



## Unmasking the Tape of Electoral Fraud in Grassroots Nigeria: Evidence from the Management of the Local Council Elections by the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs)

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**ABSTRACT:** Electoral fraud is identified as an albatross on genuine democratisation in Nigerian politics. The Nigerian political culture demonstrates a zero-sum game where a winner takes all and where a winner employs all amoral ineptitude to secure victory. The situation is escalated at the grassroots level in the country where the constitutional three-tier of the federal, state and local system was bastardised by the states who succeeded in emasculating the local governments under their absolute personal control. The local council polls usually turned into a charade that is perpetuated by charlatans in the name of elections where in reality, forceful imposition, selection and subversion of the process became the order of the day. The study examined how the use of SIECs aided the phenomenon of electoral fraud at the grassroots level where the local council elections are designed and arrested by state governors based on their selfish desire. The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. The data obtained were analysed and interpreted using mixed method of statistical tools and content analysis. The study discovered that the SIECs became tools in the pawn of the state governors that they leveraged in manipulating the local government elections against the will of the electorates at the grassroots and that has tremendously affects the democratisation process in the country where authentic institutional building remains a mirage even after more than 20 years of democratic experiment. The study recommends that the SIECs should be abrogated and the INEC should conduct the local council elections together with the national elections at the same time.

### RESEARCH PAPER

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**How to cite this paper:**

Abacha Umar Deribe *et al.*  
 “Unmasking the Tape of  
 Electoral Fraud in  
 Grassroots Nigeria:  
 Evidence from the  
 Management of the Local  
 Council Elections by the  
 State Independent Electoral  
 Commissions (SIECs)”.  
 Middle East Res J.  
 Humanities Soc. Sci., 2021  
 Nov-Dec 1(1): 25-37.

**Article History:**

| **Submit: 21.10.2021** |

| **Accepted: 22.11.2021** |

| **Published: 28.12.2021** |

**Keywords:** Electoral Fraud, Grassroots, INEC, Local Council, Nigeria, SIECS.

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### INTRODUCTION

Election is considered as a fundamental pillar of democratic ruling. Through a healthy election, peaceful transfer of power is effected, public choice of leadership is guaranteed, electorates are motivated to exercise their full franchise. The entire process of a periodic election thrills voters and gives them a feeling of liberty that they deserved in the society (Lehoucq, 2003). Unfortunately, the elites in democracies continue to devise some scintillating moves that aid them in manoeuvring their way into power at all cost including

electoral fraud. Although, many individuals will mistake electoral fraud as an affair that is the exclusive practice of emerging democracies, the phenomenon is reported worldwide including the advanced democracies of America and England (Dawson, 2020). Politicians in their bid to secure power at all cost sometimes sacrifice democratic values on the altar of fraud and subversion of the standard practice (Nwanna, 2010). Rigging, perpetrating of violence, intimidation of opposition and their supporters, excessive spending and violation of regulations that foster fair play,

abstention from providing voting materials, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, vote buying, bribery of electoral stakeholders, damaging, ballot box stealing, terrorising of voters and other means of circumventing the legal and credible process of electoral conduct are all identified as forms of electoral fraud (Nwanna, 2014).

Nigeria is one of the emerging democracies in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The democratisation process in Nigeria is observed to be full of controversies, hiccups, faulty transition, pseudo political parties and a hasty process that usually fail short of an enabling environment for institutions building that could facilitate engendering of democratisation (Tar & Zak-Williams, 2007). One of the severally reported incidences of the Nigerian democratisation and electoral process is election fraud and rigging (Olaniyi, 2017). The Nigerian politicians developed an insatiable penchant for winning elections at the verge of a war-like contest because of the personal financial benefits that accrue to the victors. Emanating from their attitudes of winner takes all syndrome, politicians adopted rigging and manipulation of the electoral process leading to massive rigging accompanied with violence in the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and even 2019 General Elections. After each election, a report from the joint domestic civil societies, international observers and academic research always pointed towards an abnormality.

An area that is turned into a serial ground for electoral fraud is the local government election. The Nigerian Constitution recognises in Section 7(1) the provision for an elected local council chairman and councillors in the wards in the 774 Local Government Councils in the country (Adesanya, 2019). However, the same constitutional provision that provides for the existence of local government as a third tier also allows for the existence of the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) which are saddled with the task of undertaking the responsibility of the conduct of elections at grassroots or local council level. Since Section 168 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution provides for the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) which eventually equipped the states with the underserved powers that propelled them to subjugate the local governments, the same was transferred in the local council elections (Olaniyi, 2017). A ridiculous and a laughable scenario that mock democracy ensued in the process where the state governors used force to return the local council elections 100% victorious by the ruling party in the individual states. A state with for instance, 20 local governments and 200 wards will have the ruling party winning 100% of all the seats even when the sitting governor is not performing. It depicts a serious problem because building democracy is a herculean task that should target the grassroots before moving upwards but here is a case where the grassroots are turned into a mockery of democracy (Sambo &

Sule, 2020). This study found it expedient to critically study the factors behind such events and how they can be remedied before they collapse the hard-earned democracy in the country.

