy. It tries to answer the question on the minds of citizens as to why the Nigerian government has done very little to control the spread of fake news and sanction those involved in such acts. This is with the hope that this study may guide decisions and policymakers in conducting future elections. The paper begins with an introduction, which is followed by conceptual clarifications of the basic concepts used in the work and a review of some existing works on fake news in Nigeria. This will be followed by a theoretical postulation that will guide the work, then the presentation of findings the paper discovered during the research. Finally, suggestions will be given at the end of the work that could help in fighting against the threat of false information.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the consequences of fake news on Nigerian Democracy about the conduct of the 2023 general elections?
2. What is the government's role in curbing the spread of fake news?

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Fake News**

The concept of fake news has been viewed by scholars mostly as it suits different societies and situations. According to Claire Walde, a research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy, fake news refers to "false information presented as if it were true, often for malicious purposes". This definition indicates that such news or information is intended to deceive and mislead those who hear it or read it. Abdulhayoglu & Salman, in their work, "Fake News: A Powerful Instrument of Disinformation in Today's Information Age," see fake news as the deliberate act of misinforming, through the spread of hoaxes via traditional print, media houses, broadcast news or online social media platforms. This, they argue, could hurt individuals, societies, and democracies. Another way to define 'fake news', according to the European Parliament Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, is as "information that is verifiably false or misleading, presented and spread as genuine news to deceive the public and influence people's opinions.". From the abovementioned definitions, one could generally see fake news as wrong information.

Therefore, for this study, fake news can be defined as the deliberate act of creating and spreading untrue information with the sole aim of misleading, misguiding, and controlling a group of unsuspecting individuals or groups of persons into accepting such information as true to the benefit of the creator(s) of such information.

### **Sustainable Democracy**

Democracies, as identified by various scholars and societies, are envisioned as the ideal form of governance. For this reason, countries worldwide, despite challenges faced in the governing process of this form of government, are inventing measures to ensure it is sustained. Sustainable democracy can be defined as a political system in which the government in power is accountable to the people, respects the rule of law, and protects individual and group rights and freedom (Kalu et al., 2018). It is a system that promotes active citizens' participation in the governing process and ensures equal opportunities for all.

Sustainable democracy is mainly concerned with the importance of environmental and economic maintenance and continuity to balance providing the needs of the present without compromising future needs. This definition explains that sustainable democracy is not just particular about protecting democratic principles but also emphasizes long-term plans and the sustainability of the system. Democracy can thrive over time, conquering whatever obstacles and challenges it encounters and hoping to deal with future complexities that may occur.

## THEORETICAL POSTULATION

Various theories are available to understand how false information could be used in politics. However, this paper adopts the conspiracy theory of political science. The theory is believed to have emerged to be a perception that resists falsification with or without evidence. Keeley (1999) argued that once a conspiracy is perpetuated, evidence in support of it must be powerful. Only then can the claim of the conspirators be accepted as a fact by the people. Some scholars Barkun (2003), (2011), Swami (2012), and Radnitz (2021), have argued that conspiracy theory is more of a faith than what can be proven or not and if not handled properly, can cause psychological and pathological damage to the minds of those who accept it.

It is worth noting that there are many forms of conspiracy theories. Barkun (2003) identified conspiracy theories into three. Namely:

- a. Event conspiracy theories entail well-defined events.
- b. Systemic conspiracy theories: this covers a wide area which could be a group, institutions, state, countries, etc., and.
- c. Super conspiracy theories: These involve linking different conspiracies to form a powerful force (Barkun, 2003).

Jesse Walker (2013) examined another aspect of conspiracy theories in his book *United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory*. He categorized five different types of conspiracy theories. Jesse Walker (2013) examined another aspect of conspiracy theories in his book *United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory*. He categorized five different types of conspiracy theories. They are: The "Enemy Outside" pertains to theories about individuals who are believed to be plotting against a community from an external position.

