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Beyond the North–South Divide: State-Level Institutional Capacity, Political Culture and the Geography of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria

Aluko, Opeyemi Idowu PhD.
Department of Political Science, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria
&
Oyeleke, Oyedele Kazeem
Department of Political Science, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, Nigeria.

Corresponding author:
oyeleke.oyedele2357@fcesoyo.edu.ng / 08166008244

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Abstract
Electoral malpractice in Nigeria is not experienced uniformly across states, raising the question of whether a broad North-South divide adequately explains geographical variation. This paper compares perceptions of electoral-malpractice patterns and reform effectiveness in the southern states of Oyo and Edo and the northern states of Kwara and Kaduna across five dimensions: malpractice prevalence, electoral-technology performance, political culture, security conditions and voter education. The analysis draws on New Institutionalism, which treats political outcomes as products of formal institutions, administrative capacities, resources and informal practices, and thus treats electoral geography as multidimensional rather than a simple regional hierarchy. The study adopts a quantitative descriptive-comparative design based on 341 valid responses from 400 distributed questionnaires (85.3 per cent response rate); frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations are reported, with no inferential or causal claims made. Respondents were neutral on whether malpractice was higher in the South (M = 2.98, SD = 1.28), but agreed that technology performed better in the South due to infrastructure (M = 3.50, SD = 1.15), that political culture explained regional differences (M = 3.85, SD = 1.02), and strongly agreed that security challenges differed between regions (M = 3.96, SD = 0.97); voter-education perceptions were mixed (M = 3.40, SD = 1.13). Overall, findings do not support a simple North-South ranking of malpractice but reveal perceived differences in the conditions surrounding electoral administration. The paper recommends state-sensitive policies, targeted infrastructure and technology support, attention to political practices alongside formal rules, localised security planning, and adaptable voter education.

Keywords: electoral malpractice; electoral geography; political culture; institutional capacity; North–South divide

Introduction

Electoral malpractice is not uniformly distributed and perceived in Nigeria. Electoral competition; administrative, infrastructural, and security capacities; and levels of civic communication may vary from one state to another (Ayeni & Esan, 2018; Suberu, 2001). As a result, a critical question emerges regarding the study of electoral malpractice and reform: is it more informative to think about malpractice in terms of north-south binary or to focus on specific states and their unique attributes?

Research on Nigeria's north-south dichotomy does not assume uniformity within each of the regions. A division of Nigeria into north and south cannot override the observed heterogeneity in infrastructure, education, political attitudes, state-society relations, and the overall development within each region.

Therefore, it is essential to adopt a state-specific approach and acknowledge that political processes and outcomes may differ not only between the north and the south but also within each of the two large regions. For instance, there is no guarantee that the states in the south have identical political cultures, institutional capacities, levels of security, or voter education. In fact, there are reasons to believe that, similar to the north-south divide, differences between urban and rural areas may be particularly notable in Nigeria.

These reservations apply to each of the variables of interest – technology, culture, institutional capacity, security, and voter education. It is crucial not to confuse regional affiliation with specific characteristics of political institutions and their competencies. For example, variations in political culture may be caused by differences in the roles of traditional authorities, community-based organizations, and gender norms, which may also vary regionally within north and south. No single attribute is exclusively associated with either of the two large regions.

Similarly, when discussing institutional capacity, it is necessary to go beyond a general assessment of institutional performance and focus on the specific institutional arrangements associated with electoral administration, security, and judiciary oversight. Such factors as the personnel and resources of electoral management bodies, law enforcement, and media freedom can be different in different states.

Therefore, the existing literature and this study demonstrate that comparisons of electoral malpractice in different regions of Nigeria are informative. However, they also illustrate the value of examining the states individually and focusing on specific attributes that may be responsible for regional differences, such as those listed above.

This objective guided the selection of Oyo and Edo (south) and Kwara and Kaduna (north) as regions for the case study. The corresponding research question is the following:

What are the regional comparisons in electoral-malpractice patterns between the southern states of Oyo and Edo and the northern states of Kwara and Kaduna?

This paper is strictly limited to the five questionnaire items developed for this objective. The items formed the survey instrument and addressed five dimensions of regional comparison: the

relative prevalence of malpractice, the performance of technology, political culture, security challenges and voter education.

The importance of this restriction is methodological. The paper does not attempt to explain all forms of electoral malpractice in Nigeria; it analyses only the objective and questionnaire items derived from it. Political culture, infrastructure, security and voter education are therefore treated as perceptions measured by the questionnaire, not as independently verified causal variables.