### Literature Review

In this section, some vital concepts and issues that are directly related to the subject matter of study are reviewed to establish the need for the study and the anticipated contribution. Based on the priority of the study, the following are examined; concept of electoral fraud, electoral fraud in Nigeria, overview of local council elections and the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs).

### The Concept of Electoral Fraud

Electoral fraud is a clandestine and a conspiratorial effort to manipulate election results. The subject matter of electoral fraud is critical to study because most of the perpetrators of electoral offences hardly leave any incriminating evidence to indict them and in many circumstances, establishing objectivity of the fraud is difficult or rather, the process of the conduct of the study is bedeviled with subjectivity. The perpetrator will want it hidden from the public scrutiny while the victim wants it popularised (Lehoucq, 2003). Dawson (2020) while totally accepted the above interpretation of electoral fraud by Lehoucq (2003), he expanded the concept as a broader term than the previous conceptualisation and thus, sees electoral fraud as “as a temporally and substantively distinct form of electoral manipulation”. Factors responsible for the fraud include the intensity of the competition, absence or low presence of observers and civil societies, availability of resources to be deployed for the act and level of political culture and voters’ behaviour (Dawson, 2020). Electoral fraud is a term that is in some instances used interchangeably with other collocations such as voter fraud, election malpractice, electoral manipulation and electoral corruption. The term simply denotes all forms of unethical, illegal, undue and forbidden interference with the standard process of electoral conduct by actors including politicians, party members, supporters, electoral officials and any other relevant stakeholder (Adesanya, 2020). Electoral fraud is an action that is executed by some few citizens operating individually or in smaller groups but in some cases, it is the government itself that is responsible for committing the act against it citizens when it perceives defeat from the voters’ responses in the polling units or even before the election day (The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2021).

Election fraud is not only limited or unique with emerging democracies. Data and other evidences disclosed that even the advanced democracies are not saved from this quagmire. For instance, the 2020 Electoral Data Fraud reported that between January and March 2020, local by-elections took place across the Great Britain, many cases of electoral fraud were recorded and fifteen (15) of the cases were investigated

by the Police. The Euronews (2021) reported that rules of election conduct were changed in the last Dutch Election to accept wrongly sealed mail-in ballots. The process is perceived as a fraud or favour to a given party or a candidate. The 2000 US Presidential Election remains controversial to date owing to the Florida incidence which failed to clear the conscience of many objective observers (Wallis, 2014). A significant number of Americans, 38% regards America's 2000 Presidential Election as questionable in what Fund (2004), described as a threat and a peril to the US democracy. In 2006, allegations of electoral fraud surrounded several elections globally including Mexico, Italy and several Soviet Republics (Alvarez *et al.* 2008).

The Nigerian electoral process is regarded as one of the broken and the most fraudulent where subversion of voters' will occur through intimidation, rigging, ballot box stealing, ballot box hijacking, ballot paper thumping, ballot paper stuffing, vote buying, inflation of results and other illegal actions. This scenario is evident in Nigeria as in the case of a Professor that was jailed for 3-years with a fine of N100,000 for electoral fraud in the conduct of the 2019 General Election in Calabar (Imukodo, 2021). In the 2019 General Election, particularly the 2019 Gubernatorial Election in Kano, a massive electoral fraud was reported accompanied with violence and infringement of voters' right including media reporters and observers both domestic and international (Uwais & Zango, 2019). The allegations of the involvement of Russia in swaying the pendulum of the November 2016 US Presidential polls continues to attract concern globally on the credibility and safety of democracy in post-democratisation era. The situation is even turned complex with Trump's blatant refusal to accept the November 2020 Presidential Election result and his continues insistence on manipulation (Aiyede, 2021). However, a study (Chayka, 2020), sees electoral fraud as a myth that is overblown by politicians and opposition for political purpose. Chayka (2020), in disagreement with all the above scholarly views, suggested that most of the outcries for voter fraud are baseless. However, in a near consensus with the opposed above views, Chayka (2020) accepted that most of the cases of alleged voter fraud are irregularities and other forms of electoral misconduct. By interpretation, Chayka (2020) could not convince logically for a position that could be accepted to refer to the dismissal of electoral fraud as he set out to do in the early stage of argument.

In the context of Africa, electoral fraud is conceived as all forms of manipulation that the politicians employed to block the legitimate voters from throwing them out of office. The increase in competitive election in Africa in the last 20 years also heralded an increase violence and various machinations for manipulation of electoral process by the incumbents (Long IV, 2012). This African perspective is supported by a general overview of global electoral fraud presented by

Cheeseman & Klaas (2018). In their submission, (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018), argue that while election increased significantly worldwide, the world become less democratic from the process. This is because about 75% of world elections are won by the governments in power because of totalitarian practice and systemic electoral manipulation. Fraud in African contests denotes infractions on the electoral regulations, ballot box thumping, snatching and stuffing, vote buying, bribing the party officials, blocking of perceived oppositions from franchise and intimidation of the electorates. Emanating from the above scenario, many African countries have conducted fraudulent elections. Such cases point as for example, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Nigeria (Long IV, 2012). In essence, the nature of electoral fraud in Africa depicts a modicum of how the politicians retain power at all cost. Both the ruling and opposition parties are active in demonstrating the tendency for electoral fraud. Weak institutions, non-performance, credibility question and corruption are attributed by Long IV (2012) as the main drivers of electoral fraud in Africa.

