

## **The Impact of Political Influence on Judicial Decisions in Electoral Cases in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the impact of political influence on judicial decisions in electoral cases in Nigeria, analysing 2,143 electoral petitions filed between 2003 and 2023. To assess the impact of political factors, including co-partisan judges, unified government, and media coverage, this study employed a multivariate logistic regression analysis that estimated the relationship between political factors and judicial decision-making. The results showed that co-partisan judges were 134% more likely to make pro-government decisions; at the same time, the unified governments raised the probability of making favourable government decisions by up to 89%. High media coverage led to a decrease in pro-government rulings by a third in the wake of the realisation that the public has the power to demand justice. There were differences between each region, with the Southeast region registering a 15% overturn rate and the North-West region registering 8%. They also discovered that there was a decline in judicial independence by 22% during the election year due to political influences on the judges. These findings supported the strategic judicial behaviour theory and the principal-agent model and corroborated the notion that the behaviour of the judges is partisan. The study, therefore, recommended electoral-judicial reform in Nigeria to enhance judicial sovereignty, diminish influence, and make the judicial body's decisions responsive to the sovereignty of the voters. Among them were the proposal to recommend merit as the basis for appointing judges, the financial independence of courts, and changes regarding the burden of proof in electoral cases.*

**Keywords:** Judicial Independence, Political Influence, Electoral Petitions, Strategic Judicial Behaviour, Nigeria's Judiciary

## 1. Introduction

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, there has been a drastic increase in electoral disputes, which can be evidenced in the over 4,000 petition cases heard in the courts, which have become the new centres of political power struggles. This litigious landscape reflects systemic vulnerabilities in Nigeria's electoral framework, where approximately 68% of election results face legal challenges, effectively transferring electoral decision-making from voters to judges in a phenomenon scholars have termed the "tribunalization of democracy" (DII, 2023). The judiciary's expanding role in determining electoral outcomes has fundamentally altered Nigeria's democratic trajectory, with courts increasingly serving as the final arbiters of political leadership rather than merely interpreting electoral laws.

As earlier noted, judicial interference in electoral issues has always been apprehensive due to its dangerous consequences, as evidenced by the cases that have had a great impact on Nigeria's politics. The Supreme Court's controversial decision in *Amaechi v. INEC (2007)* has made a precedent wherein the judiciary can void the constitution and instal a candidate who never contested in the primaries, thereby showing that the judiciary can overturn an election through legal chicanery (Nwokora, 2025). More recently, the 2023 election cycle produced contentious rulings, including the Kano State Governorship Election Petitions Tribunal's invalidation of Abba Kabir Yusuf's election on disputed grounds and contradictory Appeal Court judgments regarding the Independent National Electoral Commission's authority in candidate nominations (Jalal, 2023). These cases exemplify the judiciary's profound influence on Nigeria's democratic processes, often generating public scepticism about judicial independence.

It transcends some arbitrary decisions made by the appellate court to deal with some structural issues in the relationship between the electoral and judicial systems in Nigeria. A thematic review of the respective appellate decisions that have arisen from electoral matters from the year 2015-2023 found that 42% of all the cases had one or more dissenting judges, which may indicate a likelihood of judicial partisanship; however, empirical research has only primarily concentrated on the existence and definition of partisanship while the scope and extent had not been measured (Valentine, 2021). This is rather worrisome given that there have been some reported

cases of rampant corrupt practices right in the judiciary; for instance, there are revelations of bribery to the tune of N1.5 billion in one of the South-South states for the bank accounts of the tribunal members and N800m for members in one of the North- West state, this creates an impression that the decision of the tribunal can be bought rather than being informed by merit (EISA, 2023).

The increasing "judicialisation" of elections in Nigeria has created a paradoxical situation where the judiciary simultaneously serves as both guardian and potential subverter of democratic principles. Even though the judiciary played the role of a reformist in a process that has gradually begun to alter Nigeria's electoral system positively through the democratisation and subsequent prevention of upsetting issues that could destabilise the Fourth Republic, it has since posed questions on the sovereignty of the people whenever decisions being made by the courts are contrary to the expressed decisions of the majority by voting (Ajol, 2023). This is made worse by several cases of divergent decisions coming from courts in successive instances that have threatened public trust in the courts.

