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Questioning American model for African electoral democracy: insights from the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 US presidential elections

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America's electoral democracy is widely regarded as one of the best models for African states even though the United States did not colonise any country on the continent. For example, Britain, Nigeria's colonial master, at the independence of the latter in 1960, bequeathed it a parliamentary model fashioned after the former's Whitehall model. However, Nigeria adopted the American presidential model of democracy for its Second Republic which started in 1979 and the country has kept faith with this model. Jettisoning the British parliamentary system, adopting and sticking to the American presidential model since 1979 can be viewed as an affirmation of the notion that the United States offers Nigeria the best democratic model. With very few exceptions, Nigerian presidential elections failed the tests of integrity when compared with elections in the American political system. The 2023 presidential election was criticized locally and globally for entrenching divisions among the people instead of facilitating an orderly transfer of political power necessary for democratic consolidation, especially when evaluated in the lights of the American experience. However, events leading to the 2024 American presidential elections have created a reverse thought on the status of the United States as the model for the Nigerian state to emulate given a wide range of similarities between the two presidential elections. The study reviewed secondary data on the events surrounding the two presidential elections and concluded that Nigeria needs to reevaluate its presidential system to take cognizance of historical experiences.

KEYWORDS

African electoral democracy, elections, Nigeria, presidential system, United States

Introduction

The Scramble for Africa in the late 19th century led to the colonization of the continent by major European powers including Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Belgium (Adenuga, 2018). At independence in the 20th century, most African states adopted the system of government in practice in the home countries of their former colonial overlords. Thus, while the likes of Nigeria and Ghana had a parliamentary system patterned after the British Whitehall model, Niger, Mali and Senegal adopted the French parliamentary system of government. However, by the turn of the 20th century, many African countries have adopted the American presidential model as the preferred system of democratic governance (Prempeh, 2008; Sundquist, 2016). The growing popularity of the American presidential system, eclipsing the influence of former European colonial powers, may be ascribed to the acknowledgement of the United States as the bastion of democracy in the modern world. The United States has

consistently promoted democracy on the African continent and has made it a major condition for its interactions with African states (Enemuwe, 2024; Fajimbola, 2024).

Nigeria, the most populous country and the largest economy on the African continent, has a political system that is largely patterned after the American model. Granted that the country was bequeathed a federal structure by the British before its independence in 1960, the federal arrangement became more attuned to the federal structure of the United States with the commencement of the Second Republic in 1979. The 1979 Nigerian constitution adopted the American presidential system of government, signaling a rejection of the British parliamentary model that was in practice in its first republic (1960–1966). The 1999 Nigerian constitution retained the presidential system and thus, it is safe to conclude that the United States became the model for the Nigerian state (Adenuga, 2020; Enemuwe, 2024).

A major feature of the electoral process in both the United States and Nigeria is regular elections to choose representatives. Citizens in both countries go to the polls every 4 years to select their leaders in general and popular elections. However, while the United States has a culture of electoral excellence extending back to the 18th century (Linegar and Alvarez, 2024), elections in Nigeria have always been fraught with irregularities leading to the challenge of legitimacy for Nigerian governments (Adenuga and Agoro, 2021; Adenuga et al., 2022). Since its switch to the presidential system in 1979, literature has been awash with calls for Nigeria to fully understudy democratic practices in the United States, especially the conducts of elections, to achieve true democracy (Carbone and Cassani, 2016; Kerry, 2021; Isiaq et al., 2018; Okolie et al., 2021). However, growing democratic crises in the conduct of elections in the United States from the beginning of the 20th century have called into question the modeling of the Nigerian electoral system after the American template. It has thus become imperative to analyze the electioneering processes in both countries, study their shortcomings and determine whether the American template remains valid as the model for Nigeria. While the discourse will bring historical accounts into cognizance, major focus will be on the Nigerian 2023 and American 2024 presidential elections. The study critically examined published works on these elections to arrive at a comparative analysis of these American and Nigerian electoral processes.

The study is structured into six sections with the introduction as the first followed by a conceptual and theoretical framework. The third section analyses the 2023 Nigerian presidential election while the fourth section critically examines the 2024 American presidential election. The fifth section conducts a comparative analysis of the two elections and the sixth section concludes and makes recommendations.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Elections, electoral process and the presidential system

Elections are perhaps the most distinguishing features of representative democracy. It refers to the formalized process through which the people of a political community choose individuals to occupy public offices and take decisions on their behalf. Elections can take many forms and styles but they should be characterized by

regularity, specificity in terms of period, and most importantly should reflect the will of the people. Hence the quality of an election is determined by the level of freedom given to the electorate to express their choices and the fairness of the process (Fagbadebo, 2020; Mackenzie, 2024).

