

## **JUSTICE FOR SALE: AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL JURISPRUDENCE IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** In Nigeria, every electoral year is riddled with grievances, disputes, and discontentment regarding the processes, procedures and outcome of elections. Those who feel unfairly treated proceed to the tribunal to seek redress, and the more resources a petitioner has, the higher their ability to hire competent legal personnel to defend their case(s). This is also the situation with judges who use their position to acquire as much resources as they can. This article explored electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria, focusing particularly on the relationship between justice and the electoral tribunal in Nigeria, the character of election tribunal and election petition in Nigeria, and electoral jurisprudence and commodification of justice in Nigeria. The study anchored on the social conflict theory. It employed secondary data from the internet, textbooks and other sources of information. Data was analyzed qualitatively. Findings showed that Election Tribunal in Nigeria serve as a crucial institution for resolving disputes regarding the validity of elections. However, electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria is plagued by issues such as technicalities in the judiciary, corruption, and political interference, which lead to the commodification of justice and undermine public trust in the legal system. The paper recommends policy reforms, entrenchment of professional conduct by legal practitioners, and promotion of judicial independence as ways to overcome the imbalances in Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence.

**Keywords:** Electoral Jurisprudence, Justice, Commoditisation, Election, Tribunal,

### **INTRODUCTION**

During each electoral cycle in Nigeria, there emerge instances of grievances, disputes, and discontentment regarding the process or the results. In the 2023 General Elections, for instance, the exercise was reportedly marred by irregularities such as ballot box snatching, electoral violence, procedural and logistical shortcomings culminating in the inability of the electoral officials to upload election results from polling units in real-time (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Major actors in the electoral process, including political parties, candidates, supporters, and civil society groups were disappointed in the electoral process and the outcome of the election. Consequently, aggrieved members turned their attention to the tribunal, established through the country's legislation as a mechanism for addressing post-election matters within the prescribed time frame of 21 to 180 days from the declaration of the election outcome. Moreover, a relatively high number of election petitions are experienced in Nigeria due to its multi-party system and the fiercely competitive nature of its political landscape. These petitions usually arise when political parties or candidates who participated in primary and general elections hold the belief that the elections were tainted by irregularities, fraudulent activities, or other issues that influenced the final result. In response, they pursue legal remedies through the judicial system in order to contest the declared outcomes.

Pre-electoral matters are handled by competent jurisdiction while Election Tribunal deals mostly with post-election matters. The Election Petition Tribunal (EPT) in Nigeria is a crucial component of the electoral process, established according to sections 239 and 285 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Similarly, the Electoral Act (2022), as amended, in sections 130 to 140, explicitly outlines the establishment, powers, and procedures of electoral tribunals and election petitions. Given the unique characteristics of Nigerian elections and politics, the role of the Courts and Electoral Tribunals in restoring confidence in the electoral process and upholding democracy cannot be disregarded (Uchechukwu & Victor, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that Election Tribunals serve as the primary legal mechanism for post-election matters, which can either undermine or enhance the consolidation of democracy and democratization. Nonetheless, despite the legal responsibility placed on these special tribunals to provide redress and ensure justice, they are sometimes perceived as a tool for manipulation by the wealthy and influential. Instances of perceived divide and conquer arise, particularly from opposing parties and their supporters in opposition to the ruling party. It is evident that just as politicians and the Nigerian elite have tainted the realm of politics, their influence has extended even to the judiciary. This gradual erosion of a robust judiciary undermines the fundamental principle that it is essential for a just and equitable society (Punch Newspaper, 2020). Against this background, the study explored electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria, to ascertain if the will of the people is actually upheld as expressed in their choice of leaders by votes.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between justice and the electoral tribunal in Nigeria.
2. Assess the character of election tribunal and election petition in Nigeria.
3. Explore electoral jurisprudence and commodification of justice in Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between justice and the electoral tribunal in Nigeria
2. What is the character of election tribunals and election petitions in Nigeria?
3. What is the nature of electoral jurisprudence and commodification of justice in Nigeria?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Electoral Jurisprudence**

Electoral jurisprudence connotes judicial effort to search out and uphold the will of the people in the choice of their leaders as reflected in actual votes. It entails the laws governing electoral processes and systems within a particular jurisdiction. Electoral jurisprudence embodies legal principles, rules, and regulations that determine the conduct of elections, the manner in which votes are cast and counted, and the way that disputes arising from elections are managed.

