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CONTENT

The Political Economy of the Costs of Electoral Management in Nigeria
Sa'idu Abdullahi, Ph.D……1

Conflict Escalation and Governance Challenges: Assessing the M23 Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Security in East Africa
Jibrin Ubale Yahaya, Ph.D., Musa Mohammed Bello, Ph.D., Isyaku Adamu, Ph.D. & Nura Alhassan Sa'idu, LLB, BL, LLM (PhD in view)……15

Literature Review as a Methodological Tool: Evidence from Election Campaign Financing in Nigeria
Dr. Anthony Uchenna Onuoha & Dr. Iro Aghedo……..….33

The Impact of Banditry on the Socio- economic Development of Katsina State, 2019 – 2024
Sayaya Suleiman, Akuva I. Isaac & Obadahun O. Simon……...54

Re-Examining the Import–Growth Nexus in Nigeria: Evidence from Cointegration and Error-Correction Analysis
Nura Aliyu Kabuga & Sha'awanatu Ahmad Achida……73

Local-Level Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Societies: A Study Of Ebiraland, Nigeria
Muhammad Idris Japa, Basil O. Ibebunjo, PhD & Charles Omotolaolusanya, PhD.....89

Corruption and the Defence-Growth Paradox in Nigeria: A Cointegration and Vector Error Correction Analysis
Sha'awanatu Ahmad Achida & Nura Aliyu Kabuga……..102

The Political Economy Of Insecurity In Nigeria: Navigating Nigeria's Predatory Economy and The Commercialization Of Violence
Sunny Mene Piate……...126

Healthcare Delivery And Mortality Rate At University Of Calabar Teaching Hospital (Ucth), Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, 2018 - 2023
Nnana Okoi Ofem (Ph.D), Amawu, Runyi Gabriel, Ekpiken, Asari Archibong……...151

The Structure Of The International System And Global Security, Diplomacy And Governance
Nsan Kingsley Tiku Ph.D.& Stephen Demort Ph.D……..164

Social Work Service And The Well-Being Of Drug-Addicted Youths In Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria
Nnana Okoi Ofem (Ph.D), Ekanem, Atta Ekanem, Harrison, Bassey Eyo……176

Traditional Institution and Conflict Management in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria
Oluwafisayo Olamiposi Falowo & Afolabi Fisayo Elizabeth……189

Convergence Of Terrorism And Trans -National Organized Crime: Challenges For Security Governance In Northern Nigeria
Dr. Emmanuel Achus Jah, Dr. Mohammed Wakil, OON & Dr. Landi Amos Gideon……..200

An Overview Of Sustainable Economy And The Challenge Of Good Governance In Nigeria
Osuolale, Afolabi Hammed AICMC & Raji, Adesina Abdulfattah Ph.D…….214

Deconstructing Identity Politics In Nigerian Elections: Challenges And Prospects For National Integration
Bagudu Sheyin Enoch, Maryam Yahuza Hashim and Prof. Tukur Abdulkadir……225

Legitimacy Crisis and Military Intervention in the West African Sub-Region
Oliver Orison & Gimba Evelyn Selbyen (PhD)…….236

An Examination Of The Challenges Of Women Representatives In National Parliament In Nigeria: A Qualitative Study
Odoh Patrick Abutu, PhD (Corresponding Author), Umar S. Gardi Ibrahim Ph.D & Ejeh Adoyi William……245

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE COSTS OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The paper examines the implications of the rising cost of electoral management under a deep economic crisis on the socio-economic condition of Nigerians. Since the rebirth of democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has continued to allocate a substantial portion of its revenue to managing the electoral process despite the challenges posed by its citizens' socio-economic conditions. Yet, the state has failed to provide effective responses to the growing vulnerability. Concern has been raised that there is a need to pay more attention to enhancing the well-being of Nigerians, rather than spending a significant portion of the revenue earned on managing the electoral process. The paper used documentary sources. It argued that the rising cost of electoral management is likely to increase government borrowing and deepen the debt profile, which would further increase the amount allocated yearly for servicing debt. This could further weaken the state and render it irresponsible in reducing unemployment, providing social security, such as basic infrastructure, curbing inflation, and improving economic conditions to better the livelihoods of its citizens.
Keywords: Development, growth, electoral management, debt service, debt

