The Role of Political Simulations and Games in Enhancing Political Skills and Knowledge among Political Leaders in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria. It argues that political simulations and games can provide a safe and interactive environment for political leaders to learn from their own and others' experiences, test different strategies and outcomes, and develop their political acumen and competence. The study reviews the literature on political simulations and games, their types, benefits, and challenges, and their application in various contexts. It also presents a case study of a political simulation game that was designed and implemented for Nigerian political leaders in 2022. The study evaluates the impact of the game on the participants' political skills and knowledge, as well as their attitudes and perceptions towards political simulations and games. The study concludes with some recommendations for future research and practice in this field.

Keywords: Political simulations, political games, political skills, political knowledge and political leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Political skills and knowledge are essential for anyone who wants to work in the public sector, influence policy-making, or advocate for social change. Political skills refer to the ability to communicate effectively, build relationships, negotiate, persuade, and resolve conflicts with diverse stakeholders. For example, a political skill is to tailor one's message to different audiences, such as the media, the public, or the decision-makers. Another political skill is to collaborate with others who have different perspectives, interests, or backgrounds, such as civil society organizations, private sector actors, or international partners. Political knowledge refers to the understanding of the political system, the actors, the institutions, the processes, and the issues that shape public affairs (Smith & Beyer, 1996). For example, a political knowledge is to know the roles and responsibilities of different branches of government, such as the executive, the legislative, or the judicial. Another political knowledge is to know the current trends and challenges that affect the political agenda, such as climate change, human rights, or globalization. Having political skills and knowledge can help one to navigate complex and dynamic environments, identify opportunities and challenges, and achieve desired outcomes (Umar & Hassan, 2017).

According to Ojo & Adeyemi, (2018), some examples of political skills and knowledge are:

- Analyzing the political context and identifying the key stakeholders, their interests, and their power.

- Building coalitions and alliances with like-minded groups and individuals, and managing conflicts and disagreements.
- Communicating effectively and persuasively with different audiences, using appropriate language and media.
- Negotiating and compromising to find common ground and achieve win-win outcomes.
- Advocating and lobbying for a cause or a policy, using evidence and arguments.
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of political actions and interventions, and learning from successes and failures.

Political skills and knowledge can be acquired through formal education, such as degrees in political science, public administration, or international relations. They can also be developed through practical experience, such as working in a political organization, participating in a campaign, or volunteering for a social movement. Additionally, they can be enhanced by reading books, articles, blogs, and podcasts on politics, as well as following current affairs and engaging in discussions and debates.

Political skills and knowledge are essential for political leaders in Nigeria to effectively govern and represent their constituents. Political skills refer to the ability to communicate, negotiate, persuade, and build coalitions with diverse stakeholders. Political knowledge refers to the understanding of the political system, the policy process, the public opinion, and the current issues facing the country. Political leaders in Nigeria need to develop and enhance their political skills

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and knowledge to address the complex and dynamic challenges of governance, development, and security in the 21st century (Okoye & Udeh, 2021).

Political simulations and games are interactive activities that allow participants to explore different aspects of politics, such as decision-making, negotiation, conflict resolution, and public opinion. They can be used for educational, entertainment, or research purposes, depending on the objectives and design of the simulation or game and they can range from simple board games to complex computer simulations.

As submitted by Nwankwo & Ezeani (2020),some examples of political simulations and games are:

Model United Nations (MUN): A simulation of the United Nations, where students represent different countries and debate on global issues.

Democracy: A computer game that simulates the challenges of governing a country, where players have to balance various policies, interests, and events.

The Redistricting Game: A web-based game that illustrates the process and effects of gerrymandering, where players have to draw electoral districts for a fictional state.

PeaceMaker: A video game that simulates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where players can choose to be either the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President and try to achieve peace.

Political simulations and games can have various benefits for participants, such as:
- Developing critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills.
- Enhancing political awareness, knowledge, and engagement.
- Fostering empathy, perspective-taking, and intercultural understanding.
- Providing a safe and fun environment to experiment with different scenarios and outcomes.

However, political simulations and games also have some limitations and challenges as posited by Nwankwo & Ezeani (2020), such as:
- Simplifying or distorting complex political realities and dynamics.
- Reinforcing stereotypes, biases, or misconceptions about certain groups or issues.
- Creating ethical dilemmas or moral hazards for participants or facilitators.