#### **Justice**

Justice is defined as fairness or equal treatment. It is the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness to contesting parties. Justice might be defined as a system in

which people are entwined or bound together. Justice aims to bring disparate ideas together and organise all human relationships around it. As a result, justice entails binding, joining, or organising people into a just or fair relationship order.

### **Election**

Election is defined as a process of choosing a leader and or leaders, members of parliament, councillors and or other representatives by popular votes in a democratic setting. Election can also be seen as a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office or an official position.

### **Election Tribunal**

Election tribunal is considered a reliable forum where justice is served in matters related to elections. Such tribunals encompass various types of elections and issues related to their conduct, outcome, and legality. In Nigeria, election tribunals may hear and determine, within a specified time frame, petitions challenging the results of various elections, including those for the President, Governors, National Assembly members, and State House of Assembly members.

### **Justice and Electoral Tribunal**

Justice is a legal value that is ascertained by sociocultural factors and encompasses the allocation of rightful entitlements to individuals. Matantseva (2019), along with Pankova and Migachev (2020), posit that Justice is a form of governmental undertaking executed through the judicial system, entailing the determination of legality and rendering legally conclusive judgments. Consequently, Justice represents a fundamental moral, social, and legal tenet that encompasses notions of fairness, equity, and the unbiased treatment of individuals. It entails safeguarding the rights of individuals and ensuring their treatment aligns with established legal frameworks and societal standards. The objective is to guarantee that individuals receive their rightful entitlements, are shielded from discrimination or harm, and that resources and opportunities are justly distributed within a given society. Justice frequently involves the notion of rectifying injustices and addressing grievances while simultaneously promoting adherence to legal principles. It is a complex and multifaceted concept that exhibits variations in its application across diverse cultural, legal, and ethical contexts.

In Nigeria's judicial system, seeking justice for electoral irregularities in elections involves resorting to litigation or petitions within a specially designed system. Post-election litigations encompass the legal challenges and disputes initiated by-election candidates or political parties subsequent to the announcement of election results. These legal contentions arise as a response to the rejection of election outcomes by rival political parties or candidates who were not favoured by the certified results. Consequently, dissatisfied candidates or parties approach the courts for redress. As stated by Azeez (2013), post-election litigations represent a significant portion of post-election grievances, disapprovals, and objections to the perceived credibility of election results. These concerns are formally documented and submitted to a legally constituted authority for interpretation and determination. Azeez (2013) further explains that the procedural framework of post-election legal components in Nigeria includes the Tribunal, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court.

On the other hand, an Election Tribunal is a legal forum established to adjudicate disputes and complaints related to electoral processes and outcomes. These tribunals are integral to the electoral system in numerous countries, as they provide a mechanism for resolving disputes and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. The structure and functioning of election tribunals may vary across countries, but their primary objective is to address issues such as election irregularities, candidate disqualifications, or allegations of electoral fraud. It is an indisputable fact that tribunals and courts have played a significant role in strengthening and sustaining Nigeria's democracy since its transition to democratic governance. Electoral adjudication elucidates the role of tribunals and courts in electoral matters, particularly in determining who legitimately exercises power through periodic elections (Amaramiro & Okpara, 2018). According to Asein (2005), tribunals are an integral component of the overall adjudicatory system, established by legislation to complement the traditional court system by exercising judicial or quasi-judicial functions. Therefore, tribunals possess jurisdiction over election matters and not pre-election matters.

### **Election Tribunal and Election Petition in Nigeria**

The Election Tribunal in Nigeria is an institution that has been brought into existence by the constitution and incorporated into the Electoral Act Law of the federation. More specifically, section 285 (2) of the constitution stipulates that in each State of the Federation, one or more election tribunals, known as the Governorship, Legislative and Houses Election Tribunals, shall be established. These tribunals, with exclusive jurisdiction, are tasked with the responsibility of hearing and deciding on petitions concerning the validity of the election of individuals to the office of Governor, Deputy Governor, or as a member of any legislative house. The procedure and application of these tribunals align with sections 130-140 of Nigeria's Electoral Act Law, (2022) as amended.