The electoral process refers to the constitutional, institutional and comprehensive arrangement of conducting elections. It encompasses the whole gamut of electing individuals into public offices including the determination of the electoral management bodies, verification of eligibility for participation in the election either as a voter or a candidate, declarations of interests, nominations of candidates, primary elections, electoral system, counting of votes, declaration of winners and the process for legal redress. The quality of an electoral process is adjudged based on its competitiveness, fairness, impartiality, and transparency across the entire electoral cycle (Fagbadebo, 2020; Mackenzie, 2024; Norris, 2014).

The presidential system, viewed in the context of interrelations between the three arms of government, is identified by a clear separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary. In this system, the president is both the head of state and head of government, and is elected directly by the people with a fixed term of office. In Nigeria and the United States, presidential elections hold every 4 years with the winner to spend 4 years as the term of office (Fagbadebo, 2020).

Theory of historical institutionalism

The study is premised on the theory of historical institutionalism. Historical institutionalism, popularized by scholars including Theda Skocpol and Paul Pierson, argues that institutions, systems and processes are best understood in their historical contexts reflecting their development and explaining their natures (Greener and Powell, 2024). While this theory has been criticized for being overly deterministic, it provides a platform for understanding the historical contexts of the electoral processes and systems in Nigeria and the United States. Peter Ekeh in his inaugural lecture on colonialism and social structure in Africa, had shown that a major consequence of colonialism and neocolonialism on Africa was the wholesale importation of Western structures and institutions without taking into cognizance the peculiar milieu of the African continent leading to warped processes, structures and institutions that outwardly resemble those in the Western world but lack the basic elements needed for their workability (Okedele and Adenuga, 2020a). In this context, the American presidential system was copied wholesale in Nigeria without taking into cognizance how the system was developed in the United States leading to the absence of core values needed for its success in the country. The system was developed in the United States after the 1776 Revolution of Independence and various reforms to strengthen systemic capacity supporting the sovereignty of electorates makes it distinct from its copies.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election

Elections in Nigeria have always been accompanied by the politics of ethnicity, regionalism and religion leading to greater acrimonious

relations between the groups making up the country (Adenuga, 2022; Abumbe and Owa, 2024). Elections in Nigeria are often turned into battlegrounds where ethnic groups, the three main regions (North, East, and West) and religious groups slug it out to achieve greater access to control the resources of the country (Adenuga et al., 2023). The three main political parties in Nigeria's First Republic were essentially operated as regional parties with each closely guarding its turf against incursions from other political parties. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), as the name implied was the main political party in Northern Nigeria. The Action Group (AG) metamorphosed from a Yoruba socio-cultural group, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, and reigned supreme in Western Nigeria where the Yoruba ethnic group is dominant. The National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), which had started out as a national party, had become the party for Eastern Nigeria. The 1959 general elections witnessed the three main political parties garnering overwhelming majority votes in their regional bases. However, during the 1964/65 general elections, there were alleged attempts by the NPC, which was in control of the Federal Government, to install its puppets as the governing body in the Western Region. The supporters of the AG fought tooth and nail to resist the alleged take-over of its regional base. The military coup which ended the Republic on January 16 1966 was in response to the spreading acrimony arising from the conduct of the election (Adenuga et al., 2022; Kirk-Greene, 2022; Ojo, 2017).

The Second Republic, which commenced in October 1979, also had all the imprints of the divisive forces of ethnicity, regionalism and religion. Despite the creation of states and the adoption of the American presidential system as strategies to foster national unity, political parties still had all the trappings of ethnic, regional and religious affiliations. The three main political parties in the 1979 presidential election, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) were perceived as the reincarnations of the NPC, AG and NCNC, respectively. This belief was also reinforced by the fact that the regional ethnic elite classes that controlled the political parties in the First Republic were also dictating terms for the perceived offshoots of the parties in the Second Republic. In the same vein, in the 1979 general elections, the three main political parties also secured majority votes in the same areas controlled by their perceived forerunners. The 1979 was allegedly rigged to ensure the victory of the presidential candidate of the NPN. The same scenario that spelled the death knell of the First Republic reoccurred in the 1983 general elections which were also allegedly rigged in the states making up the old Western Region to displace the UPN Governors and impose the candidates of the NPN. The resultant anarchy in the region as a result of the election was the major reason given for the December 1983 military coup which swept away the Republic (Adenuga et al., 2022; Isiaq et al., 2018; Ojukwu and Oluwole, 2016; Omotola, 2021; Salawu and Hassan, 2011).

