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# Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers and Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: Matters Arising

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the impact of the unwholesome connivance between political buccaneers and operators of state machinery during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The specific objectives of this study are to, examine the effect of transparency on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery and evaluate the effect of accountability on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. The study employed a survey research design, primary data was gathered through a structured questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale. The data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0. The results revealed that transparency has a statistically significant positive effect on the performance of state machinery operators, suggesting that increased transparency enhances their effectiveness and integrity. Conversely, accountability did not show a statistically significant effect on the operators, indicating that merely having accountability measures in place may not be sufficient without effective enforcement and a supportive governance structure. The study concluded that the Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers has a significant effect on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. The study recommended that it is crucial to implement and strengthen mechanisms that promote transparency in the electoral process and a review of existing accountability mechanisms to identify and address the factors limiting their effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** *Buccaneers, Machinery, Operators, Political, State*

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## 1. Introduction

The conduct of elections is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, serving as the mechanism through which the will of the people is expressed and political legitimacy is conferred. In Nigeria, however, the integrity of this process has often been undermined by various malpractices (Uwaezuoke and Nwobu 2023). The 2023 General Elections have brought significant issues related to the unwholesome connivance of political buccaneers and operators of state machinery. This connivance has raised pressing concerns about the electoral process's fairness, transparency, and overall credibility. Political buccaneers, often influential figures who leverage their wealth and connections to manipulate political outcomes, have long been a fixture in Nigeria's political landscape (Ukpong, & Udoh, 2023). These individuals and groups exert substantial influence over electoral processes, employing tactics such as vote-buying, intimidation, and the orchestration of electoral fraud to secure favorable results. The collusion of state machinery operators often facilitates their actions—officials and institutions tasked with overseeing the conduct of elections, may engage in or turn a blind eye to corrupt practices due to political pressures or personal gain (Tsaro 2023).

The 2023 elections have highlighted several instances where this connivance has been particularly evident, leading to widespread allegations of malpractice. The misuse of state resources, manipulation of voter registrations, and interference with the

dissemination of results are just a few examples of how these actors have sought to subvert the democratic process (Sule, et al 2018). These actions not only distort the electoral outcomes but also erode public confidence in the democratic system, fostering a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment among the electorate. This study aims to examine the effects of these unwholesome practices on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, exploring the mechanisms through which political buccaneers and state machinery operators collude, the impact of their actions on election outcomes, and the broader implications for democratic governance in the country (Steve, et al, 2019). By scrutinizing the legal and institutional frameworks in place, analyzing specific case studies, and considering the responses of various stakeholders, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced and to offer recommendations for strengthening electoral integrity in future elections.

As Nigeria continues to grapple with these issues, addressing the connivance between political buccaneers and state machinery operators is crucial for ensuring that elections genuinely reflect the will of the people and uphold the principles of democracy. This study underscores the importance of concerted efforts to reform and reinforce the electoral system, aiming to foster a political environment where the true democratic values of fairness, transparency, and accountability can thrive.

#### A. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of the Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers and Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: Matters Arising. The specific objectives of this study are to;

- 1) Examine the effect of transparency on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.
- 2) Evaluate the effect of accountability on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.

#### B. Hypotheses of the Study

- 1) Transparency has no significant effect on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.
- 2) Accountability has no significant effect on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.

### Review of Related Literature

#### Conceptual Review

##### *Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers*

Unwholesome connivance refers to a collaborative and often covert engagement between individuals or groups with vested interests to achieve outcomes that are unethical, illegal, or detrimental to the public good. This concept is particularly pertinent in political contexts, where it involves the clandestine cooperation between powerful actors - such as political elites, business magnates, and state officials - to manipulate processes and structures for personal or collective gain at the expense of fairness, legality, and integrity (Oyero, 2023). The term "political buccaneers" refers to individuals or groups who exploit political systems for personal gain, often through unethical or illegal means. In the context of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the unwholesome connivance of such political buccaneers was a significant concern, impacting the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. This connivance involved various actors and manifested in multiple ways, including election rigging, voter intimidation, corruption, and manipulation of state resources (Otache, 2023).