According to section 130(1) of the aforementioned Act, any challenge to an election or the return of a candidate must be raised through an election petition presented to the appropriate tribunal or court in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution or the Act. The election petition is a formal written request submitted to a court or other authorized body. It is also a term used to describe a petition filed in accordance with the Act. It is a unique and distinct proceeding, known as *sui generis*, possessing its own characteristics that set it apart from civil or criminal actions in the traditional sense. It does not encompass the civil rights and obligations of the parties involved (Nwanyanwu & Bulodisiye, 2022).

In light of the relevant laws governing their establishment, specific mandate, and operational guidelines, Election Petition Tribunals can be considered as the reliable forum where justice is served in matters related to elections. Although there have been instances of electoral petitions brought before tribunals nationwide, particularly in gubernatorial elections, these cases often devolve into a fierce and contentious battle between politicians who demonstrate the extent of their financial resources and the strength of their influence.

### **Electoral Jurisprudence and Commodification of Justice in Nigeria**

The judiciary is widely regarded as the final ray of hope for the ordinary individual, or more accurately put, the last resort for the aggrieved party. Although this claim holds some truth to a certain degree, it has not been entirely accurate. Justice, as a legal concept, is increasingly being commoditized, with legal outcomes being influenced or determined by financial

considerations or power dynamics, rather than the impartial application of the law. This phenomenon can manifest through various means, including bribery, political pressure, or other forms of corruption. Unfortunately, this compromises the integrity of the legal system and undermines public trust and the legitimacy of electoral and judicial processes. Numerous instances since the inception of the fourth republic serve as evidence that justice is being commoditized, sold, and manipulated to cater to the interests of the ruling elite and the affluent who have the means to afford it. The paper therefore explores electoral jurisprudence in the following;

### **Technicalities in the Judiciary**

Technicalities in the judiciary may continue to haunt Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence. The judgment of the Supreme Court affirming the Senate President, Dr Ahmad Lawan as the All Progressive Congress Senatorial Candidate for the Yobe North, has left a sour taste in the mouth of those who thought that justices would uphold the sanctity of the provisions of section 115(d) of the Electoral Act, which forbids a person from signing a nomination paper or result as a candidate in more than one constituency at the same election. It was a shocking moment to many Nigerians (ThisDay, 2020).

In the majority decision, the Apex court also set aside the decision of the court of Appeal in Abuja which affirmed the judgment of the trial court that declared Bashir Machina as the Senatorial candidate for Yobe North. Machina accused the All Progressive Party (APC) of fraudulently substituting his name with that of Lawan. Where there is an allegation of Fraud it should not be commenced by an originating summons. There was a need to call for witnesses to prove allegations of fraud. But in a majority judgment by Justice Emmanuel Agim and Adamu Jauro, the Apex court said Lawan never participated in the APC primary held on May 28<sup>th</sup> as he withdrew voluntarily to participate in the presidential primary held on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2022.

It is obvious to note that the Supreme Court had used technicalities to deny Machina of Justice. The Supreme Court had warned the lower courts against technicalities to deny litigants justice to know that the same justices of the Supreme Court use technicalities on many occasions is baffling. It was completely unfair to use technicalities to deny Machina justice.

Just like Justice Nweze said in his dissenting judgment when the same Supreme Court sat on a matter between Senator Hope Uzodinma and a former governor, Hon. Emeka Ihedioha that the court's decision will continue to haunt Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence for a long time to come, the Bashir Machina Vs Ahmad Lawan's case will also continue to haunt the supreme court and Nigeria's electoral prudence (ThisDay, 2023).

### **Corruption in the Judiciary**

Corruption within the judicial system is one of the primary factors contributing to the phenomenon of "justice for sale" in Nigerian election tribunals. Judges, lawyers, and court officials have faced allegations of accepting bribes or other incentives to exert influence over the outcomes of election disputes. Such actions erode public trust in the impartiality of the judiciary. For instance, there have been past cases where politicians, in their pursuit to overturn election results, allegedly offered bribes to judges and lawyers in exchange for rulings in their favour. These allegations have sparked public outrage and demands for reform.