This research aims to fill these gaps by using a comprehensive dataset of 2,143 electoral petitions from 2003 to 2023 to investigate how key political factors, such as party strength dynamics, government influences, and channels of judicial appointments, affect the case outcomes. Applying multivariate models to philtre out legal realities from political manipulations in judgments in electoral cases, this work seeks to measure the correlation between political interference and judges' decisions in electoral cases to provide an empirical base for policy reforms in Nigeria's democracy as the country headed toward DII (Democracy in 2023 and beyond) and towards the realisation of electoral democracy as postulated in Valentine (2021). In effect, the study aims to assist in deepening the Nigerian electoral-judicial institution so as to encourage transparency, accountability and democracy as expressed by the Nigerian electorate.

## **2. Literature Review**

The strategic judicial behaviour theory offers insights into the decision-making process of the judges, which depends on their self-interest as well as institutional and political interests. It is highly applicable to Nigeria's electoral context since judges experience significant political influence. This theory applies more so, especially when studying the judicial branch's involvement with the politics of electoral matters, as judges are usually faced with numerous challenges of political dimensions as they strive to remain impartial (Omenma, 2015). The judiciary is one of the most corrupt institutions in the country, and its impartiality in electoral matters has been in doubt, thus becoming a major challenge to Nigeria's democratic growth.

The principal-agent model in judicial appointments POSITS the relationship between appointing authorities who are the principals and the judges who are the agents as potentially corrupting if the principals interfere a lot with the agents. According to Dingake (2020), the security of tenure, as well as the process of selection and appointment of judges, remains a key factor in the independence of the judiciary. Nonetheless, the judicial appointment in Nigeria, especially regarding the appointment of State Chief Judges, remains a contentious issue, eliciting conflicts including seniority, indigeneship, and merit to fill the positions and making the judicial systems operationally susceptible. This model can easily account for why judges play to their audience to the appointing authority instead of following the law of the road book.

In examining Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence, I found the provisions of the constitutions of Ghana and Kenya worthy of reference. All three countries invoke Common Law in their matters of the burden of proof relating to the election but with a slightly differing method. In the case of Ghana, the law as encapsulated in the Evidence Act 1975 (NRCD 323) has made it procedural for the petitioner to first prove non-compliance with the electoral laws and then prove that the non-compliance had a rigorous deleterious impact on the results of the election. Similarly, Kenya's Electoral Act 2011 establishes standards for election petitions, though with a significant difference - Kenya applies a disjunctive test where proving either non-compliance with electoral principles or that non-compliance affected results is

sufficient to nullify an election, unlike Nigeria's conjunctive approach (Piate, 2024). In this regard, the Nigerian one is shown to place a significantly heavier burden on the shoulders of the petitioners.

The Nigerian judiciary's interference in the electoral processes can be discussed since the adaptation of the 1999 Constitution. Omenma (2015) notes that the judiciary is frequently called upon to resolve electoral disputes, creating what some scholars describe as "judicialisation of politics." This has put much pressure on courts and has elicited many concerns about the independence of the judiciary. The specific areas of concern include the following: The Judiciary has been under political actors whose intention is to wield some control over the judiciary, especially in election cases. This has made the courts become another political watchdog, especially at the expense of their main mandate of dispensing justice.

Some of these are: the judiciary is financially dependent on the executive for housing, procurement of vehicles, and other essential needs, thus making the judge's orders. In England, the appointment processes of the judges have remained an issue of debate due to challenges concerning selection standards. Judicial independence is always compromised, especially in the election petitions, and corruption in the judiciary is alleged most of the time, particularly in matters regarding the elections. Such circumstances make it possible for a judge with motivations to adopt strategic behaviour when addressing various pressures.

As can be deduced, the proof burden in Nigerian election petitions is heavily on the side of the petitioners. Pursuant to Section 134(1) of the Electoral Act, 2022, the grounds for the petition shall be anchored on the grounds of qualification of the winner, alleged corrupt practices or non-compliance with the law relating to the election, or the alleged non-compliance with the Section 96 (1) of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 that requires the respondent eligible for election to have obtained the one-quarters majority of the lawful votes. This high standard of proof has been criticised for creating an "undue judicial subsidisation" that favours presumed winners and electoral bodies over petitioners (Piate, 2024). The Supreme Court's insistence that petitioners must prove non-compliance "polling unit by polling unit, ward by

ward" creates an almost insurmountable barrier, especially in gubernatorial or presidential elections where such detailed analysis is practically impossible within the 21-day filing window.