The Ibrahim Babangida military regime, in the early 1990s, attempted to chart a way from the path of divisive elections by fostering a two party arrangement in the country. The military government sponsored the creation of both the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC) with national outlooks. However, the forces of ethnicity, regionalism and religion still permeated the electioneering process as major media attention was beamed on the ethnic, regional and religious affiliations of the presidential candidates. These forces were also largely responsible for the cancellation of the presidential elections, the

abortion of the Republic and the social unrest that was generated in its wake (Adenuga et al., 2022; Isiaq et al., 2018; Omotola, 2021).

Nigeria's Fourth Republic commenced on May 29, 1999 with the swearing of Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired General, former Head of State and the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), as President. However it was alleged that the outgoing military regime rigged the election to favour Obasanjo as it was thought that in *esprit de corps*, he would not probe past military administrations and would function as a modern day Cincinnatus (Adenuga, 2009; Adesola and Ako-Nai, 2010). After 8 years in the saddle, Obasanjo in 2007 oversaw an electoral process that has been described as the worst in the annals of elections in the country. He was quoted to have stated that he was embarking on a "do and die" affair to get his preferred candidate, Umaru Yar'Adua, installed as his successor. After winning the presidential election, Yar'Adua acknowledged that he was the beneficiary of a flawed electoral process and promised to reform the process to make elections in the country freer and fairer (Adebiyi and Raheem, 2022; Isiaq et al., 2018; Omotola, 2021). Subsequent general elections including the 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections, though rated better than the 2007 elections were marred by differing levels of electoral malpractices including flawed primaries, intimidation of the opposition, vote buying and rigging (Adamo, 2018; Isiaq et al., 2018; Nabiebu, 2022; Onapajo and Babalola, 2020; Onuoha et al., 2020; Sule et al., 2020).

The buildup to the 2023 presidential elections returned the forces of ethnicity, regionalism and religion to the fore of the electoral process in the country (Babalola, 2024; Odogwu, 2023). Since the commencement of the Fourth Republic in 1999, a gentleman's agreement existed that the presidency should be rotated between Nigeria's North and South (Faluyi, 2023; Nwankwo, 2020). In 1999, the presidential candidates were from the Southern part of the country predicated on the fact that the North had been governing the country, either through civilian or military administrations, since 1979. Obasanjo, a Yoruba from Nigeria's Southwest, won the election and was also returned in 2003. In 2007, the candidates of the major political parties were from the Northern part of the country. Yar'Adua became president but died in office in 2010 and in line with constitutional dictates, his Vice, Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw from Nigeria's Southsouth, was sworn in as president. Jonathan was also returned in the 2011 election defeating the candidates of the major political parties, Muhammodu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Ibrahim Shekarau of the All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP), who are all Northerners. There was disgruntlement that Jonathan's emergence had thrown spanners into the gentleman's agreement as it was still the turn of the North. This factor was a major consideration in Muhammodu Buhari's emergence as the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a merger of main opposition parties and his defeat of the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan, in the 2015 election. Buhari was returned as president in 2019 defeating his major rival, a Northerner, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP (Faluyi, 2023; Nwankwo, 2020).

With the above scenario, and premised on the gentleman's agreement, the South felt the 2023 election was its by right. However, feelers from the two main political parties, the APC and the PDP, suggested that the Northern elites were not too desirous to relinquish the presidency to their Southern counterparts. It was alleged that the Northern elites in the APC, including its National Chairman and with

the alleged consent of Buhari, had perfected plans to foist a Northern candidate on the party (Musa and Musa, 2023; Sule, 2025). It took both subtle and obvious threats by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Southerner and former Governor of Lagos State; and generally regarded as the National Leader of the party, to destabilize the party before an open primary was conducted which Tinubu won to become the party's candidate. In the PDP, Atiku Abubakar emerged as the party's candidate through a process which some Southern elites regarded as premediated to favour the winner (Musa and Musa, 2023; Sule, 2025). Prior to the primary election, Peter Obi, Abubakar's running mate in the 2019 election, had defected from the party to become the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) on the allegations that the PDP's primary was designed to favour a particular candidate (Musa and Musa, 2023; Sule, 2025). From the party primaries, three leading candidates emerged, Tinubu of the APC, a Yoruba from the Southwest; Obi of the LP, an Igbo from the Southeast; and Abubakar of the PDP, a Fulani from the Northeast. Thus the contest of ethnicity and region was set.