Introduction

There is no doubt that managing the electoral process in a country like Nigeria, with a large number of voters spread across a vast geographical area, requires adequate funding. However, the increasing cost of managing a four-year election cycle has raised a serious concern, particularly under the deep economic challenges. The outrageous and ridiculous nature of the budgetary cost of the election, since the return of democracy in 1999, can be sufficiently utilized by investing in education, health, road construction, sanitation, and water supply, to improve the living conditions of Nigerians. The justification for the increasing cost of managing the electoral process cannot be unconnected with the desire for quality elections, as insufficient funding has affected the delivery of elections in many countries (James & Jervier, 2017). In the case of Nigeria, however, the parlous nature of people's living conditions has provided a space for Nigerian politicians to undermine the quality of the electoral process and erode the fundamental democratic values through vote buying. This represents a close relationship between the well-being of the people and the quality of the electoral process. Put differently, where the livelihoods of people become increasingly fragile due to poverty, limited access to quality education, and unemployment, there is a likelihood of vote-buying. The increasing cost of managing the electoral process would not always guarantee a quality electoral process and bring sustainable democracy. Rather, this depends on the citizens' belief in the democratic culture and their commitment towards nurturing it.

It should be noted that improvement in the quality of life of the people is largely dependent on the extent to which a country makes use of its resources. In a country where resources are poorly utilised or mismanaged, economic growth and development would be seriously undermined, with a negative impact on the living conditions of the people. Although this study believes that effective management of the electoral process requires adequate funding.

However, allocating a significant portion of revenue to managing the electoral process in Nigeria amid a rising economic crisis and social insecurity, coupled with an infrastructural deficit, is unseemly. Since the rebirth of civil rule in 1999, a significant number of her citizens continue to live in abject poverty, and the number of out-of-school children has also swollen, with over 18.95 million in 2025 (*Tribune Online*, 2025, para. 1). In addition, access to quality education and healthcare has become difficult. The paper thus argues that the outrageous cost of electoral management ca be reduce to improve the living conditions of the citizenry. This is achieved by enhancing the quality of education, basic medical facilities, the provision of potable water, and the creation of employment opportunities.

Despite a considerable body of literature on electoral management (Chukwu, 2007; Nwaodike & Agunbiade, 2025), there has been little scholarly interest in the costs of managing the electoral process and its economic implications in Nigeria. The concern of this paper is to assess the implications of the rising cost of electoral management in the context of Nigerian economic development and how it affects the living conditions of Nigerians. Thus, the paper argued that the rising cost of electoral management amid an acute economic crisis may likely worsen the deplorable living conditions of Nigerians. In doing so, the paper is divided into six sections. Section One is the introduction. This is followed by the conceptual clarification of concepts in Section Two. Section Three discusses the nature and dynamics of Nigeria's economy. In Section Four, the paper discusses the rising cost of electoral management in Nigeria. Section Five discusses the economic implications of the cost of electoral management on economic development, and a conclusion and recommendations are offered in Sections Six and Seven.

Conceptual Review: Cost of Electoral Management, Economic Growth, and Development

Cost of Electoral Management

There is doubt that carrying out the electoral process, such as voter registration and conducting credible elections, requires sufficient funding. Aiyede and Aregbeyen (2012, p.143) described cost as "…the sacrifice of resources (funds, time, etc.) that must be given up in order to execute a particular activity and/or achieve a specific goal/objective". On the other hand, electoral management involves the coordination of resources, both financial and human, for the realisation of the desired electoral goal. Thus, the cost of electoral management means efficient and effective use of resources to ensure a successful outcome of the electoral process. Electoral costs based on a study carried out by IFES (as cited in Aiyede and Aregbeyen, 2012, pp. 143-144) can be divided into three: The Core or direct costs include fund site aside for the execution of the electoral process in a stable electoral environment. Secondly, there are the diffuse or indirect costs, which are costs for election-related services that cannot be disentangled from the general budgets of institutions tasked to conduct elections. The last form of electoral cost is the integrity cost, which includes the expenses for safety, political neutrality, and a level playing field for the electoral process.

The discourse of the costs of electoral management in this paper involves the entire cost spent by state institutions, such as the electoral management body (EMB) and security agencies, on the preparation and conduct of the election, as well as other activities regarding the post-election period, including the collation of results and announcement. This involves the cost of conducting elections and other electoral activities, such as voter registration exercise, paying the allowances of ad-hoc staff and security agencies, purchasing electoral materials, such as the Direct Data Capture (DDC) machine, printing ballot papers, supplying ballot boxes, and any other expenses of the EMB on the electoral activities. It should be noted that the costs of

electoral management are not the same as the expenses of individual contestants and their political parties. Cost of electoral management, including the total cost spent on preparation for the election, its conduct, and after the election. The outrageous nature of these costs within the context of the Nigerian political economy has a serious negative effect on its socio-economic development.