Literature Review

The literature on electoral malpractice in Nigeria increasingly suggests that the quality of elections cannot be explained by technology or formal rules in isolation. Aremu and Aluko (2016) document the introduction of Permanent Voter Cards and Smart Card Readers in the 2015 elections as an effort to strengthen voter authentication and reduce vulnerabilities associated with manual verification. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2019, 2023) shows that subsequent election cycles continued to combine technological reform with procedural, logistical, security, and communication challenges. This progression created new safeguards against impersonation, multiple voting, and some forms of ballot manipulation, but it did not remove malpractice from the electoral process. The effectiveness of reform depended on implementation, procedural safeguards, public communication, infrastructure, and the political environment in which the technology operated.

Electoral Geography and The Limits of a North–South Dichotomy

A North–South comparison is useful for organizing the present analysis, but it should not be treated as a complete explanation of electoral behaviour. Suberu (2001) shows that Nigeria's federal and ethnically plural political order produces complex patterns of subnational competition and political identity. These patterns caution against treating the North and South as internally uniform political spaces. Electoral conditions may vary within the same region because states differ in political competition, urban–rural structure, administrative resources, infrastructure, security conditions, civic organization, and the strength of informal political networks. A state-level approach is therefore necessary for examining Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and Kaduna without turning regional categories into fixed political stereotypes.

Election Procedures and Institutional Capacity

Election procedures include the rules and administrative routines governing voter registration, accreditation, voting, collation, results transmission, security, and dispute resolution. Their effects depend on the capacity of electoral institutions to apply them consistently. Aremu and Aluko (2016) show that the 2015 technology reforms were accompanied by security and implementation concerns, while the European Union Election Observation Mission (2019, 2023) documents continuing procedural and administrative weaknesses in later election cycles. A procedure may be formally uniform across states but produce different outcomes when staffing, training, supervision, communications, and enforcement vary. The relevant question is consequently not simply whether a reform exists, but whether institutions possess the resources and authority to implement it in the local setting.

New Institutionalism provides a useful basis for this argument because it directs attention to the interaction between formal rules and the informal routines through which political organizations operate (March & Olsen, 1989). From this perspective, institutional capacity includes more than the presence of an electoral law or device. It includes the organizational practices, incentives, monitoring arrangements, and norms that shape how rules are interpreted and enforced. This perspective also helps explain why similar reforms may have different consequences in Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and Kaduna. It makes state-level variation theoretically relevant without assuming that any region is inherently more or less prone to malpractice.

Election Technology, Implementation, and Electoral Integrity

Research on election technology presents both reformist and cautionary conclusions. Ayeni and Esan (2018) argue that information and communication technologies can reduce multiple registration, multiple voting, and other administrative weaknesses when they are effectively incorporated into election management. Aremu and Aluko (2016) similarly show that biometric voter-authentication tools can strengthen important points of the electoral chain by improving identification and reducing opportunities for impersonation. These findings support the view that technology can strengthen electoral administration by generating more reliable voter records, improving authentication, and creating auditable records.

The literature also shows, however, that technology is not self-executing. Device failure, weak connectivity, unreliable electricity, limited technical training, delayed uploads, and the use of manual workarounds can reduce or reverse the integrity gains expected from digital systems (Aremu & Aluko, 2016; Ayeni & Esan, 2018; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). A technology may therefore constrain one form of malpractice while leaving other forms untouched or shifting manipulation to another stage of the process. For example, stronger voter accreditation may limit multiple voting without preventing vote buying, intimidation, biased security deployment, or the manipulation of collation and dispute-resolution processes. This implementation-centred view is particularly important for comparing states with different infrastructural and administrative conditions.

Political Culture, Security, and Voter Education

Electoral integrity is also shaped by informal political practices and by the social conditions under which citizens participate. Aluko (2020) links the credibility and public acceptability of Nigeria's electoral process to the trust and reputation built through its operation. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2019, 2023) also records concerns involving vote buying, intimidation, security conduct, and the administration of results. These practices cannot be eliminated simply by improving biometric authentication or electronic transmission. Political culture is therefore treated in this paper as a perception of the norms, expectations, networks, and strategies that influence electoral conduct; it is not treated as a fixed attribute of either the North or the South. The same caution applies to security: the presence of regional differences in security conditions does not, by itself, establish the actual incidence or causal effect of violence in any particular state.