In the same vein, Collier (2009), observes that most of the electoral fraud committed in Africa anchors around political violence because it is the major route to power. Politicians devised a means of rigging of election through the use of Small Arms and Light Weapons and perpetration of violence (Collier, 2009). Davis (2015), using allegorical illustration presents a similar discourse to that of Collier (2009) taking Italy as his unit of analysis in a novel. Smith (2015) relates elections with game and established the connection using the Game Theory Model that politicians consider the payoff in an election and thus, adopt all possible measures to win just as in a game of football and this has been attributed to manipulative tendency such as electoral fraud. In a different opinion, Palast (2012), argues that electoral fraud is executed in advanced democracies especially in the US through the manipulation of political party financing where the giant corporations splashed cash to woo votes and support for their favoured candidates. Fredrickson (2019) supports the above views that elections are fixed nowadays in advanced through floods of campaign donations and plutocratic donors. Poundstone (2008), also submitted that elections are not fair because of a dubious process of financing which gives an edge over many financially weak candidates. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe and several other countries, there is a rise in contentious elections emanating from allegations of electoral fraud leading to court and legitimacy challenges. In many cases, the issues are settled in courts while in other circumstances, the challenge became insurmountable settled only in bloodshed and governments collapse through bloody coups (Norris *et al.* 2015). In another perspective which strengthens the above analysis, Buttorff (2019) stresses that electoral fraud in the Arab world bastardised the process leading to boycott and other measures by the electorates

resulting from the nature in which the centres of power converted the elections into authoritarian manner. Braun (2019) further sees the US 2016 Presidential Election that witnessed the success of Trump as a flawed election which endangers democracy in US and worldwide because of the role played by hackers particularly Russia as reported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In an entirely different angle, (Achen & Bartels, 2016), described most of the modern elections as fraudulent even when the process is free and fair based on what they identified as “ignorance of voters, fallacies of choice and a majority decision in voting that does not reflect a response to policy choice”.

Electoral fraud presents a serious threat to democracy and democratisation process and it will continue to do so for as long time if it is not address properly (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2021). IFES (2021) further observes that electoral bodies and all stakeholders have a vital role to play in countering electoral fraud. One of the best practices to mitigate the phenomenon is to pursue electoral integrity. Some special tools were designed by IFES targeted purposely on identifying, blocking and discouraging fraud and malpractices. Magaloni (2010) suggested that it is not easy to compel authoritarian rulers to undertake a clean election because they will not simply relinquish power peacefully. However, he suggested that even with their possession of military might and incumbent edge, the authoritarian rulers can be forced to deliver a clean election through a united opposition and a massive civil disobedience.

Various scholars (Tar & Zak-Williams, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2007; Casimir *et al.* 2013; Bariledum *et al.* 2016; Isma'ila & Othman, 2016; Ozoemena & Evangelina, 2019 and Dada, 2021) believed that electoral fraud is committed in Nigeria through multiple stages and processes leading to challenges of legitimacy and good governance. Apart from challenges of good governance, electoral fraud in Nigeria is accompanied with protests in disagreement and legitimacy question (Daxecker *et al.* 2019). Nigeria has a history of tumultuous and controversial elections in the past with the five elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 all full of allegations of fraud and irregularities (Dele-Adedeji, 2019). Hakeem & Okeke (2014) see the electoral umpire and courts as collaborators for electoral fraud since manipulated elections could not be handled fairly by the courts of law in the country. Varella (2021), identified that one of the popular ways of electoral fraud in Nigeria is vote buying. She added that statistics in 2019 General Election revealed that about 25% of voters were wooed with money incentive to vote for some candidates. However, Nwangwu *et al.* (2018), presented a positive view of electoral fraud in Nigeria where they concluded that the adoption and implementation of digital technology via smart card reader is an elixir to the Nigeria's battling electoral

system. But Edori *et al.* (2020) did not agree that the use of digital technology alone can sooth the ailing Nigeria's electoral process that is infected by a pandemic of fraud. They suggested an alternative which is forensic accounting auditing that should be implemented during pre and post-election periods. However, Oladipo (2019) advanced the argument of Nwangwu *et al.* (2018) that the use of electronic voting is more transparent meaning that smart card readers are a practical alternative to electoral fraud in Nigeria.

### Overview of Local Council Elections

Local government election and indeed, local government system in Nigeria has been taken place and is in existence for many decades. The pre-colonial administrative structures in Nigeria in various forms consisting of Hausa/Fulani kingdom, Yoruba Empire, Kanem Bornu, Benin Kingdom, Igbo society all designed different structures of governance in their respective states. During colonial rule in Nigeria, the British Colonial Administration introduced Native Authority system which is equivalent to local governance in structure and operation. After political independence, the 1976 Local Government Reform set a solid foundation for the operation and existence of Local Government system in Nigeria. Although, the 1984 Dasuki Reform was not fully implemented, the 1999 Constitution provides in Section 7(1) for the elective offices of local council Chairman and a Councillor in each ward across the Federation. This, is perceived as the foundation for the constitutional recognition of local governments as third tier of governance in Nigeria with a provision for elected executives and legislatures. Currently, there are 774 local governments in Nigeria receiving an allocation from the Federation Allocation Account Committee (FAAC) of 20.60 monthly with provisions for residual powers in the Constitution (Sambo & Sule, 2020). Sambo & Sule (2020) further observes that local government system in Nigeria is strangled by the greedy and unethical conduct of the state governors who took over the total control of LGs resources, executed a charade called election by planting their anointed candidates in an election that is considered more a joke than a democratic process. Although, LGs had received at least, N23 trillion from 1999 to 2020, by implication meaning that no LG had received less than N30 billion each but because the LG leaders are imposed by the state governors, there is no much development to show (Sambo & Sule, 2020).