- i. The "Enemy Within" refers to the conspirators who are thought to be the individuals currently within the country and cannot be differentiated from regular citizens.
- ii. The "Enemy Above" involves influential individuals manipulating events for personal gain.
- iii. The "Enemy Below" highlights the actions of the lower classes who work to overthrow the established social order.
- iv. Walker's (2013) definition of "Benevolent Conspiracies" denotes the positive forces operating behind the scenes to improve the world and assist people.

Hofstadter (1965) examines conspiracy theory through a political lens, particularly in a democratic society where different groups represent different individuals' interests within a political system everyone agrees to follow. Hofstadter added that people who believe they cannot voice their political beliefs through established organisations may feel estranged from the system. These individuals might not see the viewpoints of opposing political parties as valid differences, but rather, as reasons to be sceptical. Consequently, these marginalized individuals may develop a fearful belief in conspiracies.

From the above information, the concept of conspiracy can be applied to understand how fake news has been introduced and spread in Nigeria. In Nigeria's political landscape, false information is used as a tool during elections, where opposing parties or candidates perceive their rivals as challenging their political aspirations. They then use misinformation to divert the minds of unsuspecting citizens into believing that the information they peddle is to attain personal interests.

Conspiracy theories have always been a subject of controversy and scepticism. While some people dismiss them outright, others demand verifiable evidence and logical explanations to support such claims. Conspiracy theories are often met with strong justifications, detailed analysis, and rigorous scrutiny to separate truth from fiction. Despite the criticisms, conspiracy theories continue circulating, and people remain divided over their validity and impact on society. However, it is relevant to the understanding of how fake news plays out in Nigeria's political terrain because, many times, before certain information can be authenticated, it would have caused the damage for which it was disseminated in the first place. Most times, rectifying the damage caused seems nearly impossible.

### **Epistemology of Fake News in Nigeria's Elections**

Like many nations around the world, false information is part of a political system, it can be referred to as 'political propaganda' or 'political tool', which can be used in achieving individual or group political interests. Whatever the reason may be, it poses a major threat, like other security issues, to sustaining any nation's democracy. The use of this tool in causing socio-political unrest is not novel. In the past, it has been used as a subtle weapon by individuals to achieve political power and other selfish needs. The problem of false information is not specific to any government. Various forms of government in Nigeria have witnessed their measure of misinformation.

The military era in the nation was noted to regulate and limit the powers of the media in whatever way it deemed fit. The nature of information and its contents, disseminated to the public, were determined by the military head of state at the central level and the army administrators at the state level. The military viewed the media as the voice that discredits their governance and presents their rulership as 'illegitimate' to the citizens. This was seen as a significant threat to their stay in government. Therefore, the media had no freedom during this era.

With the nation's reverting to democracy in 1999, the media regained its freedom to operate within the ambit of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution as amended. More media outlets, primarily privately owned media houses, were established nationwide; AIT, Channels TV, Arise TV, TVC, etc., alongside the growing internet technology with the introduction of online chat forums such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. All these and more enhanced the ability of media houses to express their freedom. However, because of the nature of Nigeria's polity and the market system to peddle information, cases of misinformation and false information began to arise in the democratic era.

In 2003, there was a general election, for example., was noted by the media through information gathered from the Human Rights Activist Observer (2003), that violence during elections occurred in states; Enugu, Rivers, and some states in the Middle Belt area across the federation which were ignored and unacknowledged by the Federal Government. The election umpire, INEC, was also alleged to be in cahoots with the federal government in sidelining the malpractices done during the 2003 general elections, which the media noticed. The then government claimed that such information was from 'newsmen' who exaggerated little conflicts in some polling units across the nation and regarded the information as false and misleading to the Nigerian populace (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Subsequent elections after the 2003 general elections had a share of media misinformation. For instance, the 2007 general elections seemed to portray conflicting information between publicly owned (NTA) and privately owned (AIT) media platforms. This was because the PDP, which was in power, influenced certain media outlets such as NTA to spread false information and maintain control over the political arena. Meanwhile, opposition candidates utilized AIT to promote their campaigns and criticize the

ruling party's actions. (Igohosa, 2021) In addition, some media outlets, such as Nigerian Tribune and Punch Newspapers (13<sup>th</sup> July 2007 & 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007, respectively), had recorded facts about what transpired during the polls that could not be denied by either the government or the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC. (Nwolise, 2007).