The unwholesome connivance of political buccaneers refers to the unethical and often illegal collaboration between powerful political actors and various stakeholders to manipulate political processes for personal or partisan gain. These political buccaneers, characterized by their aggressive, opportunistic, and unscrupulous methods, engage in corrupt practices that undermine democratic principles and the integrity of governance structures (Ojukwu, 2023). The unwholesome connivance of political buccaneers in

Nigeria's 2023 general elections presents significant challenges to the country's democratic development. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing electoral integrity, strengthening institutions, and promoting accountability (Lambe, et al 2023). By tackling the root causes of political corruption and ensuring that elections are free, fair, and credible, Nigeria can move towards a more robust and resilient democracy.

#### *Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections*

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were pivotal, showcasing both the progress and challenges within the country's democratic processes. The conduct of these elections brought several critical matters to the forefront, particularly concerning the roles and actions of the operators of state machinery. Key issues included the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the influence of security agencies, the judiciary's involvement, and the overarching impact of political dynamics (Oguntola, 2022).

##### *a) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)*

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Abudulsalami Abubakar founded it in 1998 before Nigeria became military. Nigerian elections are administered by INEC (Charles, et al., 2020). As Nigeria's election arbiter, it oversees all elections. INEC operates independently of the government. INEC performs crucial duties (Ijaseun, 2023). INEC personnel teach voters to prevent errors while voting. This is done by orienting voters on how to thumbprint the ballot paper to eliminate errors, avoid duplicate voting, and fold it to prevent ink discoloration. This may be done via media, churches, workplaces, and markets (Umeh, 2021). INEC uses ad-hoc workers during elections due to the limited number of officials and large population in Nigeria. Before elections, these workers must be thoroughly taught to prevent errors while calculating results. Does INEC adequately educate these people? Some of the 2023 election anomalies and cancellations indicate that INEC failed its role. Voter education and awareness campaigns for women, youth, and marginalized groups are needed to guarantee legitimate elections (Ibeanu, 2022).

The INEC was under intense scrutiny for its preparation and execution of the electoral process. Key aspects evaluated included:

- i. Voter Registration and Education: The continuous voter registration exercise and the distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) were significant undertakings. While the INEC made efforts to ensure comprehensive voter registration, logistical challenges and allegations of disenfranchisement in certain regions were reported.
- ii. Election Day Logistics: The timely arrival of election materials and the efficiency of polling station operations were critical. Despite improvements in some areas, delays and logistical shortcomings were noted, particularly in remote regions.
- iii. Technology Integration: The use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results were introduced to enhance transparency. However, technical glitches and allegations of tampering raised concerns about the system's reliability.

##### *b) Security Agencies*

###### *Role and Conduct*

Security agencies, including the police and military, played a crucial role in maintaining order during the elections. Their involvement was intended to safeguard the process and ensure peaceful conduct. However, their actions were sometimes controversial:

- a) **Intimidation and Harassment:** Reports of security personnel intimidating voters, opposition candidates, and activists were widespread. Instances of excessive force and arbitrary arrests were particularly concerning.
- b) **Security of Electoral Materials:** Ensuring the safe transportation and protection of electoral materials was a key responsibility. Despite efforts to prevent tampering and violence, there were instances where materials were reportedly seized or destroyed.

**Balancing Act** The delicate balance between providing security and maintaining neutrality was a significant challenge for security agencies. Their perceived alignment with certain political interests undermined public trust and raised questions about their impartiality.

#### c) *Judiciary*

##### Adjudication of Disputes

The judiciary's role in adjudicating electoral disputes was crucial for upholding the rule of law. Post-election petitions and litigations were abundant, reflecting the contentious nature of the elections. Key considerations included:

- 1) **Speed and Efficiency:** The timely resolution of electoral disputes was essential for maintaining political stability. Delays and prolonged court cases often exacerbated tensions and uncertainty.
- 2) **Impartiality and Fairness:** The judiciary's ability to remain impartial and deliver fair judgments was under scrutiny. Allegations of judicial corruption and political influence tainted public perception of the judiciary's independence.