Local government elections in Nigeria are a direct reversal of democratic process and a subversion of peoples' liberty and freedom of choice as provided in a democratic process. The elections are conducted by State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) directly under the control and monitoring of state governors (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 1999). That power to freely participate in the process of voting for leaders in a democratic process is

deprived of people at the local level where dubious elections are conducted falling short of even the minimal standard (Nwanna, 2010). The changing nature of local government in Nigeria is gradually obliterating the culture and structure of their operations and performance especially politically because the leaders are not appointed in the name of election by the SIECs (Olasupo & Fayomi, 2012). Indeed, Omar (2012), building on the above view stressed that since 1960, free and fair election at local government level has been non-existent. Nwanna (2014), in another study suggests that grassroots democratisation is being thwarted by the LG elections' conduct because it is usually characterised with violence, fraud, manipulation and forceful imposition of leaders by the state governors. The local government elections are reported as an avenue for massive irregularities and violence where state governors dictate to the teeming voters in rural areas who shall win or lost (Gambo, 2015). A disconnect is established between people in grassroots and politicians at the national level because the local government elections are an appointment made by state governors disenfranchising the people at the grassroots from participation (Ojebode *et al.* 2017). In this case, decentralisation is not advantageous at all to the people in rural areas, concluded Ojebode *et al.* (2017). A major factor attributed to the shoddy elections at local government level is the variation in the timetable for the conduct of the election. Each state conduct its election based on the time and the calendar that the governor dictates (Commonwealth, 2019). Oluwasuji & Okajare (2021) lamented that the politics of ruling parties in states hijacked the local government elections. A norm was established since 2003 of a ruling party recording a 100% victory in local council polls in that particular state.

### **The State Independent Electoral Commission (SIECs)**

Election in Nigeria is conducted by two (2) major bodies; the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is responsible for the conduct of General Elections comprising of Presidential, National Assembly, Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly Elections in addition to Local Council Election in Federal Capital Territory Abuja (FCTA). The other body, SIEC is saddled with task of conducting election at local government councils supervised and organised by the states (Sambo & Sule, 2020). Section 153 of the Constitution established that INEC organises and conducts election into federal and state elective offices both executives and legislatures. Section 3 part II of the Third Schedule of the Constitution, provides for the establishment of SIEC which has the power to conduct local government elections (The 1999 Constitution).

The SIECs have been undertaking the responsibility of election conduct since 1999. Several issues surfaced in the conduct of elections by SIECs. One of them is the contradictions and variations in the calendar. Some

states delayed the elections as far as two (2) years after the General Election. In some cases, the tenure too is not exact across the country. In some states they spent three (3) years, in other states two (2) years while in others less than. Additionally, while INEC is considered to have enjoyed a certain degree of independence in its execution of election, the SIECs become a readily available tool for control and manipulation by the state governors. The SIECs are just a pawn in the hands of the governors for their will and wish. Apart from that, the SIECs conducted elections that are believed to have been mocking the Nigeria's democracy by returning a ruling party as a 100% winner. An example is a situation where a state with 20 local governments and 300 wards will declare a ruling party in that state as a winner of all the seats without any opposition winning a single seat in that election. The irony is that all ruling parties in the country are indicted for this mishap of electoral fraud at local government level. In several instances, the opposition boycott the election because of perceived manipulation, injustice and lack of fairness in the process (Olaniyi, 2017). The situation of local government polls necessitates for many calls by experts, policy analysts and academics for an abrogation of the SIECs to enable the INEC to conduct all elections at the same time. One of the arguments that this study observes is that the same local council polls in FCT Abuja conducted by INEC is more transparent, satisfactory and is recording less outcries of manipulation then why the SIECs own is too crude and manipulative always? This is perhaps, because the State Joint Local Government Account is enabling the state governors to hijack the LGs resources in return for a flamboyant contractual projects than genuine rural development policies.

### **Framework of Analysis: Game Theory**

Game Theory is the matrix and mathematical permutations of explaining decision making in a complex, competitive and desperate environment (Gibbons, 1993). The decision can be in politics, economy, management or any other related set up (Maschler *et al.* 2013). The Theory will help immensely in consolidating the body of the literature and the discussion of the findings in the study. John Von Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern (1953) are unanimously credited for the postulation of the Game Theory model. The major job that they did in contributing to the explanation of decision making is that decision making in a strategic situation is competitive and intense in nature.