Economic Growth and Development

There has been a plague of intense controversy over the definition of economic growth and development. The concepts 'growth' and 'development' are often interchangeable, but the two do not invariably mean the same. This is because economic growth does not necessarily improve the standard of living of the people as economic development would. Abdullahi and Jiddere (2025) noted that economic growth involves the expansion of economic activities and an increase in gross national income at a rate higher than its population. This includes income per capita. In this sense, Todaro and Smith (2009) noted that problems of poverty, discrimination, and unemployment, as well as income distribution, were of secondary importance. The challenge with this definition is that some countries may record reasonable economic growth, yet the standard of living of their people has not changed. This suggests that economic growth may not necessarily lead to a better quality of life, reduce inequality, or increase employment opportunities.

Todaro and Smith (2009) argued that economic growth came to be replaced with a qualitative concept of economic development, which involves a decrease in poverty, inequality, and unemployment within the context of a growing economy. Economic development is viewed as a phenomenon that extends beyond rapid gains in overall growth, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), per capita, and gross national product (GNP). Thus, development is all-encompassing, and as such, not purely an economic phenomenon. It is multidimensional and encompasses the entirety of human life. It is all about the "trickle down" of economic benefits to citizens in the form of creating jobs and other economic opportunities. It guarantees the necessary conditions for the wider distribution of the economic and social benefits of growth. It resolves the evils of poverty, discrimination, and unemployment, and ensures equitable income distribution.

Dudley Seers (as cited in Todaro & Smith, 2012, p.15) posed the basic questions about the meaning of development. The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore:

> What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result "development" even if per capita income doubled.

Going by Dudley Seers' definition of development, which involves a reduction in poverty, ensuring equality, and increasing employment opportunities, countries that experienced economic growth cannot be developing. This is evident with the worsening development situation of these countries in the 1980s and 1990s, as their gross national income (GNI) growth rates turned negative (Todaro & Smith, 2012). The economic condition made such countries face mounting foreign-debt problems, which forced their governments to cut back on their already limited social and economic programmes.

Dynamics of Nigeria's Economy and Its Performance

Nigeria is a resourcefully blessed, and this constitutes the essence of development. Before the discovery of oil, the Nigerian state relied heavily on agriculture as its primary export and the major foreign exchange-earning commodity. The agricultural sector, before the discovery of oil, was the main source of revenue and foreign earnings for Nigeria. It also accounts for over 70 per cent of the labour force (Onunwo and Amadi-Robert, 2022, p. 80). With the discovery of oil and, consequently, the oil boom of the 1970s, the agricultural sector received little attention. Despite the huge revenue accrued through the export of crude oil, Nigeria has not been able to break the cycle of poverty that has characterised the larger percentage of its citizens. Following the oil glut in the 1980s and, consequently, the deepening economic crisis, many Nigerians were forced into poverty. By 1980, when the Nigerian population was estimated to be around 65 million people, out of which 18.3 million or 28.1 per cent were considered poor. Out of the estimated 75 million people in 1985, 34.7 million or 46.3 per cent were plunged into poverty (Uchechukwu, 2010, p. 159).

Consequently, the Nigerian state was forced to embark on the reform measures to stabilise the economy. Under the reforms, various economic policies were adopted, such as the Economic Stabilisation Act in 1982 and the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986 (SAP). Instead of the economic liberalisation policies embarked upon by the Nigerian state under SAP to address the economic challenges facing the state, it ended up stunting the economy, undermining development, and throwing many citizens into destitution. This was as a result of a decrease in the purchasing power of citizens because of spiralling commodity prices, closure of, or a decline in the capacity utilisation of manufacturing industries, making poverty worsen day by day. By 1992, the incidence of poverty stood at 42.7 per cent, affected almost 39.1 million people out of the 91.5 million estimated population. By 1996, the poverty rate moved to 65.6 per cent, affecting 67.1 million people out of a population of 102.3 million (Uchechukwu, 2010, p. 159). The dwindling economic fortune further limits the states' responsibility in providing quality education. Access to quality education becomes an unfulfilled dream for average Nigerians. The situation becomes pathetic with the increasing number of uneducated and unemployed citizens who roam the streets. This widened inequality among Nigerians and forced, especially youths, to get involved in criminal activities, such as robbery. In addition, irresponsiveness in governance, lack of accountability, and brazen corruption among those managing national assets further deteriorated the situation.