Religious considerations were also brought into the mix in the appointments of running mates by the candidates. While Nigeria prides itself as a secular state, religion has always been a decider of elections and appointments (Okedele and Adenuga, 2020b; Adenuga et al., 2023). Northern Nigerians are predominantly Muslims and customarily, a presidential candidate from the North will appoint a Christian from Southern Nigeria and vice versa to balance the religious equation. Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Southern had Atiku Abubakar, a Northern Muslim, as his Vice between 1999 and 2003. Umaru Yar'Adua, a Northern Muslim, had Goodluck Jonathan, a Southern Christian, as his Vice. On Yar'Adua's death in 2010, Jonathan, as president, appointed Namadi Sambo, a Northern Muslim as his Vice. In 2015, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, a Southern Christian became the Vice President of Muhammodu Buhari, a Northern Muslim. Accordingly, Obi, a Southern Christian, had Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, a Northern Muslim, as his running mate while Abubakar, a Northern Muslim, chose Ifeanyi Okowa, a Southern Christian as his running mate. It was a different story for the APC as its presidential candidate, Tinubu, is a Muslim. Logically and in line with convention, Tinubu should have picked a Northern Christian as his running mate but the dilemma laid in the fact that Northern Nigeria is predominantly a Muslim enclave and its political elites, who are mainly from the Hausa/Fulani ethnic stock, are also Muslims. Thus, it would be difficult to have a Northern Christian with the political clout to garner votes in the region for a Southern presidential candidate. With this

realization, Tinubu chose to appoint Kashim Shettima, a Northern Muslim as his running mate thus presenting a Muslim-Muslim ticket. This decision reportedly drew the ire of Southern Christians and minority Northern Christians with the implication that religious affiliations became a major factor determining voting behaviours in the 2023 election (Oxford Analytica, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2025).

Author's compilation

Table 1 above gives the populations of registered voters, total votes cast, voter turnout rates, total valid votes and it also shows how the three main political parties fared in the 2023 presidential election. Ethnicity and regionalism featured prominently as APC was able to secure its highest percentage of votes (53.59%) in the Southwest, where its presidential candidate's ethnic group, the Yoruba, dominates. It also got higher votes percentages in the Southeast and Southsouth than the PDP. The PDP got over 50% of votes cast in its presidential candidate's sub-region (Northeast) and garnered a cumulative percentage of over 35% of votes cast in the Northern region. The LP secured over 87.78% in the Igbo dominated Southeast and had the highest votes in the Southsouth (42.37%), a not too surprising occurrence as most of the states in the sub region were located in the old Eastern Region.

Religious considerations could also be inferred from the distribution of votes across the regions. Tinubu's calculations in picking a Northern Muslim as his running paid off as his party secured about 39% of votes cast in the region with the party receiving more votes from the Northern region than the Southern region. It can also be argued that the LP had the highest percentages of votes cast in the Southeast and Southsouth as the populations of the two sub-regions are predominantly Christians. In the same vein, the party had a good showing in the North central where it got 31.01% of votes cast as the region houses the highest number of minority Christian ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria who apparently voted for the LP's candidate as a form of religious solidarity (Musa and Musa, 2023; Odogwu, 2023; Sule, 2025).

Table 1 also shows that the voter turnout rate in the 2023 election across the six regions was low with a national average of 26.7% depicting a high level of political apathy in the country. The 1999 election that birthed Nigeria's Fourth Republic recorded a voter turnout rate of 52.3%, attributable to the general acceptance of democratic rule after almost two decades of military dictatorship. The

TABLE 1 2023 Nigerian presidential results.

Geopolitical zone	Registered voters	Total votes cast	Voter turnout rate	Total valid votes	APC		PDP		LP	
					Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
North Central	15,363,131	4,730,591	30.8%	4,564,351	1,760,993	38.6%	1,162,087	25.5%	1,415,577	31.0%
North East	12,542,429	3,612,527	28.8%	3,435,741	1,185,458	34.5%	1,737,846	50.6%	315,107	9.2%
North West	22,255,562	6,912,574	31.1%	6,690,622	2,652,235	39.6%	2,329,540	34.8%	350,182	5.2%
South East	10,907,606	2,282,212	20.9%	2,224,934	127,370	5.7%	90,968	4.1%	1,952,998	87.9%
South South	14,440,714	3,011,093	20.9%	2,857,640	799,957	27.9%	717,908	25.1%	1,210,675	42.4%
South West	17,958,966	4,440,366	24.7%	4,253,442	2,279,407	53.6%	941,941	22.2%	846,478	19.9%
Total	93,468,408	24,989,363	26.7%	24,025,940	8,794,726	36.6%	6,984,520	29.1%	6,101,533	25.4%

2003 election witnessed a voter turnout rate of 69.1%, an increase of 16.8% from that of 1999 suggesting positive expectations about the new Republic. However, with growing disenchantment on governance and alleged manipulations of electoral processes in the Republic, voter turnout rates declined to 57.4, 53.7, 43.6, 34.7, and 26.7% in the 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 presidential elections (Adigun, 2020; Olayinka et al., 2024).