The 2011 election saw the dissemination of false information by different interest groups, including political and socio-cultural organizations. The main political parties in the election were the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). The PDP experienced internal conflicts leading to regional and ethno-regional tensions. This situation resulted in increased hostility fueled by waves of false information, leading to extensive destruction of property, loss of lives, and the displacement of many Nigerians, especially in the North (Igohosa, 2021). Even after the elections, misinformation and exaggerated news continued to mar and discredit the Jonathan/Sambo administration in Nigeria. Corruption, which was alleged to be at its height during that administration, seems to be child's play in subsequent administrations in the country. The president was also accused of being 'too weak' to manage the nation's affairs.

The 2015 general elections ushered in the "change mantra". With the usual campaign promise made by all aspirants to better the lives of the citizens. Most, if not all, outlets of information, television stations, radio houses, internet sources, and platforms were 'preaching the need for an immediate and forceful change'. The results of the elections were acceptable to most people from the northern and western parts of the country. However, it was not long before the people started to critique the policies formulated by the Buhari administration, especially the hike in pump prices for petroleum products. Gradually, the administration began to speak against 'hate speech', which comprises information questioning and criticizing government policies in statements, write-ups (soft copy or print), journals, etc., written by media houses or individuals. To this extent, a Bill titled *The Nigerian Senate proposed the "National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech and Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation and Other Related Offences"* in 2019. This proposal aimed to grant government authorities the ability to enforce restrictions on social media usage and to have the power to shut down internet access at their discretion.

### **Hate Speech**

The bill proposes that any person who uses, publishes, presents, produces, plays, provides, distributes, and/or directs the performance of any material, written and or visual which is threatening, abusive, or insulting or involves the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour commits an offence if such person intends thereby to stir up ethnic hatred, or having regard to all the circumstances, ethnic hatred is likely to be stirred up against any person or person from such an ethnic group in Nigeria. According to the bill, any person who commits this offence shall be liable to life imprisonment, and where the act causes any loss of life, the person shall be punished with death by hanging.

Ethnic hatred means hatred against a group of persons from any ethnic group indigenous to today's Nigeria. On Ethnic Discrimination, the bill penalizes a person who discriminates against another person if, on ethnic grounds, the person, without any lawful justification, treats another Nigerian citizen less favourably than he treats or would treat other persons from his ethnic or another ethnic group and/or that on grounds of ethnicity.

Harassment based on Ethnicity – The bill says a person is guilty of ethnic harassment if he justifiably engages in conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating that other person's dignity or creating an

intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for the person subjected to the harassment. A person who subjects another to harassment based on ethnicity commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not less than ten years, or to a fine of not less than N10 million, or both.

Ethnic or racial contempt – The bill stipulates that any person who knowingly utters words to incite feelings of contempt, hatred, hostility, violence, or discrimination against any person, group, or community based on ethnicity or race commits an offence. The offender shall be liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years, a fine of not less than N10 million, or both (Iroanusi, 2019).

The above is part of the bill proposed to penalize individuals guilty of hate speech. However, this raised agitation among citizens who argue that passing such a bill into law tramples on the fundamental international rights of freedom of expression. Furthermore, social media, which is a major area to be scrutinized by this bill, is a liberal platform where Nigerians can freely air their opinions. If the bill is passed into law, it impedes citizens' rights, which is contrary to a democratic dispensation.