Even after the handover of power from the military to the civilian regime, macroeconomic indicators continue to worsen, and poverty remains close to the comfort of Nigerians. This is because the emergent, newly democratic government continues to capitalise on a single product as an export commodity. The price of which has continued to fluctuate in the international market. In addition, the rising corruption among government officials further exacerbated the situation. By 2004, the incidence of poverty stood at 54.4 per cent, affecting an estimated 68.7 million out of the 126.3 million people. This rose to 69 per cent in 2010, and the number of people affected was 112.5 million out of an estimated 163 million people (Aiyedogbon & Ohwofasa, 2012, p. 276). By 2018, the incidence of poverty had risen to 80.0 per cent, affecting almost 154.6 million out of 193.3 million people (*The Guardian*, Monday, July 16, 2018, paras. 1-11). In addition, it was reported that around 30.9 per cent of Nigerians lived below the extreme poverty line of 2.15 US dollars per day from 2018 to 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic *(Punch*, May 4, 2025, para. 4). The level of poverty was spatially unequal between the northern and southern regions. Between 2018 and 2019, the poverty rate in the northern region rose to 46.5 per cent compared to 13.5 per cent in the southern region

(Punch, May 4, 2025, para. 6), showing a significant disparity in poverty levels in the country.

By 2019, the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was 2.2 per cent. This steadily declined to -1.8 per cent in 2020, and rose again to 3.6 per cent in 2021. The decline in the real GDP growth rate from 3.3 per cent as recorded in 2022 to 2.9 per cent in 2023 was due to high domestic inflation (see Table 1 below). This was exacerbated by the removal of subsidies on Premium Motor Spirits (PMSs), and the rapid depreciation of the naira against foreign currencies as a result of the unification of the official exchange rate in June 2023 (AfDB, 2024, p.8). The value of the naira depreciation reached its peak in June 2024 when it lost value by more than 230 per cent from 460 naira to 1,490 naira to a dollar (AfDB, 2024, p.13). The rising domestic inflation signifies the increasing macro instability in the country, which stood at 11.4 per cent in 2019. This was raised to 24.5 per cent in 24.5 per cent and 31.6 per cent in 2023 and 2024, respectively (also see Table 1 below). The spike in domestic inflation for consumable items such as food, fuel costs, and the depreciation of the naira further aggravates the already worsening conditions of Nigerians.

Table 1: Nigerian Macroeconomic Performance from 2019 to 2025

Macroeconomic Indicators	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (e)	2024 (p)	2025 (p)
Real GDP Growth	2.2	-1.8	3.6	3.3	2.9	3.2	3.4
Real GDP Growth per Capita	-0.3	-4.3	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.9	1.0
Inflation	11.4	13.2	17.0	18.8	24.5	31.6	20.7
Overall Fiscal Balance, Including Grants (% GDP)	-4.5	-5.0	-5.2	-5.4	-5.1	-4.3	-4.1
Primary Balance (% GDP)	-2.8	-2.9	-2.8	-3.0	-3.0	-2.9	-2.9
Currency Account (% GDP)	-3.1	-3.7	-0.7	0.2	0.9	3.0	-3.6
Total population (Millions)	203.3	208.3	213.4	218.5	223.8	N/A	N/A
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	52.9	52.9	52.7	53.6	53.9	N/A	N/A

Source: AfDB (2024, p.12) (e = estimated and p = prediction)

Furthermore, it was projected by the World Bank that the percentage of people in poverty by 2024 could have reached 54 per cent, likely to be caused by multiple economic shocks, insecurity and inflation *(Punch*, May 4, 2025, para. 5). Poverty among children between the ages of 0 and 14 is 72.5 per cent, while that of female children stood at 63.9 per cent as compared with 63.1 per cent for males. The lower-middle-income poverty line was put around 3.65 US dollar (*Punch*, May 4, 2025, para. 12). The percentage of urban people living below the poverty line was 41.3 per cent in 2025, and that of rural poverty double more than that of the urban people, which was 75.5 per cent (*Punch*, May 4, 2025, para. 1-3). This, as reported, is due to economic stagnation, inflation, widening inequality, and structural challenges, which worsen economic growth in rural areas.

Access to quality education and relevant skills, which serve as opportunities to get a decent job, continues to be limited, thereby exacerbating poverty despite various economic and empowerment initiatives by levels of government. By 2024, poverty among adults without formal education stood at 79.5 per cent, and those with primary education were 61.9 per cent. The poverty rate among those with secondary education was 50.0 per cent, and graduates of tertiary education 25.4 per cent (*Punch*, May 4, 2025, para. 9-10). By 2011, the unemployment rate had risen to 23.9 per cent. This steadily grew to 24.3 per cent in 2012 and 28.5 per cent in 2013, respectively. The projected percentage of unemployed people in 2014 was estimated to be 30.0 per cent (cited in Innocent, 2014, p. 110), making a significant impact on people's livelihoods.