Game Theory has some basic assumptions. One of them is that players who are competing in a strategic situation adopt multiple and diverse techniques in their bid to outsmart each other. Also, the Theory proposes that there are two or more players either competing for the same target or struggling to gain support or provide the same value for the targetted population. The Theory also assumes that there is a payoff as an outcome of the

competition and that payoff can be what a winner or a loser sacrifice or gain in the competition. There are understood set of regulations for the players that are competing in the game which is another assumption. Furthermore, the Theory assumes that the competing players possess critical data and vital information on the strategy, movement and prediction of their opponents (Umbhauer, 2016). There are mathematical equations that are applied to demonstrate the operation and motion of Game Theory including among others zero-sum game, non-zero sum game, prisoners' dilemma, game of chicken, payoff and other terminologies. However, the major pretext of this work is to look at the applicability in the context of electoral fraud in Nigerian environment (Dimand & Dimand, 2002).

The Theory is relevance in this study because the state governors manipulated the LG elections and controlled the SIECs for the simple logic of amassing more wealth in their disposal to wield more influence in national and local politics. Most of the projects that they executed are made with LGs' fund as observed by Sambo & Sule (2020). If the local council polls are allowed by the governors to be free and fair, the elected leaders will frown at the usurping of LGs resources by the State governors. In order to execute big projects and show how powerful they are, the state governors found it convenient to emasculate the LGs and take over their resources. This is strategic decision making because the FG too is competing in delivering developmental projects to the rural areas but the state governors are parading themselves as messiahs to the rural people because they blocked the relevance of the FG and they strangled the LGs from any independent because the LGs autonomy may suppress the excessive powers and abuse of the state governors since they will have less resources at disposal. Game Theory applied here practically in the sense that LGs became the recipient of competitive decision making between the FG and the states. This is the reason why recently the FG is making a giant stride in rescuing the LGs but the state governors are busy frustrating the efforts.

#### Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The study is a qualitative design in nature where a qualitative paradigm of data collection and

interpretation was applied. The study is a qualitative case study, a particularistic case study specifically because it identified a unique issue and an organisation for the analysis. Data were collected through a survey method where an interview was conducted with some selected informants in the area of study. Since many of the states so far conducted LG elections and there is no geopolitical zone that is without a state that at least, conducted the election, informants were selected using a cluster sampling method. In each of the six geopolitical zones, one state is chosen for the data collection. In Northeast, Bauchi State is selected, in Northcentral, Kogi was chosen, in Northwest, Kano is selected, in Southeast, Ebonyi was chosen, in Southsouth, Rivers was selected while in Southwest, Oyo is chosen with FCT Abuja chosen as the seventh area of sampling selection. The reason for selecting these states are three (3); accessibility to some informants based on connection, conduct of the LG election because not all the states in all the zones conducted the election and party variation to uncover whether the electoral fraud in the council polls is peculiar with a particular party or its unique with all the states and their governors.

In each state, four (5) informants were selected, a party executive of the ruling party, a party executive of the main opposition party, an academic from a university in that state, a staff of SIEC and a member of civil society or monitoring groups or in some cases, electorates where the monitoring groups are absent. This made a total of thirty-five (35) informants for the interview. The informants were coded in various categories of A to E. category A is party executive of the ruling party, category B is the party executive of the main opposition party, category C is the academic, category D is a staff of SIEC and category E is the members of civil societies, monitoring groups or electorates. They were selected and identified based on their relevance in terms of possession of vital data needed, accessibility by the researchers, connectivity and status. The tool used for the interview was a questionnaire designed in a semi-structured form to enable for a free flow of responses to the saturation point. The informants and their categories are presented in the table below for easy illustration.

**Table-1: Informants' categories and their frequency for the seven selected states**

S/No.	Category	Informants for each of the Seven States	Sample Selected	Population
1.	A	Party exco of the ruling party	1	1
2.	B	Party exco of the main opposition	1	2
3.	C	Academic	1	3
4.	D	Official of SIEC	1	4
5.	E	Civil societies/monitoring groups	1	5
6.	Total	Total of 5x7 states	5	35

Source: Field Survey 2021.

The above is for each of the selected state and the FCT Abuja meaning that it will give a total of 35 informants. The study utilise documented sources also

for the data collection including books, journal articles, reports, newspapers and other internet sources. The data collected were discussed and interpreted using content

analysis by explaining the textual submissions of the informants together with the existing works and a formation of a model.

## DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

In this section of the study, the data collected were discussed and interpreted for findings. The data were analysed using thematic categorisation. A model was designed and formulated for summarising the outcome of the investigation.

### Local Council Polls in Post-2019 General Election

The local council polls are ignominious and the immaculate production of results with a turnover of 100% is supercilious. The declaration of the outcome is always preposterous and full of controversies beyond justification. This study limits the analysis to the LG

polls conducted only in post-2019 General Election. This is because some studies (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 1999; Nwanna, 2010; Olasupo & Fayomi, 2012; Nwanna, 2014; Gambo, 2015; Ojebode *et al.* 2017; Olaniyi, 2017; Commonwealth, 2019; Sambo & Sule, 2020 and Oluwasuji & Okajare, 2021), examined previous LG elections and the fraud attached to them to a lesser extent. This study periscope through the past investigations and discovered that not much attention is paid on the aspect of electoral fraud at the grassroots level and particularly after the 2019 General Election. The following table revealed the pattern of the LG polls so far in the states that conducted the election because some states are yet to even conduct the polls despite the consideration of spending over two (2) years after the 2019 General Election.