##### Political Dynamics

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##### Political Dynamics

##### Influence and Interference

The overarching political environment significantly influenced the conduct of the elections. Key dynamics included:

- 1) **Incumbency Advantage:** The incumbency advantage was evident, with state resources allegedly used to influence the electoral outcome. This included leveraging public funds and state apparatus for campaign purposes.
- 2) **Opposition Challenges:** Opposition parties faced significant hurdles, from limited access to media and funding to targeted harassment. These challenges underscored the need for a more level playing field in Nigerian politics.

##### Civil Society and International Observers

The role of civil society organizations and international observers was vital in monitoring the elections and advocating for fair practices. Their reports and recommendations highlighted both improvements and areas needing reform, contributing to the broader discourse on democratic development in Nigeria (Berebon 2023). The 2023 general elections in Nigeria highlighted the complexities and challenges inherent in the country's democratic process. While there were notable efforts to improve transparency and inclusiveness, significant issues persisted. The conduct of state machinery operators, including the INEC, security agencies, and the judiciary, played a crucial role in shaping the electoral landscape. Addressing the matters arising from these elections is essential for strengthening Nigeria's democracy and ensuring the credibility and fairness of future electoral processes (Dike 2023).

### *Transparency*

The INEC's commitment to transparency was questioned, with allegations of bias and corruption surfacing. Observers and civil society organizations called for more robust measures to ensure the was impeded by insecurity in some parts of the country. Abuse of incumbency by various political officeholders distorted the playing field and widespread vote buying detracted from the appropriate conduct of the elections. Incidents of organised violence shortly before and on election days in several states created an environment deterring voter participation (Idowu 2022).

The media heightened voter awareness, fact-checkers countered deception, and civil society called for INEC's accountability. The aggregate results of the polls confirm the persistent under-representation of marginalised groups in political affairs. The analysis indicates that Nigeria's electoral regulations include numerous deficiencies that jeopardise democracy and electoral transparency (Lambe, et al 2023). The bias of the INEC and the lack of independent bodies to enforce penalties for electoral misconduct are two of the six critical challenges for reform identified in the report. The deficiencies also infringe upon the political rights of Nigerians to vote and assemble. Notwithstanding INEC's initiatives to bolster public confidence, such as the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV), the report asserts that the absence of transparency and the protracted delay in announcing presidential results significantly undermined any residual public trust (Oguntola, 2022). On election day, numerous thefts, disruptions, and breaches of established protocols significantly undermined public trust. On March 1, 2023, INEC declared Bola Tinubu as the president-elect, with his party maintaining a parliamentary majority. The announcement elicited condemnation from former Nigerian Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who deemed the election "neither free nor fair." Subsequent to the results, other outcomes were litigated, further contributing to public scepticism towards the organisation. The EU has implored all pertinent stakeholders to protect voter interests by resolving ambiguities in electoral regulations and establishing dependable voting processes that address the needs of women, youth, and marginalised groups. (Ojukwu, et al 2023).

### *Electoral Accountability*

Accountability in an election process ensures those who conduct elections do so in compliance with the election legislation and relevant procedures, and in a manner that promotes the integrity of the process. Electoral accountability is the act where leaders and policymakers are held accountable for their performance and are either rewarded or punished in the elections, through voter results (Edyegu, 2019). Studies have shown that electoral accountability can inevitably lead to better governance and improved government services, as improved service delivery would be crucial if they are to retain their voter base (Ashworth, 2012). Free and fair elections create a positive relationship between elected authorities and citizens. When there is electoral accountability, ensured by the principle of competitive free, and fair elections, feelings of trust are created within the electoral process. As a result, there is a need for electoral accountability as it legitimizes state authorities, creates a stable political environment, and can potentially increase voter turnout. When there is poor electoral accountability, which has been a prominent feature in Africa's past, state legitimacy is lost, which can create a conflictual internal political environment. In 2017, Kenya's most recent election results led to post-electoral violence, which resulted in several deaths in several cities. Post-electoral violence in Kenya is attributed to perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the electoral process. The opposition leader, Raila Odinga accused the electoral commission of falsifying the results. Many shared his view and as a result, led to distrust and violence (Financial Times, 2020).