Youths, who are considered the most energetic and productive segment of society, are the most affected group by poverty, lack of employment, education, and the required skills (Uchechukwu, 2010; Udeh, 2010). It was estimated that out of the 167 million estimated population in 2012, about half of the population was youth between the ages of 15 and 34. Out of whom, 11.1 million were unemployed (Akande, 2014, para.1). This is because of sluggish growth of industrialisation, as the share of employment only marginally increased in twenty years from 11.3 per cent to 12.7 per cent. Even the agricultural sector, which despite evidence of structural transformation, saw its share of employment fall from 49.3 per cent in 2000 to 35.2 per cent in 2021 (AfDB, 2024, p.8). Thus, with this unemployment, it means a significant number of Nigerians were unable to cater for their daily needs, thereby being subjected to poverty.

In addition, economic depression and the oil price collapse in the international market from more than 100 US dollars to less than 30 US dollars between 2014 and 2015, the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic caused inconsistencies in GDP and a decrease in revenue accrued to the state. This, coupled with the prevalence of economic immorality, compelled the state to continue borrowing to finance its expenditure. The result further increased the external debt by over 8 trillion naira within a span of two years, which is from 12.36 trillion naira in 2015 to 20.37 trillion naira in 2017. The external debt component stood at 2.09 trillion naira in 2015 and grew steadily to 4.60 trillion naira in 2017. The internal debt also rose dramatically from 10.27 trillion naira in 2015 to 15.68 trillion naira in 2017, making the country's internal debt rise to about 5.41 trillion naira, or 52.68 per cent within two years (NigerianEye, 2017, para.1-18).

As of March 31, 2025, Nigeria's public debt reached 97.32 billion US dollars, equivalent to 149.3 trillion naira. The debt growth raises concerns about the economic stability, as it can increase the risk of a debt crisis by rising debt servicing costs. In 2024, the country spent a total of 8.55 billion US dollars, equivalent to 13.12 trillion naira, on debt servicing. This represents a 68 per cent increase from 5.09 billion US dollars, which is equivalent to 7.8 trillion naira recorded in 2023 (Finance in Africa, 2025, para.1). The worsening macroeconomic indicators discussed above denote that Nigeria is economically weak despite its resourcefulness. The lack of access to quality education and decent jobs, rising inequality, domestic inflation, and the high cost of living that drive poverty deteriorate the miserable conditions of Nigerians. The crisis can be attributed to the patrimonial and corrupt nature of the Nigerian state, the absence of competent leaders with political will and ability to fine-tune an effective development policy, and the over-reliance on crude oil as a major source of its revenue. These have a negative impact on the economy and socio-economic development, which affects people's living conditions.

The Rising Cost of Electoral Management in Nigeria

There is no doubt that sufficient funding is necessary for the successful conduct of an election, and in general, a free, fair, and credible electoral process. It is in line with this that the Nigerian state has committed a substantial part of its revenue earned since the return of democracy to manage the electoral process and activities. Between 1999 and 2023, Nigeria has had seven general elections. The 1999 general elections marked the transition from the military to civil rule. During this period, Nigeria expended the sum of 32 billion naira or 1.46 billion US dollars, as administrative costs for managing the electoral process (*Vanguard*, September 13, 2025, para. 6).

Table 2: Amount spent for Managing Electoral Process during the Seven General Elections in Nigeria (1999-2023)

Years	Amount Spent in billion Naira	Amount Spent in US Dollar Equivalent	Estimated Registered Voters (million)	Estimated Population (million)	Fixed Naira to Dollar Exchange Rate
1999	32	1.46 billion	57,938,945	123, 047, 320	21.89
2003	55.172	483.965 million	60.823,022	137,202,644	114
2007	74.2	618.333 million	61,567,036	144, 998, 281	120
2011	99.7	664.667 million	73,528,040	164,798,232	150
2015	122.9	646.842 million	67,422,005	187,301,148	190.16
2019	242.2	794.098 million	84,271,832	209,485,641	305
2023	355.298	815.475 million	93,469,008	227, 882, 945	435.7
Total	981.47	5.483			

Source: The information is drawn from Vanguard News (April 23, 2011); Vanguard (September 13, 2025); IFES (March 2015); Media Nigeria (February 24, 2023); populationPyramid.net. (n.d); NBS (n.d); https://www.macrotrends.net/datasets/global-metrics/countries/nga/nigeria/population.

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In 2003, a total of 55.172 billion naira, equivalent to 483.965 million US dollars, was spent on managing the electoral process in the country. This raised 74.2 billion naira during the 2007 general elections, 99.7 billion naira or 664.667 million US dollars in 2011, and during the 2015 general elections, 122.9 billion naira or 646.842 million US dollars was spent (*Vanguard*, September 13, 2025, para 6). This excluded the total cost of political parties and their candidates, which was estimated to be between 1.5 billion US dollars and 2 billion US dollars (*Vanguard News*, Sunday, June 30, 2019).