The conduct of the 2023 presidential election was also allegedly fraught with electoral malpractices calling into question the integrity of INEC and the credibility of the election (Asaju, 2023; Mene, 2024; Ogunbanjo, 2024; Oshewolo and Azeez, 2023). In 2022, the Electoral Act 2010 was reviewed to ensure better conduct of elections. The Electoral Act 2022, among others, demands early publication of voter registration lists to promote probity, extends the time for the conduct of primaries, the submission of lists of candidates and increases the timeline for pre-election litigations making it easier for political parties to sort out litigations arising out of primaries, and removed ambiguities on over-voting clauses. However, what is considered the major integrity enhancing provision made by the Act is the empowerment of INEC to transmit election results electronically directly from polling units and removing manipulations of results at collation centers. Accordingly, the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal was developed to give Nigerians updated on election results in real time from the polling units (Nabiebu, 2022; Ogunbanjo, 2024; Oniye et al., 2023).

The introduction of the IReV portal gave Nigerians confidence that the voting exercise would be characterized by transparency, that their votes would count and that electoral irregularities would be reduced to the barest minimum (Nabiebu, 2022; Ogunbanjo, 2024; Oniye et al., 2023). To the chagrin of Nigerians, INEC reported that the portal was affected by glitches making it difficult for citizens to access election results and shaking public confidence in the conduct of the election as there were widespread insinuations that the glitches were deliberate actions to manipulate the results to favour a preferred candidate. Indeed, after the official declaration of the candidate of the APC, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, as the winner of the election, LP and PDP challenged the results in court with the inability of INEC to properly transmit election results through the IReV portal as a major premise for litigation (Ogunbanjo, 2024; Oshewolo and Azeez, 2023). Widespread reports of fake news designed to influence voters preferences, vote buying, voters' intimidation, voters' disenfranchisement, lack of transparency, logistical challenges and violence from individuals, civil society groups, national and international electoral observers shaped a negative perception of the election by the public (Adeleke et al., 2024; Hassan, 2024). Thus, the administration of President Ahmed Bola Tinubu took off on May 29 2023 on a platform of shaky integrity.

The 2024 US presidential election

The United States, arguably the most powerful country in today's world and a major reference of democratic governance, started its presidential election history in December 1788, 12 years after it fought its war of independence with George Washington emerging from the process as its first president. Various reforms to ensure general adult suffrage and to promote transparency, integrity, and representativeness have made the US a leading model of electoral practice, and by extension, democracy. Overtime, elections became tools of promoting nation building, national unity and societal cohesion as evidenced by reforms prohibiting racial and gender discriminations in voting (Cole, 2021; Maisel and Brewer, 2024; Pugh, 2024; Routh, 2017).

However, by the turn of the 21st century, electoral cracks and flaws became evident in the presidential election between the Democratic Party's candidate, Al Gore, the incumbent Vice President, and the Republican Party's candidate, George W. Bush, the Governor of Texas, in 2000. The election was keenly contested with Gore receiving 48% of the popular votes and Bush getting 47.9% of the votes. However, Bush won the Electoral College with 271 votes, and by extension, the election against Gore's 266 votes. The results sparked off an intense debate on the divergence and convergence of popular elections and Electoral Colleges calling into question the electoral process in the country. Various allegations insinuating that the results did not reflect popular opinion and votes and that Bush won the election because many Democrats voted for other parties due to confusion caused by poorly designed ballots. The usage of outdated punch card voting machines which voided many votes and conflicting judicial decisions over manual vis-à-vis electronic recount of votes in Florida eroded public trust in the electoral process (Freeman and Bleifuss, 2011; Linegar and Alvarez, 2024; North, 2004; Posner, 2004).

Author's compilation

Table 2 gives the total number of registered voters in the 2016, 2020, and 2024 American presidential elections. It further shows how the two most popular political parties in the country, the Democratic Party and the Republican party fared in the elections.

Table 2 shows that in the 2016 presidential election, the candidate of the Democratic Party won the popular election with 48.2% of votes cast with the candidate of the Republican party trailing with 46.1% of the votes. However, as it happened in the 2000 election, the Republican Party's candidate won the Electoral College, and the election, with 304 votes to defeat the Democratic Party's candidate who got 227 votes.

It is worthy to note that the 2016 presidential election, between Democratic Party's Hilary Clinton, and Republican Party's Donald

TABLE 2 2016, 2020 and 2024 American Presidential election results.