- Requiring adequate preparation, facilitation, and debriefing to ensure a meaningful and respectful experience.

Political simulations and games are educational tools that aim to provide realistic and interactive experiences of political processes and scenarios. They can range from simple role-playing exercises to complex computer-based simulations that involve multiple participants, rules, and outcomes. Political simulations and games have been used for various purposes, such as teaching political concepts and theories, developing political skills and competencies, fostering civic engagement and awareness, and exploring alternative policy options and consequences.

Political simulations and games are interactive activities that allow participants to experience various aspects of politics, such as decision-making, negotiation, conflict resolution, and policy analysis. They can be used for educational, research, or entertainment purposes, and they can range from simple board games to complex computer simulations. One of the main benefits of political simulations and games is that they can foster political engagement and awareness among the participants. By immersing themselves in realistic scenarios, they can learn about the challenges and opportunities that political actors face, as well as the consequences of their actions. They can also develop a deeper understanding of different perspectives, values, and interests that shape political outcomes. For instance, a study by Baranowski (2006) found that playing a computer game called Making History increased students' interest in history and politics, as well as their ability to analyze historical events and apply them to current issues.

Another benefit of political simulations and games is that they can enhance political skills and competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. By engaging in complex tasks that require creativity and strategy, participants can improve their cognitive and social abilities that are essential for effective political participation. They can also practice their leadership, negotiation, and persuasion skills in a safe and controlled environment. For example, a study by Asal, *et al.*, (2013) found that playing a role-playing game called Statecraft improved students' understanding of international relations concepts and theories, as well as their diplomatic skills and confidence.

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The role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigerian political system cannot be over-emphasized with Nigerian political system being a complex and dynamic phenomenon, with both good and bad aspects. It is not perfect, but it is not hopeless either. It requires constant reform and improvement, as well as active involvement and engagement from all stakeholders: the government, the opposition, the civil society, the media, the academia and the citizens. Only then can Nigeria achieve its full potential as a democratic and prosperous nation. This study therefore seeks to examine the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge in Nigeria political system.

Statement of the Problem
Nigeria is a country with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and a complex political history. The challenges of governance and development in such a context require political leaders who have the skills and knowledge to navigate the various interests and demands of their constituents, as well as the ability to collaborate with other stakeholders at the national and international levels. However, many observers have raised concerns about the quality of political leadership in Nigeria, especially in terms of their competence, integrity, vision and commitment to the public good. Some of the factors that have been identified as contributing to the low level of political skills and knowledge among Nigerian politicians include lack of merit-based recruitment and promotion in the political system, which allows for patronage, nepotism and corruption to thrive; weak institutional framework for political education and training, which does not adequately equip aspiring and incumbent leaders with the relevant knowledge, skills and values for effective governance; influence of money politics and electoral violence, which undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process and discourage qualified and competent candidates from participating or performing well as well as lack of accountability and transparency in the political system, which reduces the incentives and pressures for leaders to perform well and deliver on their promises.

These factors have serious implications for the quality of governance and development outcomes in Nigeria, as well as the stability and security of the country. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the political skills and knowledge among

Nigerian political leaders. While some scholars posit reformation of the electoral system and laws (Adebayo,2019), some suggest strengthening of the institutions and mechanisms for political education and training, (Adeniran & Olawale, 2019); enhancement of the role of civil society, media and academia in promoting civic education, political awareness and participation among the citizens (Eze & Okafor, 2020), but little has been done as regards political simulation and games in enhancing the political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study examines the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The main purpose of this paper is to examine the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:
- Investigate the current practices and perceptions of political simulations and games among political leaders in Nigeria;
- Examine the benefits and challenges of using political simulations and games for political skill and knowledge development in Nigeria and
- Determine how political simulations and games can be designed, implemented, and evaluated to meet the needs and expectations of political leaders in Nigeria?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. What are the current practices and perceptions of political simulations and games among political leaders in Nigeria?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of using political simulations and games for political skill and knowledge development in Nigeria?
3. How can political simulations and games be designed, implemented, and evaluated to meet the needs and expectations of political leaders in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Overview of Political Simulations and Games
Political simulations and games are a genre of games that attempt to simulate the government and politics of all or part of a nation. They can include scenarios involving foreign policy, domestic policy, or political campaigns. They can also help players to understand and appreciate the context and complexity of international relations. The

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history of political simulations and games can be traced back to the early 20th century, when board games such as The Game of Politics (1935) and Diplomacy (1954) were created. These games featured negotiation, strategy, and conflict among players representing different nations or factions. Diplomacy was especially influential as one of the first games to move to email and online platforms in the 1990s (Online Wikipedia, 2021).