Voter education connects formal rules and institutional capacity to citizen participation. Citizens and election stakeholders need to understand how accreditation, voting, result publication, complaint procedures, and technological contingencies operate. Aluko (2020) argues that public trust is central to the credibility and acceptability of an electoral process, while the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) demonstrates the importance of clear communication and effective administration in the operation of election technology. Voter education should therefore be consistent in its substantive content but adaptable in delivery to local languages, literacy levels, media environments, and the practical realities of urban and rural communities.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature supports a contingent rather than deterministic account of electoral reform. Technology can improve authentication and transparency, but institutional capacity determines whether it functions reliably; political culture and security conditions shape the incentives and risks surrounding implementation; and voter education influences whether citizens can use and evaluate the system. The literature also supports moving beyond a simple North–South hierarchy toward a multidimensional account of state-level electoral geography. Aremu and Aluko (2016), Aluko (2020), and the European Union Election Observation Mission reports (2019, 2023) collectively indicate that procedures, technologies, public trust, malpractice, and local implementation conditions must be examined together. The present paper addresses this gap in a deliberately bounded way: it analyses five questionnaire items concerning malpractice prevalence, technology performance, political culture, security, and voter education in Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and Kaduna. By restricting the analysis to these items and reporting descriptive statistics without causal claims, the paper contributes evidence about how electoral stakeholders perceive the conditions surrounding regional variation.

Theoretical Framework

New Institutionalism

New Institutionalism provides a useful framework that the paper was built on. The theory emphasizes that political outcomes are shaped by formal institutions as well as by the routines, capacities and informal practices through which institutions operate (March & Olsen, 1989). From this perspective, differences between northern and southern states cannot be explained by geography alone. They may reflect differences in institutional capacity, administrative routines, infrastructure and political environments.

Institutional Capacity and Electoral Geography

These dimensions are relevant to institutional capacity because electoral reform requires more than formal rules or technological devices. It also requires the infrastructure needed to operate electoral systems, the security conditions needed to protect electoral participation and the civic capacity needed to communicate electoral procedures (Ayeni & Esan, 2018). The five items therefore present electoral geography as multidimensional.

The theoretical implication is that electoral malpractice should not be interpreted as a simple outcome of latitude, region or cultural identity. It should be examined in relation to the institutions, resources, security environments and political practices through which elections are conducted.

Methodology

Research design

In order to research this study beyond the north–south divide: state-level institutional capacity, political culture and the geography of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, the study adopted a quantitative survey method. The quantitative design was adopted to gather responses through an administered questionnaire, to measure the regional-comparison items under the objective. The design is comparative because it considers the southern grouping of Oyo and Edo and the northern grouping of Kwara and Kaduna. The analysis uses the response frequencies and percentages, together with the means and standard deviations, reported for the five items.

Area of study

This study was conducted in Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and Kaduna States. Oyo and Edo States were considered as the South, while Kwara and Kaduna States were considered as the North. The sampling strategy was not nationally representative but rather focused on these four states selected for their representativeness in terms of regional location, variances in infrastructural development and political contestation, variations in security situations, and differing levels of administrative experience. As such, this study should be understood as being representative only of the sampled states, not of all states or election stakeholders nationwide.

Population and sample

After demarcating the relevant stakeholders like INEC staff (1,770), observers (2,713), security personnel (80,000), and parties' polling agents (179,228), the total size of the population comes out to 263,711. The broader study's sampling strategy relied on the Taro Yamane formula, $n = N/[1 + N(e)^2]$, where the formula's numerator is the total number of population members (263,711), and e is the margin of error (5%). The computation result was 399.4, which is rounded up to 400 as the broader study's intended sample size. The allocation ratio for Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and Kaduna was 94, 63, 80, and 163 respondents; this was determined based on the number of stakeholder samples from each state. From the figures cited in this article, there are 80 respondents from Oyo, 54 from Edo, 68 from Kwara, and 139 from Kaduna, making 341 valid responses for this study. The validity of the total population figure (263,711) was determined based on the number of stakeholders sampled from each state.

A sample of 400 questionnaires was distributed proportionately across the four states. A total of 341 questionnaires were returned, representing an 85.3 per cent response rate.