Year	Registered voters (in millions)	Total votes cast	Turnout rate	Democratic party			Republican party		
				Votes	%	Electoral college votes	Votes	%	Electoral college votes
2016	157.6	136.8	86.8%	65,853,514	48.2%	227	62,984,828	46.1%	304
2020	168.3	158.4	94.1%	81,283,501	51.3%	306	74,223,978	46.8%	232
2024	173.9	156.3	89.9%	75,019,257	48.4%	226	77,303,573	49.9%	312

Trump, marked a negative milestone in the annals of elections in the country. Elections, which hitherto had been instruments of promoting social cohesion and political norms, became agents of polarization and instability. In the buildup to the elections, campaigns became centered on divisive issues including racial, religious and gender matters. Trump, apparently employing populist tactics, made scathing statements on illegal immigrants in the country with a promise to curtail migration from Latin American countries by building walls on the US borders with Mexico. To address terrorism, he campaigned to limit the influx of Muslims into the country. Clinton's emergence as the flagbearer of the Democratic Party was hailed as a major milestone in the quest for gender equality in the country; however, sexist remarks by Trump marred the significance of a female presidential candidate contesting on the platform of a major political party for the first time in the history of the country. The popularity of social media platforms made it possible for fake news to spread uncontrollably shaping public opinion and influencing voting behaviour. Trump also created a "we against them" movement styling himself as an anti-establishment individual as opposed to his rival who could only be guided by elitist considerations. He often accused mainstream media outlets of working for the "establishment" and by extension his rival, resonating with many Americans but further polarizing the nation. Most worrisome were allegations that Russia conducted a coordinated cyber misinformation exercise to shape public opinion and voting preference in favour of Donald Trump (Herbert et al., 2019; Norris et al., 2020).

Table 2 shows that the Democratic Party's candidate, Joe Biden, defeated the incumbent, Republican Party's Donald Trump, by winning a percentage vote of 51.3% of the popular votes and 306 Electoral College votes against Trump's 46.8% and 232 votes, respectively. The 2020 presidential election was in many ways not better conducted than its predecessor. While efforts were made to strengthen cybersecurity to prevent a reoccurrence of alleged Russian intervention in the 2016 election, allegations of interferences from Russia, China and Iran to spread misinformation and disinformation to influence the outcome of the election negatively affected the integrity of the electoral process (Sharma et al., 2022). Social media platforms were also criticized for partisanship as allegations were rife that handlers of some platforms were quick to censor opinions that affect their preferred candidate negatively while allowing worse opinions against the other candidate to gain traction. In the same vein, polarized reportage of electoral issues by mainstream media outlets furthered the campaign of misinformation and disinformation (Brutger et al., 2023).

In the continuation of eroding political norms, Trump refused to concede defeat and filed over 60 lawsuits claiming the election was rigged. Without substantial evidence, most of these lawsuits ended up being dismissed or withdrawn. During the certification of the Electoral College results on January 6, 2021, pro-Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol in an unsuccessful insurrection bid. All these events undermined public trust in the electoral process and further polarized Americans (Linegar and Alvarez, 2024; Pagedas, 2024).

Table 2 reveals that the candidate of the Republican Party won the 2024 presidential election with 49.9% of the popular vote and 312 Electoral College votes against the candidate of the Democratic Party who got 48.4% of the popular votes and 226 Electoral College votes. The 2024 presidential election was significantly more polarizing than that of 2016 and 2020 in many ways (Michta, 2024). Donald Trump

was returned as the Republican Party's candidate while the Democratic Party had earlier put forward the incumbent, Joe Biden, as its flagbearer in the election. However, due to fears over Biden's ailing health and his below average outing in a Presidential Debate with Trump, he was advised to withdraw for his more youthful Vice, Kamala Harris, to represent the party in the election. Internal party issues over the candidacy of Biden were a factor in the fate of the Democratic Party in the election. While the decision to replace Biden with Harris was imperative, it left the latter with a tight campaign schedule against the well-oiled Trump's campaign machinery and was deemed a reason for defeat of the Democratic Party at the polls (Oxford Analytica, 2024).

The election intensified the ideological divides resulting in an upsurge of political violence in the election year and eroding public trust in the electoral process as the voter turnout rate witnessed a decline from 94.1% in 2020 to 89.9% in 2024 (Skocpol, 2025). Deepened polarization of the major media outfits on party affiliations and support for presidential candidates allegedly resulted into biased reportage to shape voters' preferences (Spencer, 2024). The alleged intensification of foreign interferences in electoral issues, especially by Russia and China, to cause confusion in the country and to prejudice the American electorates against one of the candidates was a major challenge for the process (Lemmon, 2024; Watt, 2025). This challenge was also exacerbated by the rising tide of fake news about candidates, political parties, and events shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI) on major social media platforms (Chagas, 2025). The electioneering campaigns were dominated by fake reports and racial remarks furthering the polarization of the American electorates (Skocpol, 2025).