Table 3: Amount Budgeted for Institutions/Agencies for 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Institutions/Agencies	Total Amount Required (N)	Amount to be Allocated in 2018 Supplementary Budget (N)	Amount to be Allocated in 2019 Budget (N)
INEC	189,207,544,893	143,512,529,445	45,695,015,438
NSAO	4,281,500,00	3,855,500,000	426,000,000
DSS	12,213,282,455	2,903,638,000	9,309,644,455
NSCD	3,573,534,500	1,845,597,000	1,727,997,500
NPF	30,541,317,432	11,457,417,432	19,083,900,000
NIS	2,628,143,320	530,110,078	2,098,033,142
Total	**242,445,322,600**	**168,875,782,655**	**61,165,080,535**

Sources: *Punch News*, July 18, 2018.

Similarly, an estimated 242 billion naira was budgeted for INEC and security agencies, such as the National Security Adviser's Office (NSAO), Directorate of State Security (DSS), National Security and Defence Corps (NSDC), Nigerian Police Force (NPF), and Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), for the conduct of the 2019 general elections. Part of which, 164 billion naira, was presented to the National Assembly as part of the 2018 supplementary budget. The outstanding budget of 78 billion naira was to be covered by the 2019 budget (*Punch News*, July 18, 2018). It was estimated that between 1999 and 2018, the sum of 450 billion naira was released to the INEC by the Federal Government (*Daily Trust*, June 30, 2019). This excludes the total amount being given to INEC by foreign donors as electoral assistance.

Table 4: Distribution of the Amount Budgeted for 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

S/N	Institutions/Agencies	Total Amount Budgeted (N)
1	INEC Budget	
	Electoral operational and Administrative cost	161.9 billion
	Electoral Technology	117.1 billion
	Electoral capital cost	18.5 billion
	Annual expenditure	50 billion
2	Security Budget	
	NSAO	Not Available
	DSS	Not Available

	NSCD	Not Available
	NPF	Not Available
	NIS	Not Available

Sources: CDD Fact Check (2024, para. 8-9). https://cddfactcheck.

Looking at Table 2 above, it shows that although the 2023 general elections were the most expensive in naira terms, which consumed a sum of 355.298 billion naira. However, in dollar terms, the 1999 general elections were the most expensive due to the exchange rate. Presently, the official naira to dollar exchange swing between 1, 200 naira and 1, 300 naira, coupled with the on-going voter registration and the need to replace some of the BVAS and other damaged equipment, meaning the cost of managing the 2027 general elections is going to be more costly than the previous ones. The high cost of managing the electoral process has made Nigeria's electoral process one of the most expensive in the world. For instance, during the 2024 national elections, Pakistan, with a population of 253 million, spent 47 billion PKR, equivalent to 164.5 million US dollars. India, with a population of 1.46 billion, spent 2,408.01 million Rupees (2.89billion US dollars) in the 2024 election, with registered voters of 960 million, and Bangladesh, with a population of 175.7 million, spent an equivalent of 21.3 million US dollars during the 2024 elections (*Vanguard*, September 13, 2025, para. 1-22). The cost of managing the electoral process continues to exhaust the little revenue generated for the state amid the country's economic situation, which is likely to affect the provision of basic amenities. INEC also proposed that the 2027 election will cost 873 billion naira. The proposal is separate from the 171 billion 2026 budget estimate, which is expected to be used for personnel and overhead costs, as well as election-related activities, including by-elections and off-cycle polls (*Premium Times*, February 12, 2026, paras. 1-5).

Cost of Electoral Management and Economic Development in Nigeria

Nigeria continues to experience a rising cost of electoral management in a four-year election cycle despite worsening citizens' living conditions of its citizens and the country's economic predicaments. The rising cost of electoral management under the country's present economic conditions is a misplacement of priority if not a colossal waste of public funds, especially since the credibility of the electoral process in the country is still questioned. In preparation for the 2019 general elections, for instance, the Nigerian president requested the National Assembly (NA) to approve a supplementary sum of over 164 billion naira in the 2018 budget (*Punch News*, July 18, 2018, paras. 1-2). This was just 67.7 per cent of the 242 billion naira needed to cover the 2019 general elections. The remaining balance of 78 billion naira, which was to be covered in the 2019 budget, was for electoral institutions and security agencies to carry out their responsibilities (*Punch News*, July 18, 2018, para. 1-2). Out of the country's estimated population in 2019, which was 209, 485, 641, it was estimated that 40.2 per cent of the population, or 84,271,832, were the actual number of people registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), an institution tasked with the responsibility of conducting elections in Nigeria.