**Table-2: LG Polls Conducted Across the States in Post-2019 General Election**

S/NO.	States	Date of the Election	Ruling Party	Chairman Seats Won by Ruling Party	Chairman Seats won by Opposition	Councillorship Seats won by Ruling Party	Councillorship Seats Won by Opposition
1.	Abia	19-12-20	PDP	17(100%)	0(0.0%)	184(100%)	0(0.0%)
2.	Adamawa	7-12-19	PDP	21(100%)	0(0.0%)	226(100%)	0(0.0%)
3.	Akwa Ibom	02-11-20	PDP	31(100%)	0(0.0%)	367(100%)	0(0.0%)
4.	Anambra	No date	APGA	----	----	----	----
5.	Bauchi	17-10-20	PDP	20(100%)	0(0.0%)	323(100%)	0(0.0%)
6.	Bayelsa	10-08-19	PDP	8(100%)	0(0.0%)	105(100%)	0(0.0%)
7.	Benue	30-05-20	PDP	23(100%)	0(0.0%)	276(100%)	0(0.0%)
8.	Borno	28-11-20	APC	18(100%)	0(0.0%)	309(100%)	0(0.0%)
9.	Cross River	30-05-20	PDP	18(100%)	0(0.0%)	196(100%)	0(0.0%)
10.	Delta	06-03-21	PDP	25(100%)	0(0.0%)	500(100%)	0(0.0%)
11.	Ebonyi	29-08-20	PDP	13(100%)	0(0.0%)	171(100%)	0(0.0%)
12.	Edo	No date	PDP	----	----	----	----
13.	Ekiti	08-09-19	APC	16(100%)	0(0.0%)	177(100%)	0(0.0%)
14.	Enugu	01-03-20	PDP	17(100%)	0(0.0%)	260(100%)	0(0.0%)
15.	FCT Abuja	12-02-21	APC	5(83.33%)	1(11.77%)	N/A	N/A
16.	Gombe	20-12-20	APC	11(100%)	0(0.0%)	114(100%)	0(0.0%)
17.	Imo	No date	PDP	----	----	----	----
18.	Jigawa	26-06-21	APC	27(100%)	0(0.0%)	286(99.65%)	1(0.35%)
19.	Kaduna	Aug. 2021	APC	----	----	----	----
20.	Kano	17-01-21	APC	44(100%)	0(0.0%)	484(100%)	0(0.0%)
21.	Katsina	No date	APC	----	----	----	----
22.	Kebbi	30-10-19	APC	21(100%)	0(0.0%)	225(100%)	0(0.0%)
23.	Kogi	12-12-20	APC	21(100%)	0(0.0%)	239(100%)	0(0.0%)
24.	Kwara	No date	APC	----	----	----	----
25.	Lagos	July 24	APC	----	----	----	----
26.	Nassarawa	No date	APC	----	----	----	----
27.	Niger	1-12-19	APC	24(96%)	1(4%)	N/A	N/A
28.	Ogun	July 21	APC	----	----	----	----
29.	Ondo	23-08-20	APC	14(77.78%)	4(22.22%)	N/A	N/A
30.	Osun	No date	APC	----	----	----	----
31.	Oyo	22-05-21	PDP	33(100%)	0(0.0%)	351(100%)	0(0.0%)
32.	Plateau	Oct. 21	APC	----	----	----	----
33.	Rivers	18-04-21	PDP	23(100%)	0(0.0%)	319(100%)	0(0.0%)
34.	Sokoto	27-03-21	PDP	23(100%)	0(0.0%)	244(100%)	0(0.0%)
35.	Taraba	30-06-20	PDP	16(100%)	0(0.0%)	168(100%)	0(0.0%)
36.	Yobe	28-02-21	APC	17(100%)	0(0.0%)	178(100%)	0(0.0%)
37.	Zamfara	_No date	PDP	----	----	----	----

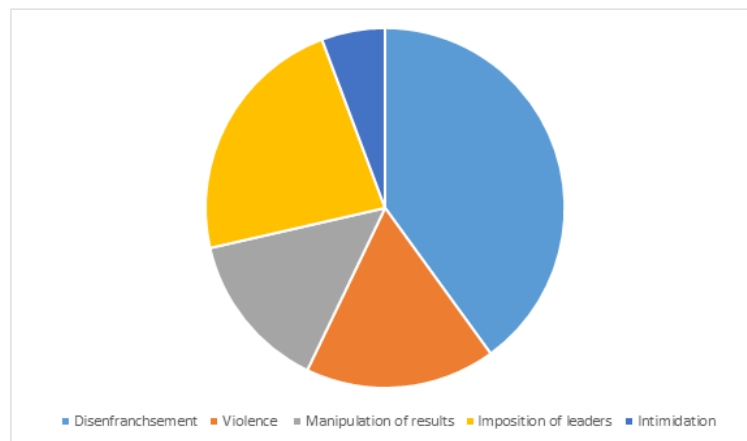
**Sources:** Idowu (2021), Ayodele (2020), Vanguard Politics (2021), BBC News (2021), Nanlong (2021), Akingboye (2020), Punch Newspaper (2021), Dipo (2019), The Guardian Newspaper (2020), Punch Newspaper (2019), Adewale (2021), INEC (2021), Premium Times Newspaper (2020), Premium Times Newspaper (2020), The Guardian Newspaper (2020), Oluwale (2019), The Guardian Newspaper (2021), Uchechukwu (2020), Channels Television (2020), Odeyemi (2020), Premium Times Newspaper (2019), The Guardian Editorial (2020), Emmanuel (2020), The Guardian Newspaper (2020) and