Table 2 shows that the population of registered voters increased from 157.6 million in the 2016 presidential elections to 168.3 in the 2020 elections and 173.9% in the 2024 elections. However, despite increasing polarizations, voter turnout rate remained significantly high with 86.8, 94.1, and 89.9% recorded in the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections, respectively.

Comparing the Nigerian 2023 and the US 2024 presidential elections

The Nigerian 2023 and the US 2024 presidential elections, while differing in many ways, also had many features in common. A major difference was that while the two countries have multiparty systems, the US election, in line with established historical antecedents, featured two major political parties, the Democratic Party with Kamala Harris at its presidential candidate, and the Republican Party which had Donald Trump as its candidate. In Nigeria however, the presidential election was keenly contested by three major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) with Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its candidate, the Labour Party (LP) with Peter Obi as the candidate and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) having Atiku Abubakar as its candidate.

The 2023 Nigerian election was defined by ethnic, regional and religious considerations. These factors dictated the selection of candidates and also influenced voters' preferences. For the US 2024 presidential election, emphasis was laid on party affiliations, ideology, issues and the charisma of candidates. Voters turnout in the two elections also differ significantly with the Nigerian election recording

a low voter turnout, a function of the country's political culture, while there was an above average voter turnout for the 2024 US presidential election.

A major difference could also be seen in the process of electing the president in the two political systems. In Nigeria, the president emerges through a simple majority vote and must have won 25% of votes cast in 2/3rd of the 36 states in the country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. In the United States however, a candidate must win the Electoral College to be declared the winner of the presidential.

However, a critical comparative analysis of the two elections, the 2023 Nigerian and the 2024 US presidential elections will be conducted primarily through the lenses of Pippa Norris' electoral integrity framework, Levitsky and Ziblatt's political elites' adherence to democratic norms, and Cheeseman and Klass' election quality premises. Norris's (2013, 2014) seminal works on electoral integrity argues that elections are best evaluated by their level of adherence to or departure from the global norms, standards and principles guiding the conducts of elections. The integrity of every election is adjudged by the level of its fairness, transparency, impartiality of the electoral management bodies, and the professionalism of the electoral officers. Norris further avers that the totality of the electoral process, including the process of enacting electoral laws, delimitations of electoral constituencies, accuracy and inclusiveness of its voters registration exercise, party primaries, campaign finance, vote count and results, should be placed under scrutiny. In essence, the integrity of an election is determined not only on the days votes are cast, but also by the processes leading to the election days and subsequent events after the actual voting exercise. A compromised electoral process creates apathy while high integrity shores up political participation.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election fell short of the Norris electoral integrity expectations in many aspects. Allegations were rife that the electoral process had been compromised by the ruling party, the APC, to ensure the victory of its candidate in the election. The failure of the INEC to fully transmit election results electronically directly from polling units, as stated in the 2022 Electoral Act, lend credence to allegations that the field was stacked against opposition parties. The impartiality of INEC and the professionalism of its officials were queried with assertions of complicity in protecting the fortunes of the ruling party made against the electoral management body. The integrity of the election was also negatively affected by reports of malpractices before, during, and after the voting exercise including flawed primaries, vote buying, fake news, electoral violence, election rigging, and influencing judicial adjudications on electoral petitions (Babalola, 2024; Odogwu, 2023; Oshewolo and Azeez, 2023; Sule, 2025). The all-time low level of voter turnout rate of 26.7% indicated a high level of apathy borne out of distrust in the capacity of the EMB to ensure the integrity of the election.

The 2024 US presidential election fared better than the Nigerian 2023 presidential election in several respects. First, the party in power, the Democratic Party, was not alleged of using the security apparatus of the state to harass and intimidate the opposition party. There were no obvious attempts by the Democratic Party to manipulate electoral laws and institutions to ensure the victory of its candidate. The Democratic Party did not also resort to gerrymandering to stack the field against its opponents. However, allegations of high levels of fake news, jaundiced reportage by media houses, negative propaganda, cyber disinformation, and external manipulations by foreign powers

in favour a candidate and political party compromised the integrity of the election (Chagas, 2025; Lemmon, 2024; Skocpol, 2025; Spencer, 2024; Watt, 2025). Though the voter turnout rate of 89.9% in the election is quite impressive when compared with the 26.7% recorded in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, it is noteworthy that the election witnessed a decline of 4.2% in the voter turnout rate from the 2020 US presidential election. This may be interpreted as a decline in voters trust in the electoral system as a result of compromised electoral integrity (Skocpol, 2025).