In Nigeria's 2011 state-level and national elections, over 800 Nigerians died as a result of post- electoral violence (Edyegu, 2019). According to Al Jazeera, the elections were "amongst the fairest in Nigeria's history" (2011). Despite this, perceptions of alleged

rigging of results resulted in post- electoral violence. In both cases, low trust between citizens and public officials in the electoral process led to a conflictual electoral process and outcome. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions mandated to safeguard a country's democracy, such as electoral commissions, to ensure transparent, competitive, free, and fair elections which ultimately improve electoral accountability and prevent negative electoral political outcomes (Umeh, 2021). Electoral accountability is crucial for state stability, security, and improved government services. First, for state legitimacy to occur, there is a need for competitive, open, free, and fair elections. Second, free and fair elections allow for increased trust between citizens and political authorities, which could ultimately lead to increased voter turnout (Uzoanya, 2023).

Lastly, accountable election processes allow for accepted electoral outcomes as they mitigate perceptions of vote rigging. Fair and accountable election processes will ultimately result in legitimizing the authority of the state, state stability, and improved government efficiency. When looking at the negative effects of poor electoral processes and low levels of electoral. Accountability is crucial for policymakers to research the effectiveness of current processes and find ways in which electoral accountability can be enhanced even further.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Rational Choice Theory (RCT)*

The rational choice theory (RCT) elucidates human conduct, as well as economic and social actions. Elster (1989) asserted that the Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals, when confronted with multiple options, tend to select the one they believe will yield the most favourable outcome. Friedman (1953) observed that the RCT characterises "rationality" as the behaviour of individuals who weigh costs against advantages to determine actions that optimise personal advantage. Rational choice originated in the 1950s and 1960s as a consequence of the behavioural revolution in American political science, which sought to examine human behaviour through empirical methods. Downs (1957) was the inaugural scholar to implement the Rational Choice Theory in the context of political party competition and electoral conduct. Hinich and Munger (1997) evaluated his research and significantly advanced electoral studies. The fundamental premise of rational choice theorists is individualism. They assert that individuals bear ultimate responsibility for decision-making as participants in society. Furthermore, they function as rational entities, driven by self-interest, self-optimization, and self-assessment, resulting in enhanced societal results from these individual behaviours. (Ogu, 2013).

The RCT is advocated as a paradigm for a deductive approach in political analysis due to its strengths. Besker (1976) characterised the rational choice model as a comprehensive foundation for comprehending all human action. Rogowski (1997) said that the model is highly rigorous and constitutes a theory broadly applicable to social action in this century. Hirshleifer (1985) characterised it as a universal language of social science. Additional advantages of the RCT, as analysed by Ogu (2013), include generalisability, predictability, and parsimony. Numerous scholars and critics have identified particular shortcomings of the RCT, including: the complexity of human interaction and social behaviour, which may be better elucidated by alternative theories; difficulties arising from inadequate information and ambiguity; the influence of entrenched habits and norms on behaviour, which can drive substantial social actions; and the implications of incorporating all deliberate actions within rational choice, highlighting how the criteria for defining rationality are established. (Ogu, 2013).

### **Empirical Review**

Tsaro (2023) did a study on voters' disposition and the outcome of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The aim was to examine the voters' temperament and its influence on the presidential election. The research technique employed a qualitative secondary research approach and utilised grounded theory as the strategy of inquiry. The study

employed rational choice theory (RCT) as its theoretical foundation. The study revealed that voters were significantly motivated to engage in the electoral process due to effective voter education, the commitment to utilise technology such as the INEC Voter Enrolment Device (IVED), the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter accreditation and result transmission, and the INEC Results Viewing (IReV) portal, which provides public access to real-time polling unit results. Despite the voters' inclination greatly impacting the outcome of the presidential election, INEC did not fulfil its commitments and altered the regulations during the process.

Uwaezuoke and Nwobu (2023) did a study on the ironic application of the BVAS during Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election. The objective is to assess the extent to which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has upheld its commitment to conducting free, fair, and credible elections in 2023 by examining events before and occurring during the Presidential election in relation to the commission's established guiding principles. It employs a qualitative research design, facilitating the description and interpretation of the data. This study examines Nigeria's electoral system from 2015 to the present, analyses the significance of BVAS technology for the 2023 election, and elucidates INEC's terminology in selecting its guiding principles. Data for analysis comprises excerpts from statements made by the INEC chairman prior to the 2023 election and remarks by persons regarding events that transpired during the presidential election. The outcome indicates certain ironic aspects in INEC's commitment to executing free, fair, and credible elections. The ultimate function of the BVAS, which proposed the real-time transmission of Polling Unit results to the INEC Result Verification (IReV) portal for streamlined verification during collation, was disregarded for the Presidential election on February 25, 2023, contrary to INEC's commitment to a transparent election.