Justice Kayode Eso, who is widely recognized as the pioneer of judicial activism in Nigeria, expressed his dismay in 2008 over the emergence of "billionaire election tribunal judges" (Punch Newspaper, 2012). In January 2004, the Nigerian Judicial Council suspended four judges due to incidents related to the acceptance of bribes during litigation concerning the disputed 2003 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State. After a complaint was filed by the petitioner, Ime Samson Umana, Nigeria's security agency discovered that the judges presiding over the tribunal had received millions of Naira as bribes from Governor Victor Attah, whose election was being challenged. Ironically, the Nigerian Judicial Council also uncovered that a judge from another state acted as a conduit for the petitioner, offering 60 million Naira (equivalent to approximately US\$380,458) to members of the tribunal in favour of Umana (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2014). Similarly, in July 2008, allegations arose in the news media regarding an unethical relationship between members of the election tribunal and the lead attorney for the defendant in the disputed 2007 gubernatorial election in Osun State. The News magazine, in its July 14, 2008 edition, published an intriguing exposé consisting of numerous telephone conversations (via text messages and voice calls) between the tribunal's chairman, Justice Naron, and the defendant's principal attorney, Olagunsoye Oyinlola (the incumbent whose election was being challenged) (Kolade-Otitoju, 2008). As a result, the magazine and the opposition party, the ACN, suspected that the tribunal had been manipulated, particularly after its ruling on July 15, 2008, favoured the defendant (Ugbagwu, Ikhilae, Yishau & Adeniyi 2008).

### **Political Interference**

Election tribunals in Nigeria often witness high-stakes political battles, wherein influential entities strive to acquire or retain control in power. This phenomenon has the potential to exert undue political pressure on the judicial process, thereby compromising its autonomy. Instances have been reported wherein politicians with considerable sway have been accused of attempting to manipulate the tribunal's proceedings by exerting influence on judges' decisions, intimidating witnesses, or impeding due process.

The Imo State gubernatorial election of 2019 was marred by legal disputes and controversies, necessitating the intervention of the tribunal to determine the rightful winner. The public displayed a keen interest in the tribunal's proceedings, and allegations of political interference, bribery, and financial influence surfaced, further eroding trust in the electoral and judicial systems. The Supreme Court on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, 2020 delivered a conflicting judgment that removed Rt. Hon Emeka Ihedioha as the Governor and declared Senator Hope Uzodinma as the Governor of Imo State. Similarly, the Ondo State gubernatorial election of 2020 encountered legal challenges and allegations of irregularities, heightening the significance of the tribunal's rulings in resolving the disputes. Concerns were raised regarding the impact of financial resources on the legal process, with accusations of bribery and corruption compromising the impartiality of the judiciary.

The recently concluded gubernatorial elections on March 18, 2023, across the 28 states of the federation, witnessed instances of the commodification of justice for sale and political interference. Out of the 28 states, 25 expressed dissatisfaction with the election outcomes and approached the tribunal seeking redress. These cases serve as classic examples of the aforementioned issues, highlighting the need for scrutiny and reform.

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 the governorship election petition tribunal in Kano rendered the incumbent Governor and New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) candidate, Abba Yusuf, ineligible for the position. The tribunal, utilizing the platform of Zoom, directed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to revoke the certificate of return issued to Yusuf. It upheld the victory of Nasir Gawuna, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), as the duly elected governor of Kano State. During the proceedings, the tribunal invalidated 165,663 votes received by Yusuf due to the absence of necessary stamps, signatures, and dates from INEC, as mandated by the law. Consequently, the court instructed INEC to issue a certificate of return to the APC candidate.

This verdict was considered the most politically interfered, by the members and adherents of Kwankwasiyya (a political movement of the former NNPP presidential candidate Musa Kwankwaso), and on the other hand, observers and sympathizers of NNPP including some of the legal practitioners and political commentators, because of the political feud between the Rabi'u Kwankwaso, the national leader and former presidential candidate of NNPP and his Kwankwasiyya political movement in one hand, and the immediate past governor of Kano State, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, who is now the national chairman of the ruling party, APC, in one hand, and on the other hand, the strategically political importance of Kano especially in every presidential election as always the biggest vote bag of the nation, is enough reason for the ruling party to not let loose and interfere with the tribunal decision.

### **Social Conflict Theory**

This paper is anchored on the premises of social conflict theory. Social conflict theory is rooted in the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and many other scholars that are linked to the Marxian or Weberian traditions such as George Simmel, Lewis Coser, Ralf Dahrendorf, etc. (Ritzer 2008). It is a perspective in sociology that emphasizes the social, political, or material inequality of a social group. According to Coser "social conflict [is] a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflict groups are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals." This denotes the whole idea of the power relations in the society, (Oberschal 1978).