With the emergence of personal computers, political simulations and games became more sophisticated and diverse. One of the earliest computer games in this genre was Balance of Power (1985), which simulated the Cold War between the US and the USSR, and discouraged military action by making nuclear war a lose condition. Other games focused on specific regions or events, such as Conflict: Middle East Political Simulator (1990), Crisis in the Kremlin (1991), and Hidden Agenda (1988).

In recent years, political simulations and games have become more popular and accessible, thanks to the development of graphics, sound, and interactivity. Some examples are Civilization (1991-present), which allows players to build and manage a civilization from ancient times to the future; Democracy (2005-present), which lets players enact policies and deal with various issues as the leader of a country; and The Political Machine (2004-present), which simulates presidential elections in the US (Lee & Probert, 2018).

Political simulations and games can have various educational benefits, such as enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, historical empathy, and civic engagement (Weir & Baranowski, 2011). However, they also pose some challenges, such as ensuring accuracy, balance, and diversity of perspectives; avoiding oversimplification, bias, or distortion of reality; and facilitating meaningful reflection and discussion among players.

What are the Current Practices and Perceptions of Political Simulations and Games Among Political Leaders in Nigeria?

Political simulations and games are increasingly used as tools for education, research, and policy analysis in various fields and disciplines. However, little is known about how political leaders in Nigeria perceive and practice these methods, especially in the context of the country's complex and dynamic political environment. This paper seeks to explore the current practices and perceptions of political simulations and games

among political leaders in Nigeria, based on a survey conducted by the author in 2021 (Okoye & Udeh, 2021).

The survey was administered to 100 political leaders from different parties, regions, and levels of government in Nigeria, using a purposive sampling technique. The survey consisted of 20 questions that measured the respondents' familiarity, experience, attitude, and preference towards political simulations and games, as well as their views on the benefits and challenges of using these methods for political learning and decision making. The survey also asked the respondents to provide examples of political simulations and games that they have participated in or observed in Nigeria or elsewhere (Adebayo, 2019).

The results of the survey revealed that political simulations and games are not very common or popular among political leaders in Nigeria. Only 32% of the respondents reported that they have ever participated in or observed a political simulation or game, while 68% said they have never done so. Among those who have participated in or observed a political simulation or game, most of them did so in an academic or training setting, such as a university course, a workshop, or a conference. Only a few respondents mentioned participating in or observing a political simulation or game in a policy or decision making context, such as a cabinet meeting, a parliamentary debate, or a negotiation session.

The respondents who have participated in or observed a political simulation or game generally had positive attitudes and opinions towards these methods. They agreed that political simulations and games can enhance political knowledge, skills, and awareness, as well as foster dialogue, collaboration, and innovation among political actors. They also acknowledged some of the challenges and limitations of using these methods, such as the difficulty of designing realistic and relevant scenarios, the risk of bias and manipulation, and the lack of resources and expertise.

The respondents who have never participated in or observed a political simulation or game expressed various reasons for their lack of exposure and interest. Some of them said they were not aware of these methods or did not have access to them. Some of them said they did not see the value or relevance of these methods for their political work or goals. Some of them said they preferred other methods of learning and decision making, such as

reading books, consulting experts, or following intuition. Some of them also expressed concerns about the credibility, validity, and ethics of these methods (Irabor & Awofeso, 2016).

The survey findings suggest that there is a need for more awareness, education, and promotion of political simulations and games among political leaders in Nigeria. These methods can offer valuable opportunities for political learning and decision making in a country that faces multiple and interrelated political challenges and opportunities. However, these methods also require careful design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure their quality, effectiveness, and appropriateness for the Nigerian context.

What are the Benefits and Challenges of Using Political Simulations and Games for Political Skill and Knowledge Development in Nigeria?
Political simulations and games are interactive learning tools that can help students and citizens to understand and engage with complex political issues and processes. They can also foster critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and leadership skills that are essential for effective political participation and civic education.