This budgetary cost was sent to the National Assembly as a supplementary budget in 2018 by President Muhammadu Buhari to enable the INEC and security agencies to start early preparations ahead of the 2019 general elections. Part of the budget was to cover the purchase of sensitive and non-sensitive materials required during elections, personnel costs, and security activities. Regrettably, as the cost of electoral management continues to increase, the state has failed to provide effective measures to address the growing vulnerability. The twin social pillars, education and health, for instance, suffer neglect despite government rhetoric

statements that it is committed to enhancing the livelihood of Nigerians. Of the 8.83 trillion naira budgeted in 2019, the allocation for education for the entire population, estimated to be around 209,485,641, was 7.02 per cent or 620.5 billion naira (Amoo, 2018, para. 1-5). This is against 10.79 per cent earmarked to the sector in 2015 (Statista, 2026, para. 1). This was to cater for the 28 parastatals, 37 federal universities, and 25 federal polytechnics, 21 federal colleges of education, and 104 federal unity schools that are directly under its controlled (Amoo, 2018, para.6). Even with that, the total of 539,689,537,187 billion naira went for personnel cost, 33,522,298,519 billion naira for overhead, and only 47,291,333,322 billion naira was earmarked for capital expenditure (Amoo, 2018, para.6).

Furthermore, at a time when over 242 billion naira, or 794.098 million US dollars, was allocated to manage the 2019 electoral activities, the number of Out-Of-School-Children (OOSC) stood at 16 million (Ndanusa, Aboyomi & Harada, 2021, p. 66). It was 8.7 million in 2014, and raise to 13.2 million in 2015(Ndanusa, Aboyomi & Harada, 2021, p. 66), but also reached its peak in 2025 with over 18.95 million children (*Tribune Online*, 2025, para. 1). While a significant percentage of Nigerian children are kept-out of school with increasingly fragile livelihood, more resources are diverted in managing electoral process, which still far from being credible.

Thus, as the health sector continues to receive limited resources despite the challenges confronting it, a significant portion of the budget is allocated to manage the country's electoral process. For instance, the sector was allocated 315.62 billion naira out of the 8.83 trillion naira budgeted in 2019 (Amoo, 2018, pp. 7-8), for the entire population of over 209,485,641. However, a total of 242.2 billion naira was earmarked to manage the 2019 electoral process of 84,271,832 voters. Similarly, in 2021, the share for the health sector for the entire population was 547 billion naira, and this rose to 826.9 billion in 2022. At a time when the country committed the sum of 815.475 million US dollars, equivalent to 355.298 billion naira for managing electoral process for just 93, 469,008 registered voters in 2023, only 1.17 trillion naira was earmarked to cater for the health of 227, 882, 945 million people. The sector share rose to 1.33 trillion naira in 2024, and further to 2.48 trillion naira in 2025 (*Punch,* December 31, 2025, para. 17). The amount budgeted for the health sector each of these years was far below the 15 per cent 2001 Abuja declaration target. The human resources imbalance, which persists due to neglect and brain drain, further worsens the already troubled situation in the two sectors. It was reported that an estimated 4,193 medical doctors and dentists allegedly left the country for greener pastures (*Punch,* December 31, 2025, para. 19), resulting in a lag in the ratio of doctors to patients.

This likely to deepen the challenges in the Nigeria's health sector, such as increase in maternal mortality, which remains a terrible nightmare in Nigeria, making it among the highest countries with maternal death rate of 904 in every 1,000 in 2024 (*Premium Times*, March 10, 2026, para.1). It is fact that reducing maternal mortality challenge cannot be resolved using single measure as the driving factors cut across behavioural, health facility capacity, and broader health system governance, as noted by Olasunmbo Makinde, public health physician expert (*The Guardian*, March 12, 2026, para. 2). However, injecting more funds to the health sector to enhance health facilities in Nigerian hospitals and boost awareness could reduce significantly the loss of women during pregnancy. Even though the death rate continues to decline from 1999 to 2025, it still remains high, especially in rural locations where the health facilities are inadequate. It has been reported that the death rate declined from 17.80 per 1000 people in 1999 to 15.99 in 2004. This further declined to 14.55 per 1000 people in 2009 to 13.74 per 1000 people in 2014. This continues to decline to 12.68

per 1000 people in 2019 and further to 10.83 per 1000 people in 2024 and 10.67 per 1000 people in 2025 (Macrotrends, n.d, para. 2).