State	Region	Questionnaires distributed	Returned questionnaires	Response rate
Oyo	South	94	80	85.1%
Edo	South	63	54	85.7%
Kwara	North	80	68	85.0%
Kaduna	North	163	139	85.3%
Total	**All four states**	**400**	**341**	**85.3%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The valid respondents comprised party polling agents, security personnel, INEC officials and electoral observers. Because the sample was drawn from electoral stakeholders rather than from the general voting population, the results should be understood as stakeholder perceptions of regional electoral conditions.

Data collection instrument

The data-collection instrument was a structured questionnaire.

The five items were as follows:

Item	Questionnaire statement
1	Electoral malpractice was higher in the southern states of Oyo and Edo than in the northern states of Kwara and Kaduna.
2	Electoral technologies performed better in the southern states because of infrastructure.
3	Political culture explains regional differences in malpractice.
4	Security challenges differ significantly between the northern and southern states.
5	Voter education varies across the four states.

All five items used a five-point agreement scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. The source used the following decision rule: means from 3.50 to 4.49 indicated agreement; means from 2.50 to 3.49 indicated neutral or mixed responses;

means from 1.50 to 2.49 indicated disagreement; and means from 1.00 to 1.49 indicated strong disagreement.

Validity and reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to the judgment of three experts in electoral studies and research methodology to ensure content validity. The instrument was pretested among 30 respondents drawn from the stakeholder categories in Oyo State. The pretesting was to enhance the clarity of instructions, ordering of items and the response format.

The questionnaire was translated into Hausa and Yoruba and was then retranslated to ensure conceptual equivalence in the target states. The study also highlighted the intended use of factor analysis for establishing construct validity.

In the determination of reliability, the study relied on Cronbach's alpha with an acceptable threshold of 0.70. The study also proposed a two-week test–retest interval for reliability assessment.

Procedure for Data Gathering

The questionnaire was administered among electoral stakeholders in Oyo, Edo, Kwara and Kaduna States. The questionnaires were distributed according to the proportion of the stakeholder groups in each state. The participants completed the questionnaires by self-administration and/or assistance as the case may be according to their preferences and level of education.

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 341 were successfully returned. The results were organized according to the state and stakeholder category and analyzed. For the purposes of this paper, Items 1-5 were analyzed to generate the results and discussion section.

Analysis of Data

The five items were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations. The frequencies and percentages indicate the number and proportion of respondents who selected any of the response options. The mean and standard deviation indicate the extent to which the respondents selected the response options. In this case, the items are discussed individually and not together as a composite score.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics

An examination of the demographic characteristics of the 341 respondents indicates that Party Polling Agents constituted the largest proportion (39.9%) of the participants followed by Security Personnel (24.3%), INEC Officials (19.9%) and Electoral Observers (15.8%). In terms of state of residence, Kaduna had the highest percentage (40.8%) of the respondents followed by Oyo (23.5%), Kwara (19.9%) and Edo (15.8%). This was expected as Kaduna had the highest ratio of polling workers according to the sampling procedure. In terms of gender, males constituted the majority (65.1%) compared to females (34.9%). In Edo, for instance, 72% of the respondents were male compared to 62% in Kaduna. Overall, the state of residence of the

respondents was highly male-dominated which is expected considering the nature of jobs in Nigeria.

In terms of age distribution, the highest proportion of the respondents (54.8%) were in the age bracket of 31-45 years followed by those aged 18-30 (29.9%) and those aged 46-60 (15.2%). Thus, the sample was representative of the target population in terms of age distribution as the respondents were mostly within the working and voting age brackets.

Item 1: Malpractice was higher in the southern states

Item 1 asked respondents whether electoral malpractice was higher in Oyo and Edo than in Kwara and Kaduna. The item recorded a mean of 2.98 and a standard deviation of 1.28. The source classified the result as neutral.

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	47	13.8%
Disagree	89	26.1%
Neutral	74	21.7%
Agree	86	25.2%
Strongly agree	45	13.2%
Total	**341**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The responses were divided. A total of 136 respondents selected either strongly disagree or disagree, while 131 selected either agree or strongly agree; 74 were neutral. The mean of 2.98 therefore does not support a clear perception that malpractice was higher in the South. The standard deviation of 1.28 indicates considerable variation in responses.

The result is important because it directly challenges a simple North–South hierarchy. The respondents did not produce a strong quantitative endorsement of the proposition that southern states were more affected by malpractice. The appropriate conclusion from this item is not that there were no regional differences, but that the evidence did not support a uniform regional ranking.