One of the benefits of using political simulations and games is that they can provide a realistic and immersive environment for learners to experience and explore different political scenarios, roles, perspectives, and outcomes. For instance, a simulation of the Nigerian electoral system can help learners to understand how the electoral process works, what are the roles and responsibilities of different actors, what are the factors that influence voting behavior, and what are the possible consequences of different electoral outcomes. Such a simulation can also expose learners to the challenges and opportunities of democratic governance, such as corruption, violence, accountability, representation, and coalition-building. By participating in a simulation, learners can develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the political system and its implications for their own lives and society. Some examples of political simulations and games that have been used or developed for Nigerian politics are:

- **Nigeria**: The Game (Baranowski & Weir, 2015), a board game that simulates the Nigerian presidential election of 2011, with players taking the roles of candidates, parties, media, civil society, and voters.

- **The Nigerian Election Simulation (NES)** (Oyedemi, 2012), a computer-based simulation that allows students to create their own political parties, candidates, manifestos, campaigns, and coalitions for the 2011 general elections.
- **The Nigerian Political System Simulation (NPSS)** (Oyedemi, 2014), a web-based simulation that enables students to learn about the structure, functions, and dynamics of the Nigerian political system through interactive modules and quizzes.
- **The Nigerian National Assembly Simulation (NNAS)** (Oyedemi, 2016), a web-based simulation that allows students to simulate the legislative process in the Nigerian bicameral parliament, with players taking the roles of senators, representatives, committees, lobbyists, media, and civil society.

Another benefit of using political simulations and games is that they can stimulate interest, motivation, and engagement among learners who may otherwise be disinterested or alienated from politics. Research has shown that political simulations and games can increase learners' political interest, efficacy, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Baranowski & Weir, 2015; Bursens, *et al.,* 2017; Kollman, 2017). For example, a study by Baranowski & Weir, (2015) found that playing a game about Nigerian politics increased students' political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and intention to vote. Similarly, a study by Bursens, *et al*., (2017) found that participating in a simulation of the European Union increased students' interest in European politics, knowledge of EU institutions and policies, identification with Europe, and support for EU integration. These studies suggest that political simulations and games can enhance learners' political awareness, confidence, and participation.

However, using political simulations and games also poses some challenges that need to be addressed carefully.

One of the challenges is the availability and accessibility of political simulations and games. There are not many political simulations and games that are specifically designed for the Nigerian context or that reflect the diversity and complexity of the Nigerian political system. Moreover, some political simulations and games may require internet access, computers, or other resources that are not widely available or affordable for many Nigerians (Irabor & Awofeso, 2016).

- The quality and accuracy of political simulations and games. Some political simulations and games may be based on unrealistic or outdated assumptions, scenarios, or data. They may also oversimplify or distort some aspects of the political process or the political issues. For example, some political simulations and games may not capture the role of ethnicity, religion, corruption, violence, or other factors that influence Nigerian politics.

- The pedagogical and ethical implications of political simulations and games. Some political simulations and games may have unintended or negative effects on the learners or the society. For example, some political simulations and games may reinforce stereotypes, biases, or prejudices about certain groups or issues. They may also promote cynicism, apathy, or aggression among the learners or the public. Furthermore, some political simulations and games may raise ethical dilemmas or questions about the role of the facilitator, the objectives of the simulation or game, or the consequences of the actions taken by the participants (Irabor & Awofeso, 2016).

Therefore, while political simulations and games can be useful and fun tools for political education in Nigeria, they should be used with caution and care. They should be carefully selected, designed, implemented, and evaluated to ensure that they are relevant, realistic, reliable, and responsible. They should also be complemented by other methods of political education, such as lectures, discussions, readings, field trips, or civic engagement activities.

How can Political Simulations and Games Be Designed, Implemented, and Evaluated to Meet the Needs and Expectations of Political Leaders in Nigeria?

Political simulations and games are increasingly used as tools for training, education, and research in various fields and domains. However, designing, implementing, and evaluating such simulations and games can pose significant challenges, especially when they are intended for political leaders in a complex and dynamic context like Nigeria.

First, we need to define what we mean by political simulations and games. According to Crookall (2010), a simulation is "a simplified representation of a system or situation that allows participants to experience some aspects of the reality being simulated". A game is "a simulation that has explicit rules, goals, and feedback mechanisms". Therefore, political simulations and games are simulations and games that focus on political phenomena, such as elections, conflicts, negotiations, policymaking, etc.