The out of hand of public funds for electoral activities is likely to limit the required funds to enhance the well-being of Nigerians. Consequently, the result of this is capable of serving as a motivating factor that could lead significantly number of Nigerians into destitution. The inability to access formal education is likely to deny one's right to be educated and have a prepared mind for employment, thereby setting oneself free from overwhelming poverty. Thus, as the cost of managing elections continues to increase in every four-year election cycle, the rate of youth unemployment also continues to grow. Necessary measures need to be in place to monitor the increase in youth in the reserve army. This is because it is capable of posing danger to the economic sector, as such youths are likely to be manipulated to serve as cannon fodder, such as pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, and jihadist insurgencies of *Boko Haram* and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Nigeria, for instance, has witnessed a significant decline in crude oil production and export due to pipeline vandalism, typically perpetuated by youths. The resulting disruption in oil production had shrunk government revenue and undermined economic growth and development. Between 2017 and 2021, the report of Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) revealed that Nigeria lost 208.639 million barrels of oil valued at 12.74 million US dollar or 4.325 trillion naira in 7,143 pipeline vandalism cases (cited in Onyango, 2023, para.3). This kind of socio-economic challenges can be restrained by generating economic opportunities for all citizens, especially youths. Some of these opportunities cannot be generated without adequate funding, which should be provided by reducing the huge amount being expended to manage the electoral process in the country.

In addition, the increasing cost of managing electoral activities is likely to force borrowing amid economic downturn due to over-reliance on the export of a single commodity production – crude oil, whose price continues to fluctuate in the international market. This is capable of raising the country's debt stock funded by domestic and external loans. In addition, with poor economic management and a budget deficit, government borrowing is liable to increase. Between 2015 and 2023, the budget deficit rose to 370 per cent (cited in Tekedia, January 26, 2024, para. 7), which is reflected in the debt profile of the country. As of December 2015, Nigeria's total debt stood at 65.42 billion US dollars. Out of this, 10.7 billion US dollars was external debt, while 53.1 billion US dollars (12.6 trillion naira) was domestic debt (The Nation, May 1, 2023, para.2). This was raised to 95.77 billion US dollars in June 2021, with external debt accounting for 38.3 billion US dollars and domestic debt with 57.28 billion US dollars or 35 trillion naira (*The Nation*, May 1, 2023, para.3). This reached 101.2 billion US dollars in September 2025 (CEIC Data, n.d, para. 1). The raising debt profile increases debt service which continues to have negative effects on the Nigeria's economy by consuming a high proportion of state revenue. In 2023, the debt servicing to revenue ratio was 124 per cent (cited in Tekedia, January 26, 2024, para. 7). This further constrained the ability of the Nigerian state to perform its primary responsibilities of providing decent job opportunities, a good road network, and adequate health facilities, as well as quality education to its citizenry. This can force the state to collect more loans, recycling the economic crisis with devastating consequences on the well-being of the people.

The Nigerian state, thus, is economically weak but still remains alpha and omega in the provision of basic infrastructure and social services for its citizenry. The growing decay of such infrastructure and services has exposed the irresponsiveness of the Nigerian state. Amid this controversy, the state has continued to allocate a substantial amount of its revenue

earnings on managing elections without due consideration of the people's needs. In line with this, it can be argued that the growing cost of managing elections under the dwindling economic fortune and poor state of citizen welfare can be seen as economically irresponsible. There is an urgent need for the country to develop a strategy that would enhance the credibility of the election without spending such a huge amount of resources.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the rising cost of electoral management and how this affects the economic development of Nigeria and the living conditions of Nigerians. Thus, the state has failed to address the fundamental question about the living conditions of the Nigerian state, while on the other hand, it continues to increase the cost of managing elections. The paper believes that under a deepening economic crisis, the high cost of electoral management contributes to the poor condition of Nigerians. More worrisome is that despite the rising cost of electoral management in Nigeria, limited success has been achieved in enhancing the quality of the country's electoral process. There is evidence of electoral fraud, irregularities, and violence. The illegalities that have polluted the quality of the electoral process have been on the rise and have become increasingly sophisticated in every election, while the well-being of the majority of citizens has continued to be frustrated.

Recommendations

Having said this, the paper recommends that:

- Nigeria state should give more priority to addressing social insecurity by injecting more funds into various sectors of human needs, such as health and education. More effort should be made by the state in providing potable water and sanitation, reducing unemployment, and enhancing economic opportunities by investing heavily in agriculture and industrial development.
- INEC should develop a strategy, such as electronic voting, using a simple machine that would not only limit the cost of managing the electoral process, but also enhance the credibility of elections in the country.
- The budget for managing the electoral process in the country should undergo serious scrutiny, with openness by civil society organisations (CSOs), members of the public, and members of the National Assembly.
- There is a need for more improvement in governance in all parts of the country;
- There is a need to cut-down budget size of the electoral process and allocate adequate funds to the very important electoral activities.

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