There are five (5) issues that could be deduced from the above statistics. The first is that most of the states conducted their LG polls but in various period, no specific uniform calendar from the events except the desire of the sitting governor in a state. The second issue is that only three (3) parties out of ninety-one (91) political parties that contested the election were able to secure a governorship seats and this by extension, is descended down to the local council polls also. The third observed phenomenon from the data is that majority of the states recorded a 100% victory in the council polls irrespective of the party once it is the ruling party. The fourth identified issue is that some states have fixed a date for the conduct of the LG polls in future while in the case of the last discovered phenomenon, some states are yet to fix a date even when the 2019 General Election is more than two (2) years now, more than half of the journey. Only two (2) states present a fairly result that indicate a performance from opposition parties.

### Examination of the Cases of Fraud in the Local Council Polls in Post-2019 General Election

Building on the above data and the diverse views of the informants, many cases of fraud in the LG election were reported. For instance, election is believed to have been an avenue for a competitive quest for power in a

civil manner devoid of violence and diversion of the due process attached to it, in the case of the above data, it is discovered that impossible miraculous results were produced. For example, twenty-three (23) states out of the thirty-seven studied in this work returned a results of 100% victory in all the chairman and councillorship election. This depicts an impracticable scenario in a democratic setting. It is expected that there will be different opinion, different support and other factors such as imposition and anointment of party candidates by the ruling parties which may favour the opposition but an extra step was taken to squash the threat of opposition. Another area of concern is the delayed conduct of the LG election which is seen as another fraud through an indirect way. Currently, there are eleven (11) states that are yet to conduct the LG election. Aside, some of the major issues reported by the informants in connection with the LG polls in Nigeria include disenfranchisement of voters, violence, selection of leaders, intimidation, manipulation or cooking of a fictitious results, bastardisation of the process and blockage of opposition from participation. The main views of the informants are summarised in the chart below. Zero-sum game displayed visibly in this context where the winner takes all without being conscious of the payoff to the contender such as litigation and rejection in addition to legitimacy crisis.



**Fig-1: Summary of the Informants' Views on the Cases of Fraud in the LG Polls in Post-2019 General Election.**  
*Source: Field Survey 2021.*

Drawing from the above pointer, one can argue on what makes the LG polls so special or distinguishing from the general elections in Nigeria if the above are the types of fraud that are perpetrated? The answer is obvious. In general elections conducted by INEC, no elective seat is ever returned 100% as a winner no matter the strength of the party and the candidate in that contest. In essence, in several occasions, the informants submitted that the contest usually appeared highly competitive and the race closer to the extent that few votes separate the winner from the loser. In another direction, the LG polls in Nigeria experimented the perfect Game Theory of zero-sum game where the winners take all and the losers lose all. The second distinguishing feather that the informants suggested is

unique with the LG polls in terms of fraud is the boycott of the election by the opposition in many states. In general election, many opposition parties participated no matter the extent of the vulgarity and impunity of the incumbent. In the LG polls, the situation differs sharply. Election is conducted in several instances without a contender. Ruling parties in the state threatened the opposition to the extent of withdrawal yet, the election continues. While general election has a fixed date for all the contending positions, the LG polls re conducted disjointedly by the state governors based on the convenient time that they feel satisfied that all factors will work towards their ambitious 100% formula of victory. This situation was reported previously by Nwanna (2010), Olasupo & Fayomi (2012) Nwanna,



(2014), Gambo, (2015) Ojebode *et al.* (2017), Olaniyi (2017) and Sambo & Sule, 2020 except that they have not captured the situation after the 2019 General Election and that the methodology used by all the above studies and the theoretical framework all differ from what this work presented.

**Factors Responsible for Perpetration of Fraud in the Post-2019 Local Council Polls**

The informants divested from various perspectives what they believed are the drivers that motivated electoral fraud in the post-2019 General Election. The views are summarised and presented in the tabular form below.