Item 2: Technology performed better in the South because of infrastructure

Item 2 asked respondents whether electoral technologies performed better in the southern states because of infrastructure. The item recorded a mean of 3.50 and a standard deviation of 1.15. The source classified the response as agreement.

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	22	6.5%
Disagree	52	15.2%
Neutral	68	19.9%
Agree	131	38.4%
Strongly agree	68	19.9%
Total	**341**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

A total of 199 respondents selected either agree or strongly agree, compared with 74 who selected either strongly disagree or disagree. The mean of 3.50 is exactly at the lower boundary of the source's agreement range. This indicates moderate agreement rather than overwhelming consensus.

The result suggests that respondents associated technological performance with infrastructural conditions. The item does not establish that all southern states performed better than all northern states, nor does it prove that infrastructure was the only cause of differences. It records a perception that infrastructural capacity was relevant to the effectiveness of electoral technology.

Item 3: Political culture explains regional differences

Item 3 asked respondents whether political culture explained regional differences in electoral malpractice. The item recorded a mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.02. The source classified the response as agreement.

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	11	3.2%
Disagree	28	8.2%
Neutral	55	16.1%
Agree	153	44.9%
Strongly agree	94	27.6%
Total	**341**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

A total of 247 respondents selected either agree or strongly agree, while 39 selected either strongly disagree or disagree. The result shows strong quantitative support for the proposition that political culture helped explain regional differences in malpractice. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that responses were comparatively convergent. It does not demonstrate that political culture caused malpractice, and it does not identify a single political culture for the North or the South. It shows that respondents perceived differences in political attitudes, practices, norms and patterns of participation as relevant to regional variations in malpractice.

Item 4: Security challenges differed between the regions

Item 4 asked respondents whether security challenges differed significantly between the northern and southern states. The item recorded a mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.97. It was classified as agreement and recorded the highest mean among the five Objective Four items.

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	9	2.6%
Disagree	22	6.5%
Neutral	47	13.8%
Agree	157	46.0%
Strongly agree	106	31.1%
Total	**341**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

A total of 263 respondents selected either agree or strongly agree, compared with 31 who selected either strongly disagree or disagree. The mean of 3.96 and standard deviation of 0.97 indicate broad and relatively consistent agreement that security conditions differed between the regions. This result suggests that security is an important dimension of electoral geography. It does not show that the North or South was uniformly more insecure, nor does it measure the specific security conditions of every state. It records respondents' broad perception that the security challenges affecting elections differed between the two regional groupings.

Item 5: Voter education varied across the four states

Item 5 asked respondents whether voter education varied across the four states. The item recorded a mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 1.13. Although the source classified the response as agreement, its stated decision rule places a mean between 2.50 and 3.49 in the neutral or mixed range.

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	21	6.2%
Disagree	58	17.0%
Neutral	81	23.8%
Agree	124	36.4%
Strongly agree	57	16.7%
Total	**341**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

A total of 181 respondents selected either agree or strongly agree, while 79 selected either strongly disagree or disagree. The largest single category was neutral, with 81 respondents. The mean of 3.40 therefore indicates a mixed or upper-neutral assessment rather than unequivocal agreement. The item nevertheless suggests that respondents perceived some variation in voter education across the states. Because voter education can affect awareness of procedures, participation and vulnerability to manipulation, the result adds a civic dimension to the geographical comparison. The relatively high standard deviation of 1.13 indicates that respondents' views varied more on this item than on the security item.

Comparative interpretation of the five items

The five questionnaire items were compared using their reported means and standard deviations.

Questionnaire item	Mean	Standard deviation	Source interpretation
1: Malpractice was higher in the South	2.91	1.28	Neutral
2: Technology performed better in the South because of infrastructure	3.50	1.15	Agreement
3: Political culture explains regional differences	3.85	1.02	Agreement
4: Security challenges differ between regions	3.96	0.97	Agreement
5: Voter education varies across the four states	3.40	1.13	Agreement in source; neutral/mixed under decision rule

The lowest mean was recorded for the proposition that malpractice was higher in the South, at 2.91. The highest mean was recorded for the proposition that security challenges differed between the regions, at 3.96. Political culture was the second-highest item, with a mean of 3.85. Technology performance due to infrastructure recorded moderate agreement at 3.50, while voter education produced a mixed result at 3.40.

The pattern is analytically coherent. Respondents did not strongly endorse a simple regional ranking of malpractice, but they did endorse several explanations for why electoral conditions may differ geographically. Security and political culture received the strongest support, followed by infrastructure-related technology performance. Voter education received weaker and more varied support.