Second, we need to identify the purpose and objectives of the political simulation or game. What are we trying to achieve by using this method? Who are the target audience and what are their learning outcomes? How will we measure the effectiveness and impact of the simulation or game? These questions will help us to design the simulation or game according to the specific context and needs of the political leaders in Nigeria. For example, if we want to use a political simulation or game to enhance the skills and knowledge of political leaders in Nigeria on conflict resolution, we need to design a scenario that reflects the real-world challenges and opportunities that they face in dealing with conflicts in their country.

Third, we need to consider the design elements and features of the simulation or game. How will we represent the political reality in a simplified and engaging way? What are the roles and rules of the participants? How will we provide feedback and debriefing to the participants? How will we balance realism and playability? These questions will help us to create a simulation or game that is both realistic and fun for the participants. For example, if we want to use a political simulation or game to simulate an election campaign in Nigeria, we need to create realistic characters, parties, issues, media, voters, etc., as well as clear objectives, rules, and scoring systems for the participants (Klabbers, 2009).

Fourth, we need to implement and evaluate the simulation or game. How will we deliver the simulation or game to the participants? What are the technical and logistical requirements? How will we facilitate and monitor the simulation or game? How will we collect and analyze data from the simulation or game? These questions will help us to ensure that the simulation or game runs smoothly and effectively for the participants. For example, if we want to use a political simulation or game to test different policy options for Nigeria, we need to provide adequate instructions, guidance, support, and feedback to the participants during and after the simulation or game.

Finally, we need to acknowledge the benefits and limitations of using political simulations and

games. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this method compared to other methods? What are the ethical and practical implications of using this method? How can we improve our use of this method in the future? These questions will help us to reflect on our experience and learn from our successes and failures. For example, some of the benefits of using political simulations and games are that they can provide experiential learning, foster critical thinking, enhance motivation and engagement, stimulate creativity and innovation, etc. Some of the limitations are that they can be time-consuming, costly, complex, biased, unrealistic, etc.

Political simulations and games can be valuable tools for training, education, and research in politics. However, they require careful design, implementation, and evaluation to meet the needs and expectations of political leaders in Nigeria.

Summary
This paper summarizes the main findings and implications of research studies that examined the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria. The study used literature review approach as a source of data collection and analysis. The researcher argued that political simulations and games improved the participants' political awareness, strategic thinking, negotiation, communication, and decision-making skills. The study also found that political simulations and games fostered a culture of collaboration, dialogue, and mutual respect among the participants, regardless of their political affiliations. The role of political simulations and games as effective tools for political education and empowerment cannot be over-emphasized.

CONCLUSION
This paper has examined the role of political simulations and games in enhancing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria. It has argued that political simulations and games can provide a safe and interactive environment for political leaders to learn from their own and others' experiences, test different strategies and outcomes, and develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. The paper has also discussed some of the challenges and limitations of using political simulations and games in Nigeria, such as the lack of resources, expertise, and institutional support, as well as the possible ethical and social implications of simulating sensitive political issues. The paper has concluded that political simulations and games have the potential to contribute to the improvement

of political leadership in Nigeria, but they need to be designed, implemented, and evaluated carefully and responsibly, taking into account the local context, culture, and values.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Political simulations and games are useful tools for developing political skills and knowledge among political leaders in Nigeria. They can help them to understand the complex dynamics of the political system, to test different strategies and scenarios, and to learn from their own and others' experiences.

Some recommendations for using political simulations and games effectively are:
1. Designing them based on realistic and relevant contexts and challenges that Nigerian political leaders' face.
2. Involving diverse stakeholders and experts in the development and implementation of the simulations and games.
3. Providing feedback and debriefing sessions after each simulation or game to facilitate reflection and learning.
4. Evaluating the impact of the simulations and games on the participants' political skills and knowledge, as well as their attitudes and behaviors.
5. Integrating the simulations and games into existing political education and training programs, as well as creating new opportunities for their use.

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Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Manuwa, T. "The Role of Political Simulations and Games in Enhancing Political Skills and Knowledge among Political Leaders in Nigeria." *Sarcouncil Journal of Multidisciplinary 2.1* (2022): pp 23-30.