**Table-3: Frequency of the Responses on Factors that are Responsible for the Perpetration of Fraud in the Post-2019 LG Polls**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	Total
1.	Shortcomings of the 1999 Constitution	3(8.57%)	3
2.	Conduct of LG polls by SIECs	19(54.29%)	22
3.	Low level of awareness at the grassroots	4(11.43%)	26
4.	Political apathy after the 2019 General Election	3(8.57%)	29
5.	Emasculation of LGs by state governors	3(8.57%)	32
6.	Weak and disorganised opposition	2(5.71%)	34
7.	Low level of monitoring especially by foreign observers	1(2.86%)	35

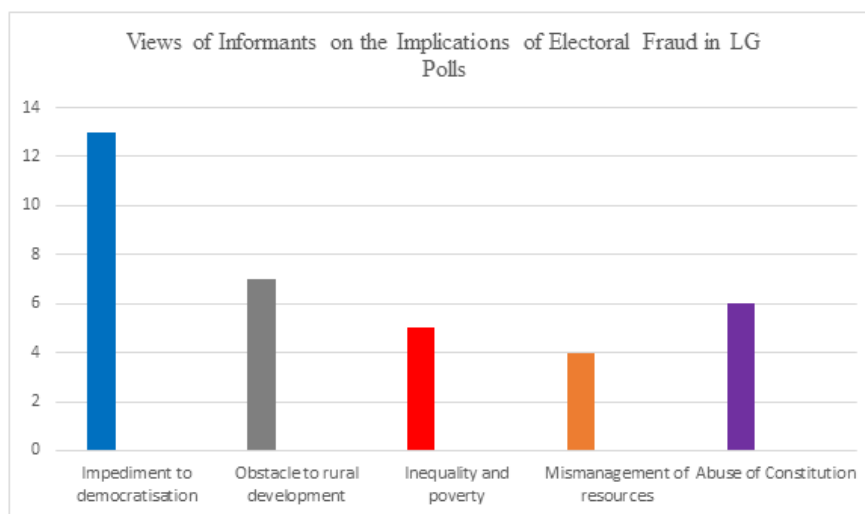
**Source:** Field Survey 2021

From the above figures, it can be inferred that most of the informants from category A to E across the selected seven (7) states believed that the conduct of the LG polls by SIECs is the main factor that is responsible for the electoral fraud at grassroots election. The statement can be correct because INEC has never returned an election with a margin of a 100% victory to any contestant even if he is in the ruling party in its history of the conduct of election. Additionally, as observed by Sambo & Sule (2020), the same LG polls in FCT Abuja which is carried out differently by the INEC instead of SIECs always present a different result from that of states which is perceived to have been the true reflection of what the LG polls might be if the people are allowed to freely exercise their franchise. The condition is critical of what is obtainable in a stiff Game Theory that is deadly with a possible payoff that is typical of Game of Chicken; total collateral outcome

from the clash without regards to the impact on the opponents once the competitor considered himself winning.

**Consequences of Electoral Fraud in Local Council Polls on Nigerian Democracy**

Electoral fraud in the LG polls has numerous consequences. Previous studies Nwanna (2010), Olasupo & Fayomi (2012) Nwanna, (2014), Gambo, (2015) Ojebode *et al.* (2017), Olaniyi (2017) and Sambo & Sule, 2020 affirmed that. Additionally, the responses of the informants also attested to various implications of electoral fraud in the LG election. The views which the informants submitted varied according to their perception, expertise and status. Hence, they are summarised and presented below in a chart form for an easy illustration.



**Fig-2: Views of the Informants on the Implications of Electoral Fraud in the LG Polls in Post-2019 General Election**

**Source:** Field Survey 2021.

The informants in their different narrations concluded that electoral fraud at the grassroots level particularly

the LG polls in Nigeria has many implications on democracy and good governance. They perceived the

problem as an obstacle to grassroots development because the LG resources are now carted away by the states depriving them from undertaking community needs. They also submitted that it is a process that is leading to poverty and inequality because the resources of local areas that should be used for poverty eradication policies are cornered by the state governors for less relevant projects that have little or no direct benefit to the rural populace. This is interpreted as mismanagement of resources and abuse of the Constitution which recognises the offices of the Chairperson and Councillorship but some states spent over two years without conducting the election rendering the Constitution as a suspended article.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper concludes that the LG polls in Nigeria is a typical case of an electoral fraud at the grassroots level have which many several causes and implications. The level of electoral fraud perpetrated at the local council level resembles a miracle that is not ever witnessed in other democracies worldwide. Ruling parties of any type at the state level staged a charade called LG polls and returned results of 100% victory at the behest of the voters and opposition parties. The situation disenfranchised electorates at the grassroots and threatens the democratic institutionalisation in the country. Comparatively, the study found that the elections conducted by INEC even at the LG level as in the case of FCT Abuja presents a more decent and credible posture than what the SIECs are ignominiously executing in the name of LG polls. The entire situation mocked and ridiculed the Nigerian democracy. This scenario cannot simply continue the way it is now. An urgent action must be taken to rescue and safeguard the hard-earned democracy in Nigeria before it is collapse by the nonchalant nondescript attitude of the state governors in the country. Based on the conclusion, the following are recommended as permanent panaceas for addressing squarely the menace of electoral fraud at the LG polls.

1. The Section 3 part II of the Third Schedule of the Constitution should be abrogated to allow the INEC to conduct all elections in Nigeria;
2. The INEC should conduct the General Election in Nigeria to include LG polls together with other elections;
3. The tenure of the Chairperson and Councillor should be articulated clearly in the Constitution to be a four-year term of 2 tenures for the Chairperson and a continuous contest for the Councillor just as obtainable in the Federal and State process;
4. Domestic and international observers as well as civil societies should be encouraged to pay more attention to LG polls more than any other election to block manipulation and
5. Local government should be given full autonomy financially, politically and in all aspects devoid of state control by abolishing joint account.

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