Therefore, Conflict can occur between individuals, between social groups, and/or within social groups. Among the major assumptions of Social conflict theory was a focus on competition between groups, (Stolley, 2005). Conflict theory centres its attention on the disparities in power that exist among individuals or social groups, placing great emphasis on the notion that individuals are inherently inclined toward contention when engaged in competition for resources and power (Frederick, 2014).

The following are the basic assumptions of the theory

- Conflict theory assumes that social and economic inequality is a fundamental aspect of society. It argues that inequality results from the uneven distribution of resources, power, and opportunities
- Conflict theory posits that power is not evenly distributed in society. It contends that a small, dominant group holds power and uses it to maintain control over others, leading to power imbalances.

- The theory argues that individuals and groups engage in competition for limited resources, whether economic, political, or social. This competition is a source of social conflict.
- Central to conflict theory is the concept of class struggle. It asserts that society is divided into social classes, and these classes engage in a perpetual struggle for control over resources and power.
- Conflict theory assumes that the dominant classes maintain their power by controlling the dominant ideology, which legitimizes the social order and suppresses dissent.

Drawing from social conflict theory, potential solutions to address issues within Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence include reforms to mitigate technicalities in the judiciary by ensuring equitable access to legal resources and streamlining legal procedures. Combating corruption within the judiciary necessitates comprehensive reforms focusing on transparency, accountability, and integrity, including the establishment of independent anti-corruption bodies and promotion of ethical conduct. Efforts must be directed towards safeguarding judicial independence through legislative measures, enhancing security of judicial appointments, and fostering public awareness and advocacy. By implementing these measures, stakeholders can work towards strengthening Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence and promoting fairness and integrity in the electoral process.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper derived data from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, internet sources among others. Review was done in line with the objectives of the study. Data was analysed qualitatively, synthesizing and summarizing existing research findings. Recommendations were issued based on review of the influence of digital connectivity on social interaction among secondary school teachers in Nigeria.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The first objective sought to examine the relationship between justice and the electoral tribunal in Nigeria. Findings revealed that justice, particularly in the context of electoral processes, is ensured through the establishment and functioning of electoral tribunals. These tribunals serve as legal forums to adjudicate disputes and complaints related to electoral processes and outcomes. They play a crucial role in addressing issues such as election irregularities, candidate disqualifications, or allegations of electoral fraud, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. Various scholars have emphasized the critical role played by electoral tribunals in safeguarding justice in Nigeria's electoral system. For instance, Adejuyigbe and Ogunleye (2017) argued that electoral tribunals serve as important mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes and ensuring fairness and justice in the electoral process. They provide aggrieved parties with a legal avenue to seek redress for perceived injustices stemming from election irregularities or malpractices.

Electoral tribunals in Nigeria are tasked with adjudicating disputes and complaints arising from electoral processes. As noted by Okoye (2014), these tribunals are empowered to hear cases related to various aspects of elections, including disputes over election results, allegations of electoral fraud, and challenges to candidate qualifications. Through their adjudicatory functions, electoral tribunals play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring that electoral outcomes reflect the will of the electorate.



The establishment and functioning of electoral tribunals contribute to safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process in Nigeria. According to Jega (2015), the existence of credible and impartial tribunals helps deter electoral malpractices by providing a legal mechanism for holding perpetrators accountable. By addressing issues such as vote rigging, ballot stuffing, and other forms of electoral fraud, tribunals contribute to enhancing public confidence in the electoral process and promoting democratic governance. Despite their importance, electoral tribunals in Nigeria face various challenges that can impact their effectiveness in ensuring justice. Omodia (2018) highlighted issues such as delays in the resolution of electoral disputes, lack of independence, and allegations of bias as some of the challenges confronting electoral tribunals. To address these challenges, reforms aimed at enhancing the transparency, efficiency, and independence of electoral tribunals have been proposed by scholars and stakeholders.