The attempt to pass such a bill stems from the idea that fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and similar issues are inflaming the polity and causing discord and disunity in an already diverse society influenced by ethnic and religious affiliations. The historical experiences in past elections in the country, as well as its political landscape, show that information—whether true or false—has shaped electoral turnout, the people's responses to the government, and the government's output to citizens.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several studies have conducted scholarly efforts to portray the dangers of disinformation in any society, primarily how it affects its political terrain. Hassan (2023) argued that misinformation is not limited to individuals. Low media literacy among its users and strong political support for certain parties have allowed political parties to advance in information warfare on social media by spreading conflicting information. Unfortunately, as opined by Salihu (2020), this has the potential to befuddle citizens with accurate information, as the propagation of alternative facts frequently hinders individuals' ability to discern truth from falsehood. Confusion regarding what constitutes truth or genuine information inevitably prevents the establishment of a common foundation for engaging in meaningful discussions about pertinent issues. This also impedes the public's ability to hold their political representatives accountable. Further, in their study, Ogbette et al. (2019), suggested that one reason for the continual spread of fake news is the lacuna between the government and the media. Where the government hoards the truth while the media must provide information, and fabricate some, which may contain half-truths and lies, this invariably determines the information disseminated to the public.

Olaimolu & Adebumiti (2022) differ slightly from the previous studies. In their work, they faulted the widespread fake news on the inability of the government to tackle it as a menace to sustaining Nigeria's democracy. To them, little attention is given to fake news compared to other societal threats (insecurity, ethno-religious conflicts, etc.), so the spread of false information advances. Oji (2020) argues that while false information has always posed a danger to democracy in Nigeria, technological advancements have played a role in its increasing prevalence. The study noted that rumors and fake news spread faster with easy access to the internet and 'cheap' data. The study also blamed the insincerity of politicians during election campaigns as one of the reasons why whatever is being peddled through the media (online and

offline) is easily believed, whether true or false. This is why the weapon of fake news continues to sell during elections and is used by political aspirants from opposing party lines.

As pointed out by scholars, the advances in technology have provided many advantages and disadvantages to societal harmony. Ease of communication and the speed at which information can get to where it is required, without using the conventional way of posting such information. However, it is also easy to spread incomplete, unverified, and false information. Sadly, this is gradually becoming the norm in the polity. As noted by Professor Pate in an interview, the use of social media is closely linked to the proliferation of fake news, particularly given the rising levels of social media engagement in Nigeria. Failure to tackle this issue could result in the infiltration of post-modernist Machiavellianism, noble lies, or falsehoods into Nigerian politics, potentially leading to unexpected turmoil. Lai Mohammed, the Nigerian Information and Culture Minister, has labelled this phenomenon as "the greatest threat to democracy and security." (Abdullahi, March 13, 2017, online). This is so because, for personal or group interests, the spread of false information threatens the peace and order of society. When this distrust is at its height, even when the truth is said, it isn't easy to believe. Also, true information becomes a scarce commodity in governance. Therefore, urgent action is needed to address this issue.

The damage the dissemination of false information has done and is still doing, as noted by the scholars above and others not mentioned here, cannot be quantified. It has infiltrated the political arena and threatens Nigerian democracy. Nigeria is a developing country, and though it is identified with the growth of technology globally, it has limited access to those 'sophisticated tools' used to verify the credibility and how true information is. This is one of the reasons the BVAS was introduced and utilized in the last general elections for the easy transmission of election results and information. Despite the findings and suggestions of the above literature, the menace of misinformation and untrue news remains part of the Nigerian polity. This can be seen from the different unverified sources of information that gave certain information to the public just before the 2023 general elections (INEC Report, 2024). The paper intends to examine the gap on whether misinformation had negative or positive effects on the 2023 elections and the efforts the Nigerian government has made in curbing the spread of untrue information.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used the qualitative research design method and adopted the purposive sampling of data closely related to the 2023 general elections. The primary data is the primary data of Archival sources, magazines, social media broadcasts, and official and unofficial reports. In contrast, the secondary data comprises books, journals, election reports, and media information because of its relevance to the study, containing information about the 2023 general elections. The gathered data and content were assessed and examined using descriptive techniques for the primary data, as seen in the table below, and narrative analytical techniques for secondary data sources. It is important to note that data were chosen based on themes related to the topic, all coded manually.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **INEC and the Media in 2023 General Elections: The Situation**