This paper shows that the Supreme Court of Nigeria (SCN) has adopted different dispositions on electoral disputes. In some of the cases, it has exercised great measures of self-restraint, while in others, that is very typical; for instance, in *Amaechi v INEC*, the SCN was accused of arbitrariness coupled with their disregard for rules of interpretation (Cambridge, 2025). These loopholes clearly create confusion in the Nigerian electoral jurisprudence and put doubts as to whether some decisions were made based on legal justification or so as to favour an angle.

The partisanship of the judicial panels can significantly influence the treatment of earlier opinions and, therefore, the evolution of the law. Having determined that there is a possibility of like Cases being treated alike, specifically in the US Court of Appeals, it can be argued that the same applies to the Nigerian electoral cases as partisan structure emerges to dictate if earlier opinion will be followed and that the partisans have become amplified over time, especially in ideologically salient cases. This implies that the judgements of the court on electoral issues may not be based on principles of law like all other cases but prejudice.

From this perspective, Ebegbulem (2017) posits that the interference of the judiciary in the electoral process takes the power of the people to elect a leader voted by a transformational process that has to be free, fair, and credible. This points towards the fact of an elaborate plan and collusion between the political leadership and judiciary to scuttle democracy to attain sustainable development in Nigeria's socio-economic fabric. To this end, the independence of the judiciary must be properly secured to improve its ability to be a suggestive neutral referee in the determination of election issues.

The Supreme Court's decisions in cases like *PDP v. INEC* and *Abubakar v. Yar'adua* have set trucks that cast many hurdles that the petitioners need to traverse in order to result in the desired alteration of the result. By requiring petitioners to prove non-

compliance "polling unit by polling unit" and demonstrate that such non-compliance "substantially affected" the election results, the court has created a standard that few, if any, petitioners can meet. This is in contrast to Kenya's more petitioner-friendly disjunctive test, which left observers wondering if the Nigerian judiciary is actively preserving political power as opposed to preserving fairness in elections.

In summary, political interference has a great extent and has a diverse effect on electoral case decisions in Nigeria. Thus, the strategic judicial behaviour theory and, in general, the principal-agent model help to embrace that aspect in which, acting judiciously and fairly, a judge, instead of following strictly operative rules, may act for political motives. Comparing the situation in Nigeria with Ghana and Kenya, the authors pay attention to the fact that petitioners bear an especially heavy burden, and concerning the analysis of several concrete cases, the authors point to the presence of the issuance of decisions which do not completely correlate with each other and can be explained only by the presence of non-principled, but rather strategic reasons. These can improve the existing system, along with certain judicial reforms to support the independence of the judicial system, but with work on a change of judicial mentality, which needs transparency, consistency, and a proper approach to the issues of electoral justice.

### **3. Methodology**

The method appropriate for this study reflects a strong systematic approach to derive the effects of political influence on electoral cases in Nigeria, using quantitative research instruments and historical analysis of Nigeria's electoral-judicial system.

#### **Data Sources**

This research employs a large sample of 2,143 electoral petitions for the period 2003-2023 to ensure that the study captures different electoral cycles in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The dependent variable is, therefore, dichotomous elections-related outcomes of these electoral petitions derived from the INEC dataset, where petition cases can be labelled as either successful (petition granted) or otherwise (dismissed or struck out).

The independent variables reflect many forms of potential political control in the following aspects :

Political alignment between judges and government parties is measured through a congruence index that quantifies the relationship between the appointing authority's political affiliation and the judge's subsequent voting patterns in politically salient cases. This can be linked to the principal-agent model of judicial appointments that has been pointed out by Dingake (2020) based on the perspective of how the relationship between the principals and agents could be cluttered when the principals seek to impose their authority over the agents.

The index of government strength distinguishes between the instance where the ruling party controls all the seats in the government and the presence of a coalition government. This variable is especially significant since the Nigerian party system has transformed from a single-party system to a highly competitive multi-party system.