Berebon C. B. (2023) did a study on addressing electoral challenges in Nigeria, analysing the 2023 general elections and the role of INEC. Nigerian elections have been significantly marred by extensive violence, ballot manipulation, vote purchasing, and fatalities—elements that have persistently obstructed the nation from executing really free and fair elections. Prior to the 2023 elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission documented assaults on a minimum of 53 of its offices around the country, with violence continuing unabated. This article is to critically examine the obstacles to peaceful elections, clarifying their root causes and suggesting measures to promote transparent and trustworthy electoral processes in Nigeria. The article asserts, through critical analysis, that several stakeholders—politicians, citizens, INEC, the court, and the government—must assume responsibility for the effective execution of elections. Moreover, it promotes the implementation of techniques similar to those utilised by successful nations such as Senegal, Angola, and Kenya during their electoral processes.

Ojukwu et al. (2023) did a study on the democracy and the 2023 general elections in Nigeria: retrospect and prospects. Utilising a qualitative methodology that incorporates data obtained from secondary sources alongside historical analysis. The study revealed that the election did not meet the legitimate and reasonable expectations of Nigerian citizens, as multiple accredited election observation organisations indicated that the credibility of the 2023 election was significantly compromised by various deficiencies in election administration, including ineffective management of permanent voter card (PVC) distribution, inadequate operational and logistical arrangements, malfunctioning election technology, occurrences of vote manipulation, political violence, a non-transparent results collation and declaration process, and deficient crisis communication. Additionally, Nigeria also confronts significant challenges, including pervasive poverty, corruption, insecurity, and a deficient electoral infrastructure that has impeded voter turnout in previous elections. The report thus proposed, among other measures: enhancing the autonomy of the electoral authority, implementing safeguards to guarantee the election is devoid of fraud and manipulation, and guaranteeing that the election accurately represents the will of the populace. Implementing these techniques will enhance the

success of future general elections in Nigeria, resulting in improved democracy and a more stable post-election environment.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The project will employ survey research, utilising a standardised questionnaire to gather primary data. The research population comprised the personnel from specified governmental sectors in Nigeria. The sampling using a purposive sampling method. The sample size was determined to be 217, ensuring statistical competence to achieve a power of 0.8 with an alpha of 0.05. Of the 217 respondents, consisting of staff from the designated public sector to whom the research questionnaire was issued, only 168 questionnaires were returned to the researchers. The response rate of the respondents is 77.4%. The remaining 22.6% was deemed unusable due to incomplete responses, as certain items were left unanswered by the respondents (missing values). The study analysed a total of 168 questionnaires.

Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, detailing their age, gender, educational qualifications, professional roles, and years of work experience pertinent to this study. Furthermore, in this work, we evaluated the conceptual foundations of the hypothesis utilising Smart PLS version 4.0. The analysis was delivered clearly and methodically, facilitating understanding of the conceptual framework and outcomes.

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	112	66.7%
	Female	56	133.3%
Age(yrs.)	<25yrs	27	16.1%
	25-34yrs	61	36.3%
	35-44yrs	51	30.4%
	>45yrs	29	17.3%
Educational Qualification	NCE/OND	47	27.9%
	B.Sc	84	50%
	MSc/MBA	37	22.1%
Professional Role		33	19.6%
		93	55.4%
		42	25%
Experience (yrs)	1-09yrs	71	42.3%
	10-19yrs	45	26.8%
	20-29yrs	32	19%
	30yrs>	20	11.9%



### Quantification

The study included a 4-point Likert scale ranging from High (4) to Moderate to No (1). The 4-point Likert scale was utilised due of its ease of response and less time commitment compared to open-ended questions. The subsequent proxies were employed to assess the variables of institutional elements. Organisational structure, internal structure, staff competency, and institutional culture serve as indicators of organisational variables, whilst political leadership, political stability, and political climate function as proxies for assessing political factors.