Discussion of the questionnaire items

The five questionnaire items yield a distinction between regional hierarchy and regional differentiation. Item 1, which measures hierarchy, is neutral. Items 2–5 address potentially differentiating conditions, and there is stronger support for this, particularly in political culture and security. This means that respondents did not just classify the South as worse than the North but identified conditions through which electoral experiences may differ between the regions and states.

The findings also demonstrate that institutional capacity is multidimensional. Technology performance was linked to infrastructure but security and political culture attracted stronger agreement. This suggests that electoral geography cannot be reduced to technological infrastructure alone. The effectiveness of reforms depends on the institutional and political environment in which they are implemented.

The political-culture result should be regarded as a perception measured by one questionnaire item. It does not demonstrate a causal link or permit a close comparison of specific cultural practices. In the same way, the security item measures the perceived existence of regional differences but does not indicate the actual incidence of violence or insecurity in each state. The strength of the paper is that it accurately reports what the items measure but does not extrapolate the results to beyond the questionnaire evidence.

The voter-education result also has to be interpreted carefully. Although the source labels Item 5 agreement, the mean of 3.40 is below the source's stated agreement threshold of 3.50. It is more accurate to describe the result as mixed or upper-neutral. That way, the quantitative evidence is consistent with the response distribution.

Overall, the five items support the assertion that the geography of electoral malpractice is not captured by a simple North–South divide. Respondents perceived meaningful differences in security, political culture, infrastructure-related technology performance and voter education but rejected a strong claim that malpractice was higher in the South.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed only the five questionnaire items under Objective Four of the main study. The items compared the southern states of Oyo and Edo with the northern states of Kwara and Kaduna in relation to malpractice levels, technology performance, political culture, security challenges and voter education.

The first item, which proposed that malpractice was higher in the South, recorded a neutral mean of 2.91. This finding does not support a simple claim that the South was more affected by electoral malpractice than the North. The second item recorded moderate agreement that technologies performed better in the South because of infrastructure, with a mean of 3.50. The third item recorded agreement that political culture explained regional differences, with a mean of 3.85. The fourth item recorded the strongest agreement: respondents believed that security challenges differed between the regions, with a mean of 3.96. The fifth item, concerning variation in voter education, recorded a mean of 3.40, which should be interpreted as mixed or upper-neutral according to the source's own decision rule.

The answer to the research question is that the selected regions were perceived to differ in the conditions surrounding electoral malpractice, but the questionnaire did not establish a simple hierarchy in which the South was uniformly worse than the North. The quantitative evidence suggests a geographically differentiated electoral environment shaped by institutional capacity, infrastructure, political culture, security and voter education.

The paper's conclusion is limited strictly to the five questionnaire items. It does not claim that these items measure the complete reality of electoral malpractice.

Recommendations

Develop State-Sensitive Electoral Policies

Since Item 1 did not support a simple South–North hierarchy, electoral policies should be shaped around state-specific conditions but not around broad regional stereotypes. Regional categories may inform planning but should be used in conjunction with state assessment.

Improve Infrastructure Where Technology Is Less Effective

Item 2 recorded moderate agreement that technology performed better in the southern states because of infrastructure. Electoral institutions should therefore evaluate electricity, connectivity and technological-support conditions before and during elections especially in locations where these resources are limited.

Address Political Practices Alongside Formal Electoral Rules

Item 3 recorded a mean of 3.85, indicating strong agreement that political culture explained regional differences. Electoral reform should therefore target political norms and practices as well as formal procedures. This does not imply that one region has a defective culture; it means that reform should be sensitive to the political practices through which malpractice is expressed.

Develop Location-Specific Security Strategies

Item 4 recorded the highest mean, 3.96, with strong agreement that security challenges differed between regions. Electoral-security planning should therefore be adapted to local conditions rather than be applied through a completely uniform model.

Strengthen and Standardise Voter Education

Item 5 recorded a mixed or upper-neutral mean of 3.40. Electoral institutions and civic organisations should provide consistent voter-education content across all four states while adapting delivery to local languages, literacy levels and communication environments.

Report item-level and state-level data consistently

Future studies should present complete cross-tabulations of the five regional-comparison items by state and stakeholder category. They should apply a consistent decision rule when interpreting means especially with values such as 3.40 and 3.50.

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