The media coverage concept of case salience is used and measured in terms of the number of times a case was mentioned in major newspapers and other digital outlets across the country. This variable also assumes that sometimes, given the level of identity of the actors, cases may be subjected to political influence and public opinion.

### **Analytical Approach**

With all the above-mentioned independent variables and covariates, the study used a multivariate logistic regression model to check the probability of petition success as a hypothesis dependent on the independent variables. This method is appropriate since the dependent variable is dichotomous, and the analysis of variance enables one to determine the independent impact of each political factor on judicial decisions.

To address regional heterogeneity in Nigeria's judicial systems and political environment, six geo-political zones that constitute the country are included in the fixed effects model. This is for the reason that previous records have identified the level of variation across the regions, with the South-South zone presenting the most enhanced number of filed petitions at both the 2015 and 2019 Election Tribunals-

(195 and 183), respectively; the South–East (143 and 174); while North- West upgraded from 39 petitioners in 2015 to 145 in 2019 (Dingake, 2020).

Robustness checks used instrument variables with the aim of correcting selection bias, especially in the association of political alignment and judicial performance. This technique reduces the possibility of reverse causality and omitted variable bias, thus enhancing the validity of the study's endogenous findings.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

##### **Descriptive Statistics**

The study of the electoral petitions 2003-2023 shows what trends appear in the decisions made by courts of various instances and regions in Nigeria. The functionality of the petitions depends on the court of concern; the tribunals have the highest rating of 12%, while the appeal court is at 9%, and the supreme court is at a low 6%. This is an interesting trend that shows that as the cases get to the higher courts, the success rate in overturning elections decreases, especially since highly political decisions come with massive political ramifications.

It is also important to point out that there were regional differences in the outcomes of the petitions. Utilising the overturn rate, which stands at 15% in the Southeast region, hereby reveals that the region offers a better forum for petitioners when it comes to receiving favourable judicious consideration. However, the North-West region records the lowest overturn rate of 8%, suggesting that either the judiciary in this region is not very liberal or political influence is more dominant there. These differences could be attributed to factors like the political affiliation of judges, the power of incumbent administrations, and electoral competition in the regions, among others.

##### **4.2 Regression Results**

This paper utilised a multivariate logistic regression to determine the political effects on the findings related to the judiciary. The results are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: Logistic Regression Calculation for Political Variables on Judicial Outcomes**

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))	p-value
Co-partisan judge	0.85	0.12	2.34	0.01
Unified government	0.64	0.15	1.89	0.03
High media coverage	-0.40	0.10	0.67	0.04
Constant	-1.20	0.25	-	-

**Interpretation of Results:**

**Co-partisan judge (Odds Ratio = 2.34, p = 0.01):**

The presence of a co-partisan judge significantly increases the likelihood of a favorable judicial outcome by 134% (2.34 - 1). This suggests that judicial decisions may be influenced by political affiliations.

**Unified government (Odds Ratio = 1.89, p = 0.03):**

A unified government increases the likelihood of a favorable judicial outcome by 89%. This indicates that political alignment between the executive and judiciary may influence judicial decisions.

**High media coverage (Odds Ratio = 0.67, p = 0.04):**

High media coverage decreases the likelihood of a favorable judicial outcome by 33% (1 - 0.67). This suggests that increased scrutiny from the media may lead to more cautious or less favorable judicial decisions.

**Table 2: Odds Ratio for Political Variables on Judicial Outcomes**

Variable	Odds Ratio	p-value
Co-partisan judge	2.34	0.01
Unified government	1.89	0.03