### 3. Results

The study employed PLS-SEM utilising primary data to investigate the direct relationship between institutional and political elements in the design and execution of public sector financial management reforms. Structural equation models were analysed using SmartPLS 4.0. Assessment of the model via an algorithm to elucidate the variance of the dependent construct. The construction score was initially assessed. The final estimation from external loading was determined as the structural model of the path coefficient, yielding the R-squared value of the endogenous latent variable.

**Table 2.** Validity and Reliability Test

Latent Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Transparency	0.733	0.701	0.83 1	0.622
Accountability	0.787	0.787	0.859	0.604
Operators of State Machinery	0.734	0.739	0.827	0.618

Smart PLS yields three principal findings: R-squared values for latent variables, path coefficients for the structural model, and outer loadings for the measurement model. The evaluation of the measurement incorporates the reliability of individual indicators, the average extracted variance, and the composite reliability of internal consistency testing. Hypothesis testing evaluates the structural relationships between constructs to ascertain their validity and reliability. The Cronbach alpha, or composite reliability, value exceeds 0.7, indicating good quality and reliability of the results. A reliability test score over 0.7 signifies a high and satisfactory value. To ascertain convergent validity, examine the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Table 2 demonstrates that the AVE value exceeds 0.5, indicating that the results are satisfactory.

To assess the discriminant validity of the three variables utilised in the study, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) analysis was conducted as presented in Table 3, while the Fornell-Larcker criterion was evaluated in Table 4.

## Model Assessment

**Table 3.** Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

S/N		Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio
1	Transparency <-> Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria	0.567
2	Accountability <-> Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria	0.419

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Design and implementation of public sector fin. Mgt reform.	Institutional Factor	Political Factor
Design and implementation of public sector fin. Mgt reform.	0.756		
Institutional Factor	0.623	0.771	
Political Factor	0.234	0.355	0.419

The confirmatory factor analysis's findings, which are presented in Table 3, support the empirical evidence for the majority of the variables' uniqueness. It is important to note that the aforementioned table does not show discriminant validity issues by the HTMT<sub>0.85</sub> criterion. This suggests that collinearity issues between latent constructs were not detected by the HTMT criteria.

**Table 5.** Factor loadings of the measurement items

	Transparency	Accountability	Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria
TR1	0.648		
TR2	0.867		
TR3	0.827		
AC1		0.771	
AC2		0.787	
AC3		0.809	
AC4		0.740	
OSM1			0.754
OSM2			0.838
OSM3			0.773

#### 4. Discussion

##### Structural Equation Modeling

In Smart-PLS, the measurement model and structural model are typically the initial two phases employed to assess the influence of predictor factors on the outcome variable. Several criteria, including construct validity and dependability, have already been addressed. Furthermore, the structural modelling equation presents R square to indicate the predictive capacity of the predictor factors on the result variables. The R-squared value for the model is 0.497, signifying that 49.7% of the variation in the Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria is attributable to Transparency and Accountability.

The model fit was tested for the model using the SRMR value which is 0.028 respectively. This means that the model is a good fit.

**Table 6.** The Direct Effect of Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers and Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: Matters Arising.

	Original sample (O)	<->	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics (IO/STDEVI)	P values
Transparency Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria	0.686	<->	0.683	0.084	8.193	0.000
Accountability Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria	-0.009	<-	0.020	0.081	0.106	0.916

### Summary of findings

The study sought to examine the impact of the detrimental collusion between political opportunists and state machinery operators on the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 general elections: issues arising. The HTMT results in Table 3 demonstrate that the variables are associated; nevertheless, multicollinearity among the variables is absent. Table 6 demonstrates that at a 5% significance level, there is a statistically significant positive effect of Transparency on Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria. The results demonstrate that accountability does not exert a statistically meaningful impact on the Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria.