While preparing for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the electoral umpire, INEC seemed to have prioritized the media at different levels. This is because they are relevant stakeholders in the conduct of the elections. The acknowledgement by the Commission of the media as a key partner emphasized the intentional push to gain the support of the press for the different electoral changes and technological advancements implemented right after the 2019 General Election. The Commission had a communication policy that it aimed to implement throughout the electoral process. This policy was designed to be applied from the grassroots level to the completion of the exercise, to achieve the Commission's strategic communication objectives. The Commission sought to engage top media executives, editors, online publishers, and online editors in constructive dialogues to support the implementation of the INEC Communication Policy. Additionally, the Commission utilized its social media platforms - X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp - as well as its official online newspaper, *inecnews.com*, to disseminate timely press conferences, releases, and special publications to communicate important information about the election preparations, the conduct of the polls, and the subsequent events. (INEC, 2024).

The above indicates that INEC involved the media at different levels during the election to reduce untrue information. The Commission's active engagement with the media, characterized by its transparency, accessibility, and authenticity, helped mitigate much of the potential harm that could have been caused by fake news and misinformation during the election. For instance, numerous discussions occurred with media leaders, internet publishers, and section editors in Lagos from November 24th to November 25th, 2021. At these gatherings, specific officials at the INEC Headquarters delivered talks about the organization's procedures, advancements, and arrangements for the 2023 General Election (INEC Report, 2024). The Commission enlisted more than 90 members from various print, broadcast, and online media organizations who were officially authorized to cover and report on the Commission's activities. The Commission emphasizes the crucial role these members play in disseminating information about its activities due to their direct interaction and access to the Commission. The Commission believes that a journalist's effectiveness and accuracy are directly linked to the quality of information available to them, and thus, a thorough understanding of the Commission's processes, procedures, and governing laws is essential for journalists to report objectively on its activities. To address this, the Commission conducted a capacity development workshop for members of the Press Corps in Lagos on the 26th and 27th of September, where selected INEC Directors presented most of the 11 papers at the event (INEC Report, 2024).

Despite the measures taken by the Commission, it could not filter all the information disseminated by these media houses regarding the 2023 general elections. During the polling process, as Nigerians awaited the official election results, the social media platform Twitter in Nigeria had a significant impact on spreading unreliable election-related information, serving as a primary source of disinformation and misinformation (Nwonwu & Tukur 2023). Unfortunately, X is one of the social media platforms used and believed by many Nigerians to have reliable and trusted information. This is the reason why whatever information is seen or gotten from it, is accepted as true.

## **Accreditation for Media Personnel Covering the 2023 General Election**

The election umpire granted permission to certain accredited media organizations to oversee the information disseminated to the public during the 2023 General elections in the country. As a result, the Independent National Electoral Commission's official portal was made accessible to the media from January 5th to February 6th, 2023, to enable interested media organizations to register online. They were to be screened and those qualified were nominated to participate in the electoral process. The table below shows the figures of what was presented by INEC as media participation.

**Table 1**

### *INEC Portal Media Registration*

| S/No/ Title | INEC Platform                         | Categories                   | Recorded Figures |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| 1           | Total Number of Users                 | Organizations and Individual | 4, 529           |
| 2           | Total Number of Organizations         | Local and Foreign            | 1667             |
| 3           | Total Number of Applications Received | Combined                     | 947              |
| 4           | Total Number of Approved Applications | Combined                     | 716              |

*Source.* INEC 2023 Election Report.

The Table 1 indicates those who used the registration portal made available for the election exercise. This was to ensure the media's inclusion in the process and the credibility and authenticity of the information being disseminated to the public. However, this did not hinder the spread of false information. In 2023, the BBC claimed that the BBC Global Disinformation Team had uncovered false information. They closely examined and assessed three new websites - Podium Reporters, which was established in 2021, Reportera, in July 2022, and Parallel Facts, in May 2023. Mr. Tijani, a BBC staff member, suggested that the timing of their creation was intentional, indicating that the websites may have been designed to influence the election of specific candidates. He also suggested that the creators were motivated to generate significant ad revenue from their sites.