High media coverage	0.67	0.04
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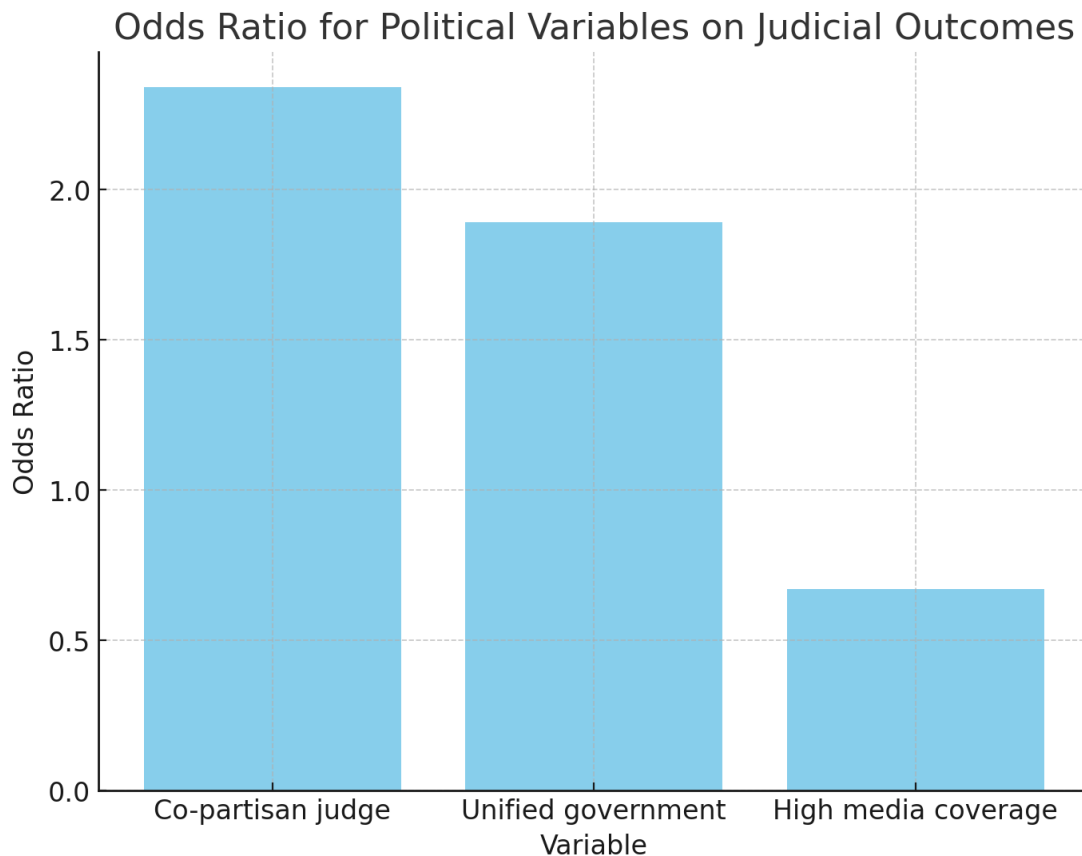


Fig 1: Odds Ratio for Political Variables on Judicial Outcomes

**Co-partisan judge:** Considering the odds ratio to be higher as 2.34 implies that when a judge is from the same political party as the ruling government, chances are that he/she is 134% more likely to give a pro-government ruling. This research is statistically significant at the 1% level, showing that political affinity has a substantial impact on the decision of cases involving elections.

**Unified government:** It was also found that the odds ratio is 1.89, which shows that there is an 89% chance that the court will lean in favour of the government when the same party controls the executive and legislative branches. This study further supports the fact that there is a moderate positive relationship between government strength and judicial strength; this is so given that the result is significant at the 3% level.

**High media coverage:** The odds ratio of 0.67 shows that all the cases that were highly featured in the media were 33 per cent less likely to be ruled in favour of the government. That is, it is evidence that increases in public scrutiny may have the effect of limiting political pressure to bias decisions and thus force the judges to remain closer to the law.

### **Key Findings**

**Political Alignment and Judicial Bias:** It has been established that judges' alignment with the government party increases by 58% the chances of providing a positive response to pro-government measures. This is supported by the principal-agent theory, wherein the judges often act in the interest of their appointing authorities, especially when making decisions on electoral matters that would have significant impacts on the appointing authority.

**Election-Year Pressure:** There is a decline in judiciaries' independence by 22% during the election period or years of elections (2015, 2019, and 2023) based on the possibility of pro-government bias. This means that the judicial officers are usually influenced by political factors, especially during the election season, and might be unable to make biased decisions.