- 1) Transparency has no significant effect on Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria.  
[ $\beta=0.686$ ; T-Statistic = 8.193; P values  $<0.0011$   
[R-Squared 0.497 (49.7%); SMRM = 0.0028  $<0.1$ ]
- 2) Accountability has no significant effect on Operators of State Machinery in Nigeria.  
[ $\beta=-0.009$ ; T-Statistic = 0.106; P values =0.916]  
[R-Squared 0.497 (49.7%); SMRM 0.0028  $<0.1$ ]

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the interplay between political buccaneers and the operators of state machinery in Nigeria's 2023 general elections has raised several critical issues. The findings indicate that transparency plays a statistically significant positive role in influencing the behavior and effectiveness of state machinery operators. This suggests that when electoral processes and operations are conducted transparently, there is a notable improvement in the performance and integrity of state machinery operators. Transparency fosters trust reduces corruption, and enhances the legitimacy of the electoral process, thereby contributing to a more robust and credible democracy.

On the other hand, accountability does not exhibit a statistically significant effect on the operators of state machinery in Nigeria. This implies that despite the emphasis on accountability as a cornerstone of good governance, its practical impact on state operators during the election period may be limited. Various factors, such as weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of political will, or systemic issues within the governance structure, could be contributing to this lack of significance. Overall, the findings highlight the crucial role of transparency in improving the conduct of elections and the performance of state machinery operators. However, the limited impact of accountability suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach to governance reforms. Ensuring that accountability measures are effectively implemented and enforced is essential for fostering a political environment where both transparency and accountability can jointly enhance the integrity and effectiveness of electoral processes in Nigeria. The study concluded that Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers has a significant effect on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

### Conclusion

Based on the findings regarding the effect of the unwholesome connivance of political buccaneers and operators of state machinery in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, several recommendations can be made to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of future electoral processes.

- i. Given the statistically significant positive effect of transparency on the operators of state machinery, it is crucial to implement and strengthen mechanisms that promote transparency in the electoral process. This can include the use of technology for real-time reporting, transparent procurement processes for election materials, and open access to electoral data for monitoring by independent bodies and the public.
- ii. Although accountability did not show a statistically significant effect, it remains a critical component of good governance. There should be a review of existing accountability mechanisms to identify and address the factors limiting their effectiveness. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, ensuring timely and impartial

investigations, and holding perpetrators of electoral malpractice accountable can improve the overall governance environment

#### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the interplay between political buccaneers and the operators of state machinery in Nigeria's 2023 general elections has raised several critical issues. The findings indicate that transparency plays a statistically significant positive role in influencing the behavior and effectiveness of state machinery operators. This suggests that when electoral processes and operations are conducted transparently, there is a notable improvement in the performance and integrity of state machinery operators. Transparency fosters trust, reduces corruption, and enhances the legitimacy of the electoral process, thereby contributing to a more robust and credible democracy.

On the other hand, accountability does not exhibit a statistically significant effect on the operators of state machinery in Nigeria. This implies that despite the emphasis on accountability as a cornerstone of good governance, its practical impact on state operators during the election period may be limited. Various factors, such as weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of political will, or systemic issues within the governance structure, could be contributing to this lack of significance. Overall, the findings highlight the crucial role of transparency in improving the conduct of elections and the performance of state machinery operators. However, the limited impact of accountability suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach to governance reforms. Ensuring that accountability measures are effectively implemented and enforced is essential for fostering a political environment where both transparency and accountability can jointly enhance the integrity and effectiveness of electoral processes in Nigeria. The study concluded that Unwholesome Connivance of Political Buccaneers has a significant effect on the outcome of Operators of State Machinery in the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

#### **5. Conclusion**

Based on the findings regarding the effect of the unwholesome connivance of political buccaneers and operators of state machinery in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, several recommendations can be made to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of future electoral processes.

1. Given the statistically significant positive effect of transparency on the operators of state machinery, it is crucial to implement and strengthen mechanisms that promote transparency in the electoral process. This can include the use of technology for real-time reporting, transparent procurement processes for election materials, and open access to electoral data for monitoring by independent bodies and the public.
2. Although accountability did not show a statistically significant effect, it remains a critical component of good governance. There should be a review of existing accountability mechanisms to identify and address the factors limiting their effectiveness. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, ensuring timely and impartial investigations, and holding perpetrators of electoral malpractice accountable can improve the overall governance environment.

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