This was confirmed by a certain Mr Adebayo Ilupeju, a staff of African Media Works, a PR consultant and a Digital Media expert. He alleged that an attempt to reach the website with false information via email was unsuccessful. Unfortunately, the damage had already been done through the spread of such fake news for instance, politicians also shared stories from the websites, helping their popularity. Please remember the following text: During the elections, Festus Keyamo, the current Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, shared several stories from Podium Reporters. Additionally, Mr Obi participated in two Twitter Spaces with Parallel Facts, and as a result, the website's engagement grew from less than 10,000 mentions to 40,000 mentions between May and July 2023. (Nwonwu et al., 2023). This shows that despite efforts to involve the media in the electoral process, the government and its election body (INEC) didn't have adequate control over the kind of information that was disseminated during the pre-election, election, and post-election periods in Nigeria's 2023 general election.

## **Aftermath Report of the 2023 General Elections**

At the end of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, a lot of observations were made with the hope that a proper review of the aftermath of the process, will ensure improved performance in future elections particularly as it relates to the media and dissemination of election news. The commission hopes to ensure sustained stakeholder engagement and effective use of traditional and new media platforms will prove useful in external communication and curb misinformation. This is in addition to structured engagement with the leadership of political parties, security agencies, Civil Societies, the Media, Voters, Development Partners, Election Observer Missions, and others to reduce the tendencies for miscreants to use the media in any form in spreading fake news. The Commission used its SERVICOM unit, and other information platforms to further engage with the public. However, improving voter turnout at elections with the associated issue of unclaimed PVCs remains a challenge regardless of the Commission's strategic planning efforts. The Commission had to manage the issue of media owners' interest vis-à-vis coverage of its activities. The policy of NIN-SIM connectivity was noted in this study's findings to have impacted on some of the Commission's public outreach platforms.

In summary, this study's findings show that INEC has done a bit to counter the spread of fake news during the elections process in Nigeria through its online newspaper ([inecnews.com](http://inecnews.com)). Yet, it seems inadequate, which indicates that more needs to be done to check the contents of information that is peddled, particularly during elections and generally in society at large, to foster continuous societal peace and orderliness.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problem of fake information particularly during the election process, impedes the sustenance of democracy as a form of government in Nigeria. This is because 'election' which is one of the strongest pillars of democracy, once it loses its credibility in the minds of the people, because of information that cannot be trusted, makes the entire democratic system questionable. This is so because the democratic government which Nigeria practices represents the people and the press, which is also a pillar of democracy, is an avenue for the free expression of opinions and dissemination of credible information. Therefore, it should not be misused as a 'tool' to cause societal disharmony.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The passing of the bill, "*National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech and Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation and Other Related Offences*" in its entirety, to law, as recommended on the floor of the Nigerian Senate, by a few of its Senators, may be considered as impeding on the fundamental human rights of the citizens. However, there is a need for the government at the federal, state, and local government levels to take measures to filter media outlets, prints and online to regulate their activities.

Secondly, there is a need for the federal government to establish a functional regulatory body that will be given the responsibility of regulating every media outlet and the kind of information they let out to the public. They should also ensure they take responsibility for whatever news they let out to the public.

Thirdly, the Federal Government need to borrow a leaf from other countries such as China to regulate the social media platforms that its citizens are allowed to use. When such is done, it allows the government, through its regulatory agencies, to hold accountable any social media platform that is found guilty of disseminating false information.

Finally, the spread of new technology, known as Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used positively in future elections in Nigeria. The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) can train some of its personnel, particularly those in the IT unit of the Commission to specialize in the use of this technology. This can go a long way in helping the electoral umpire in countering any form of false information that is been spread during elections. Tactics like the immediate publicising of corrected information, once the fake one has been uploaded and controlling the use of online political advertising, are some of the many ways that INEC can employ.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declares no potential conflict of interest.

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