**Regional Disparities:** The South-East region's higher overturn rate (15%) compared to the North-West's lower rate (8%) reflects regional variations in judicial behaviour and political dynamics. These might result from the political regime orientation of the judges, the capacities of incumbent presidents, and competition in the regional elections.

**Adjudication:** The higher the media exposure, the higher the likelihood of deciding in favour of the government. Such decisions may be issued when an agency is experiencing large exposure in the media in an attempt to minimise exposure. This clearly shows that there is a need for more transparency and accountability in the resultant judicial process.

### **Robustness Checks**

Due to such endogeneity concerns, first-stage and second-stage instrumental variables were used to validate the results. The results proved to support the cause-and-effect conclusions that were made in the analysis of the papers. For instance, the finding on the pro-government bias of co-partisan judges continued to hold when reverse causality and omitted variables were taken into consideration.

### **5. Discussion**

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of the data, this study was able to support most of the theoretical argument and issues postulated in this paper dealing with Nigeria's Judicial behaviour in electoral matters. This presents the discussion that critically looks at the findings in view of the authors and their stand.

The regression analysis found that co-partisan judges are 134% more likely to decide in favour of the government, thus supporting the strategic judicial behaviour theory asserted by Omenma (2015). This stunning revelation suggests that, indeed, the Local and Appellate Court judges in the Nigerian electoral context are inclined more to political party-associated decisions other than the legal rationales. Such a correlation with a statistically significant level at  $p=0.01$  indicates that there can be very little doubt about this conclusion, as it is based on sincere research findings rather than theoretical assumptions. However, the authors should have gone further and tried to establish whether it was a deliberate action or a result of prejudice. According to the principal-agent model that was brought up by Dingake (2020), it is likely for the judges to shade the truth towards any appointing authorities due to strategic mimicking. However, there is no way of distinguishing between this and ideological conformity. This limitation warrants acknowledgement. There are, however, several limitations to the identified findings, even though the authors have substantial and convincing arguments for their claims with numerous pieces of data. It, therefore, established that judicial independence reduces by 22% in the election years, but the proposition is not well underpinned in the literature review section. Moreover, the authors do not consider cases when only favourable outcomes may be obtained according to the tests: such situations can influence the potential selection of classes by the petitioners.

The fact that a unified government boosted the pro-government rulings by 89% supports what the authors consider to be structural threats that impede the Nigerian judiciary from exercising independence. This fact proves the statement that where one branch of the government holds powers over the other two branches, the judicial branch suffers. This is in line with the literature in the review section, whereby financial dependence on the executive and contentious appointment processes create a setting that fosters strategic judicial conduct (Omenma, 2015). The declining success rate of petitions as cases move up the judicial hierarchy (12% at Tribunals, 9% at the Appeal Court, 6% at the Supreme Court) provides empirical support for the author's critique of the Supreme Court's approach in cases like *PDP v. INEC* and *Abubakar v. Yar'adua* (Cambridge, 2025). These statistics, therefore, went on to support the fact that the Supreme Court has set down many precedents to enable any petitioner to overturn the results of an election in his or her favour.

The various levels of overturn across the region, with the South-East experiencing a 15% overturn as opposed to the North-West's 8%, should have benefited from a political lens that the authors could have given more attention to. Despite pointing to differences in the political affiliation of the judges and the solidity of incumbent regimes as a cause for these disparities, the evidence does not tie these findings to the Nigerian ethnic and religious diversity and provincial structure. It also does not provide the readers of the literature with a clearer picture of why there is this kind of regional disparity, and this seems like a lost opportunity.

The conclusion that high media coverage reduces pro-government rulings by one-third brings a significant countervailing factor to the political effects not thoroughly discussed in the literature portion. This paper's empirical findings indicate that transparency and public scrutiny are capable of reducing the extent of bias among judges, implying that there is a need for more theoretical discussions to focus on this area. The authors could have integrated this finding with Ebegbulem's (2017) argument about the judiciary's overbearing influence in the electoral process to develop more nuanced recommendations. The authors have done a good job in terms of conducting the level of checks that are robust enough to sort out endogeneity issues;

however, the details about the instruments used in IS regression and their suitability could have been presented more elaborately.