Levitsky and Ziblatt's (2018) book titled "How Democracies Die" posit that the democracies decay when political elites violate key democratic norms. Political elitism is a global phenomenon (Adenuga and Akingbulu, 2023; Adenuga and Johnson-Odusanya, 2024) and these political elites play major roles in determining the integrity of elections. Elites across political parties are expected to show restraints in electoral contests. Political opposition should be viewed and treated with respect and the belief that every party candidate has the equal right to win the election and govern the political system should guide the conduct of elections. Any deviation from this norm creates and intensifies socio-political polarizations with severe implications for societal cohesion and democratic consolidation.

Acrimony among its political elites has been a major challenge for Nigeria since the country started its electoral democratic practices in 1922. Every election in Nigeria has always been characterized by unrestrained rivalry and acrimonious electoral competitions were largely responsible for the collapse of earlier Nigerian Republics (Adenuga et al., 2022; Isiaq et al., 2018; Ojukwu and Oluwole, 2016; Omotola, 2021; Salawu and Hassan, 2011). The Fourth Republic has also witnessed acrimonious interactions among Nigerian political elites (Adamo, 2018; Isiaq et al., 2018; Nabiebu, 2022; Onapajo and Babalola, 2020; Onuoha et al., 2020; Sule et al., 2020) and the 2023 presidential election was not an exception. The political gladiators across the different political parties employed the divisive forces of ethnicity, regionalism and religion to obtain selfish and sectional political gains but with negative implications for national unity and democratic consolidation in the country. The election further deepened and entrenched ethnic, regional and religious divides in the country (Babalola, 2024; Odogwu, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2025).

The United States has a history of utilizing elections as a tool of social cohesion (Cole, 2021; Maisel and Brewer, 2024; Pugh, 2024; Routh, 2017) but the 2024 US presidential election was a departure from that tradition. Political gladiators and their supporters did not subject themselves to the bonds of restraint but rather engaged opposing sides in campaigns of calumny, and propaganda of fake news. The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections polarized the country but the 2024 election further deepened polarizations in the country along ideological and racial lines (Chagas, 2025; Logan, 2025; Spencer, 2024).

Cheeseman and Klaas, (2018) work on "How to Rig an Election" shows that the quality of an election is a function of its level of competitiveness and uncertainty. An elections that is competitive and where there is a high level of uncertainty on its outcome is deemed to have more quality than an election where the winner of the election is known before votes are counted and the official results made known. Literature shows that with very few exceptions, Nigerian elections have always been allegedly manipulated to ensure the victory of favoured candidates, especially the candidates of ruling political parties (Adenuga et al., 2022; Isiaq et al., 2018; Ojukwu and Oluwole,

2016; Omotola, 2021; Salawu and Hassan, 2011). Though very competitive, allegations were also rife that the 2023 presidential election were manipulated to favour the ruling party (Asaju, 2023; Mene, 2024; Ogunbanjo, 2024; Sule, 2025). In this regard, the 2024 US election should be adjudged to be of high quality as there was a high level of competition between the candidates of the two major political parties. The level of uncertainty was also high and the winner of the election was not known until votes were counted and results officially released.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 US presidential elections shows that while the two elections failed the tests of integrity and political elites engagements, the later fared much better in terms of its competitiveness and uncertainty. The rates of voter turnout in the two elections also indicate that the 2024 US presidential election had a better level of integrity than the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. This is despite the noticeable challenges in the conduct of the 2024 US presidential elections which have entrenched polarizations in the country. With historical institutionalism as the theoretical anchorage, it can be surmised that the over two centuries of electoral democracy in the United States have created a consolidated democratic culture that keeps it going in spite of internal and external autocratic assaults. With a checkered democratic history characterized by ethnicity, regionalism and religion, the 2023 Nigerian presidential election became more of a tool of division than of cohesion. It is therefore recommended that democratic consolidation, through good governance, be vigorously pursued in the country. Good governance will help to erase the lines of divisions in the country, ensure the consolidation of democratic norms, and make redundant the employment of ethnicity, regionalism and religion as electoral tools.

It is also pertinent to note that the two systems of government in Nigeria's political history, the British parliamentary and the American presidential systems, were foisted on the country without factoring peculiarities of historical experiences and cultural values. The parliamentary system was bequeathed by the British colonial overlords while the presidential system was imposed by a military administration. The parliamentary system failed and the presidential system is also failing to ensure the much sought after national unity in the country. To address the challenge, it is recommended that the presidential system be continuously evaluated and electoral reforms periodically conducted to arrive at a system best suited to build bridges across ethnic, regional and religious divides in the country.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

GA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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