Analysis of the second objective indicates that Election Tribunal in Nigeria, established by the constitution and incorporated into the Electoral Act Law, serves as a crucial institution for resolving disputes regarding the validity of elections. These tribunals, with exclusive jurisdiction, are responsible for hearing and deciding on petitions concerning the election of individuals to various political offices, including Governor, Deputy Governor, and legislative positions. The procedures and applications of these tribunals align with specific sections of Nigeria's Electoral Act Law. Ogunnaike and Oloko-Oba (2016) emphasized that these tribunals derive their authority from the Nigerian Constitution and are further regulated by provisions within the Electoral Act Law. They are vested with exclusive jurisdiction to hear and determine petitions challenging the validity of elections to various political offices. The jurisdiction of Election Tribunals in Nigeria extends to a wide range of electoral disputes, including those involving the election of Governors, Deputy Governors, and legislative positions. According to Umeadi (2019), the Electoral Act Law delineates the specific categories of disputes that fall within the purview of these tribunals, ensuring clarity and consistency in the adjudication process. This exclusive jurisdiction underscores the importance of Election Tribunals in safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process.

The review showed that electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria is plagued by issues such as technicalities in the judiciary, corruption, and political interference, which lead to the commodification of justice and undermine public trust in the legal system. The issues of technicalities, corruption, and political interference in Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence have been extensively documented in academic literature and reports. Scholars have noted the prevalence of legal technicalities used by the judiciary to deny litigants justice, as highlighted in the case between Bashir Machina and Ahmad Lawan. This phenomenon has been criticized for undermining the principles of fairness and impartiality within the legal system (ThisDay Newspaper, 2023). Moreover, studies have explored how corruption within the judiciary, including allegations of bribery and unethical conduct among judges and court officials, erodes public trust in the integrity of electoral processes. For instance, Justice Kayode Eso's critique of "billionaire election tribunal judges" underscores concerns about the influence of financial incentives on judicial outcomes (The Punch, 2012). From the foregoing, justice for sale is a function to acquire, maintain, and exert power and dominance, and also the desire to accumulate more from scarce resources of power relations in terms of economic strengths and power imbalances. The petitioners who have more resources to make their way outside the conventional for the acquisition of power as a means of control and a means of resource accumulation. This however goes the same way with the judges who use their position to acquire as many resources as they could. The more resources a petition has increases his/her

ability to hire many and more competent legal who can defend his/her case. Beyond that, the monetary or other material resources influence the outcome of the tribunal verdict as the case of Victor Atah of Akwa Ibom, and offering 60 million Naira (equivalent to approximately US\$380,458) to members of the tribunal in favour of Umana.

Additionally, literature has extensively documented instances of political interference in Nigeria's electoral tribunals, where powerful individuals or entities seek to manipulate legal proceedings to serve their interests. The case of the Imo State gubernatorial election of 2019, which witnessed conflicting judgments and allegations of political pressure on the judiciary, serves as a pertinent example (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2020). Similarly, reports have highlighted the impact of political feuds and power struggles on tribunal decisions, as seen in the Kano State governorship election petition tribunal of 2023. The involvement of influential political figures and the strategic importance of certain states in national elections underscore the challenges posed by political interference in electoral jurisprudence (The News magazine, 2008). These findings collectively demonstrate how technicalities, corruption, and political interference converge to commodify justice and diminish public trust in Nigeria's legal system.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The issue of endemic corruption and abuse of power has bedevilled the judicial system as a whole, and electoral jurisprudence in particular. Justice is often for the higher bidders. Even though petitioners in electoral tribunals cannot be seen as commoners, the power tussle and highhandedness, manipulation using the state instruments show that the competition and struggles in society are not only about class differences but rather a kind of opportunistic intra-class struggle where members of the same class compete and those with higher opportunity outweigh the other. From the findings, the following recommendations are suggested to overcome the imbalances in Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence:

1. Reforms aimed at enhancing the transparency, efficiency, and independence of electoral tribunals should be prioritized by policy makers. This could include measures to address delays in the resolution of disputes, ensure the impartiality of tribunal members, and strengthen the enforcement of legal standards.
2. Existing efforts to combat corruption within the judiciary must be intensified. Legal practitioners should adhere to professional ethics and standards of conduct, while policymakers should enact and enforce stringent anti-corruption laws. Civil society organizations can play a crucial role in monitoring and exposing instances of corruption, advocating for accountability mechanisms, and promoting a culture of transparency within the judiciary.
3. It is essential to safeguard the independence of the judiciary from political interference. Policymakers should enact laws and policies that protect the autonomy of the judiciary and insulate it from undue influence. On their part, legal practitioners and civil society actors can raise awareness about the importance of judicial independence, monitor attempts at political interference, and hold accountable those who seek to undermine the impartiality of the judiciary.

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