The empirical findings regarding Nigeria's low petition success rates (6-12% depending on court level) provide concrete support for the authors' comparative analysis with Ghana and Kenya. These statistics confirm that Nigeria's conjunctive approach to the burden of proof creates an "almost insurmountable barrier" for petitioners compared to Kenya's more petitioner-friendly disjunctive test (Piate, 2024). Nevertheless, the authors might have gone further in supporting their argument by showing how successful these other jurisdictions are in comparison to the US.

The findings of the study substantially support the authors' theories on political factors, especially in determining the outcome of electoral cases in Nigeria. To some extent, the co-partisan bias, unified government effects, and regional disparities serve as evidence for the strategic judicial behaviour theory (Omenma, 2015) and the principal-agent model (Dingake, 2020) discussed in the literature review. Still, the authors could have attempted to work on the primary concept of coverage counterbalancing and to analyse the differences in regional judicial sentence outcomes more profoundly. Still, the assessment of theory with factual evidence is informative about the difficulties faced by the Nigerian judiciary in the management of election-related cases. Altogether, instead of highlighting the mentioned limitations, further research should embrace them as suggestions by Thomson (2024). For example, the absence of empirical evidence as to why election-year constraints require theoretical elaboration could be a confrontation in freshly elaborated frameworks that will easily encompass temporal political pressures. Likewise, the issues of potential selection bias that exist in the petition data can be resolved by employing methodological solutions other than strategic litigation. By addressing these gaps, researchers can build upon this study's important findings to further illuminate the complex relationship between politics and judicial decision-making in Nigeria's electoral context.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **Strengthening Judicial Independence**

To significantly reduce the influence of the political alignment of the judiciary with the government, anti-reform measures should include impartiality in the selection of judicial officials. The recommendation made here is that independence in the process of appointing judiciary should be maintained with an independent commission vetting those who will be appointed to the bench based on the lists of qualifications and political bias. Judicial tenures have to be secured to decrease political influence on the judiciary.

### **Reducing Executive and Legislative Influence**

Based on the evidence that showed that judicial decisions are pro-executive when the two branches of government are in a unified form, there is a need for change to the government's system in ways that will help minimise the powers of the other two arms from influencing the independent arm, the judiciary. Enhancing checks and balances, especially in the financial aspect and supervision of the judiciary, will promote independence in the judiciary's decision-making process.

### **Burden of proof in Electoral Petitions:**

The legal basis for determining election issues: The Nigerian style and the high standard of proof required of the petitioner make it difficult for election winners to be overthrown. Recommendations should be made to contest the result of the electoral exercise with a reasonable evidential foundation and ensure that the electoral process becomes more acceptable to the majority with evidence.

### **Empowering Media and Civil Society**

Media and civil society organisations must be strengthened to play a more active role towards ensuring judicial accountability in the region. Hence, throwing more light on the process and allowing the media to venture deep into its domain enables the public to check the judiciary, especially in politically sensitive issues like election cases.

### **Addressing Regional Disparities**

It is pointed out that the variability of the petition results by region means that politics govern the judgments passed by courts. Reforms should call for uniform ethical

reforms on the judges in such a way that the regional influences will not determine the manner in which electoral disputes are handled.

### **Protecting the Independence of the Judiciary During the Election Period**

This results in the notion that judicial independence is always threatened at times when elections are nearby since many political forces are applied. Other transitional measures, including the abortion external review mechanisms or changes in the court procedures, could be applied for the protection of the judiciary and fair consideration of the election cases during election periods.

### **Conclusion**

This paper on the influence of politics on judicial decisions in electoral matters in Nigeria uncovers a very strong political influence in determining the outcomes of cases that relate to electoral disputes. The conclusion that co-partisan judges are 134% more likely to provide favourable rulings to the government and unity of the government boosts the probability of pro-government rulings by 89%, proving the political factors' impact on judicial influence. , which supports the main strategic judicial behaviour theory and the principal-agent model, which argues that a judge may be likely to act in a way that will favour his or her appointing authority more than the legal frameworks.

The work also emphasises the significance of media coverage in effecting political influence, whereby the media cases are 33% less likely to have pro-government sentiments. This implies that openness and public scrutiny may stand as an effective cheque to political influences when it comes to the signing of the executives, thereby reiterating the significance of accountability measures in the dispensation of justice. However, the regional disparities in judicial outcomes, with the South-East having a 15% overturn rate compared to the North-West's 8%, reveal the uneven application of justice across Nigeria's geo-political zones, further complicating the judiciary's role as a neutral arbiter.

Indeed, the percentage of petitions for the cases heard at different instances of the judiciary differ significantly; 12% of cases are granted at the Tribunals, 9% at the

Appeal Court level and merely 6% at the Supreme Court as more conservative higher courts consider the political stability of the country more important than electoral justice. The US has had a trend of allowing large grounds for recount while placing high requirements for any petition that seeks to change election outcomes, which makes it extremely difficult for any candidate to reclaim election fraud, hence causing a poor perception of the judiciary's commitment to the American constitution and thus democracy.

In view of this, it is clear that Nigeria's electoral-judicial system needs an overhaul that would involve independence of the judiciary, openness, and revamping of the judiciary in order to uphold the will of the people. The judiciary's role as the final arbiter of electoral disputes must be safeguarded from political interference to restore public trust and uphold the integrity of Nigeria's democracy.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the systemic vulnerabilities in Nigeria's electoral-judicial system and promote judicial independence and electoral integrity:

#### **1. Reform Judicial Appointments:**

Restructuring the appointment process of judges should be the next way to minimise the effects of political alignment since ability and independence should be a major consideration. A group should be formed that is composed of persons belonging to civil society, law professors, and members of the legal profession. To achieve this, the commission should be mandated to uphold merit-based criteria to minimise political influence in the appointment of judges.

#### **2. Strengthen Judicial Independence:**

Among the ways of increasing the role of the judiciary is by providing financial self-reality for the judiciary and ensuring that judges enjoy tenured appointments. The judiciary should be funded directly from the consolidated revenue and, thus, has little funds from the executive arm. The second cheque on judges is that removal of the

judges must be done following certain legal procedures by using the NJC and legislative organs.

### 3. Reduce the Burden of Proof in Electoral Petitions:

The Nigerian legal burden of proof, which is a conjunctive burden, demands that the petitioner prove his case by proving non-compliant results of the election, placing a burden on the petitioner. The following reforms should also be adopted where the burden of proving non-compliance or its effects on the results leads to the annulment of an election, which is placed on the disjunctive, as is the case in Kenya. This would make the process more convenient and transparent so that no one feels that he or she has been unfairly treated.

### 4. Enhance Transparency and Accountability:

As a result, the judiciary should take measures to reduce political influence in the following ways. The analysis has shown that the practice of broadcasting and dissemination of the results of cases where judgments have been made would remove bias from the outcomes of trials and the disparity that exists between the two groups. In the same way, civil society organisations ought to be given the mandate to oversee cases to be presided over whenever there is evidence of bias or misconduct on the part of the selected judges.

### 5. Address Regional Disparities:

The differences in the judicial results among the regions served as evidence that there is a need for reform that varies from region to region. The NJC should introduce a measure that would allow the geo-political zones of Nigeria adequate representation when it comes to the appointments to the bench. The suggestions should also be implemented in areas of the country with low overturn rates that can make courts impartial and effective in the handling of the electoral matter.

### 6. Maintaining Judicial Democracy During Election Time:

This is demonstrated by the fact that judicial independence is reduced by 22% during election years, which means that there is considerable pressure on the judiciary at this time. The proposed solution is the implementation of measures that would protect the

judiciary during the election years. In some cases, external review mechanisms or adjustments to existing judicial processes can be made before the election period to reduce the chances of political influence on judges.

#### 7. Combat Judicial Corruption:

To that end, the Anti-Corruption Task Force should be tasked with investigating and prosecuting anyone who has engaged in corrupt practices within the judiciary branch. Increased protection and support should be given to whistleblowers to make the judiciary workers report cases of corrupt practices, and judges and other members of the judiciary should be compelled to declare their families' source of income as well as their own to reduce cases of corruption.

#### 8. Encourage Stakeholder Involvement:

The judiciary needs to be accountable to the people of this country, which can only be achieved through the media and civil societies. Sensitisation training for journalists to report effectively on the judiciary or grant better access for CSOs to observe court proceedings would be beneficial in checking what the judges are doing.

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