

**THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND THE QUEST
FOR ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: A STUDY OF THE 2019 KOGI STATE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

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DECLARATION

I, Sylvanus Chukwudi UGOH hereby declare that this declaration is an outcome of my research efforts carried out in the school of Post Graduate Studies in the National Institute of Legislative and Democratic Studies/ University of Benin. I hereby wish to further state that this research work is entirely mine under the supervision and guidance of my Lecturer, Dr Arthur Ikeme. The work of other scholars consulted or used were duly acknowledged in the references.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**The Independent National Electoral Commission and the Quest for Electoral Integrity: A Study of the 2019 Kogi State Governorship Election**” was carried out by Sylvanus Chukwudi UGOH and has been read and approved for the award of Master’s Degree in Elections and Party Politics (MEPP) of the National Institute of Legislative and Democratic Studies/University of Benin Postgraduate programme.

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DEDICATION

This Research is dedicated to all the lovers of knowledge and all those that are involved in the struggles to emancipate and liberate the Nigerian Workers from the oppression and suppression of the Nigerian ruling class.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As far as this work is concerned, I see Jesus. I sincerely want to thank the Almighty God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has been a father and counselor to me.

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ABSTRACT

The electoral process has been at the center of a number of problems that have hampered Nigeria's democratic experimentation since her independence. The integrity of Nigeria's electoral process is perceived to be associated with election administration in Nigeria. The 2019 Governorship election, witnessed many court cases filed by some of the contestants challenging the election results. They alleged that the poll was marred by corrupt practices and non-compliance with the provision of the Nigerian Constitution, the Electoral Act and the Independent National Electoral Commission's Electoral Guidelines. The objectives of this research is therefore, to determine how the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State conducted by INEC. And also to determine the level of electoral integrity attained by the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State and ascertain how the level of electoral integrity of the election could be enhanced. Given that the credibility of an election is critical to the long-term viability of democracy in any civilized country and bearing in mind that the credibility of an election plays a major role in the sustainability of democracy in any civilized country, assessing the integrity of the 2019 Kogi State Governorship election becomes critical.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Primary data includes the administration of questionnaire on relevant stakeholders in electoral process, interviews of stakeholders and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) from five local government areas in Kogi state while secondary sources were derived from the consultation of books, journals and internet search. Two hundred and fifty well-structured questionnaires were distributed. Fifty questionnaires to each of the five local government areas. Two hundred and forty questionnaires were returned out of the 250 that were distributed and 230 were returned and valid. Ninety five were females and 135 were males

From the findings of the research, it was observed that the public perceptions of the electoral integrity is directly related to the level of trust on the Independent National Electoral Commission. It was also observed the integrity of the elections were compromised even as it affects the way and manner some of the activities of INEC was carried out especially in the area of logistics and exhibiting professionalism.

From the result of the research it can be recommended that since mass perception of free and fair election, impartiality of INEC, capacity building play a dominant role in the improvement of electoral integrity as found in the literature and empirical investigation. INEC should further strengthen the training of both permanent and adhoc staff to enable them get acquitted with relevant skills to further the improvement of electoral integrity. And also Openness and abiding by the rule of law in the conduct of election are germane to the integrity of Electoral Process. Hence, the commission should organize workshop on a continuous basis where these concepts are well taught and encouraged and that INEC staff especially at the lower levels should be seen doing the right things during elections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page
Cover page	i
Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Certification	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract	vii
Table of Contents	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Research Problem	2
1.3 Research Questions	3
1.4 Objectives of the Study	3
1.5 Scope of the Research	3
1.6 Significance of the Study	4
1.7 Definition of key Concepts	6
CHAPTER TWO	
2.1 Literature Review	7
2.2 Gap in Knowledge	29
2.3 Theoretical Framework	29
2.4 Relevance of the theories to study	30
CHAPTER THREE	
3.1 Research Design	32
3.2 Sources of Data	32
3.3 Data Analysis	33
3.4 Study Setting, Sampling Technique and Sample Size	33

3.5 Instruments for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	33
--	----

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Analysis of Data from Primary Sources	34
---	----

4.2 Confidence in the Credibility of INEC	36
---	----

4.3 Perception in the Credibility of INEC	37
---	----

4.4 Efficiency and Professionalism of INEC	37
--	----

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Summary of findings	39
-------------------------	----

5.2 Recommendations	45
---------------------	----

5.3 Conclusion	45
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REFERENCES	47
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APPENDIX	
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Maintaining electoral integrity requires proper election management by an impartial electoral management body with the institutional competence to hold free and fair elections. According to ACE (2012), in well-developed democracies, the entities in charge of elections are often taken for granted because of their extensive track records of conducting free and fair elections. And when difficulties arise, they rarely raise questions about the institutions' integrity or legitimacy.

Electoral administration bodies in emerging democracies, such as Nigeria, may still be evolving and face tremendous suspicion, criticism, and scrutiny. In addition to the difficulties that come with arranging an election, the body may face institutional issues, such as a lack of staffing, resources, or experience. The development of an INEC that is institutionally autonomous and not subject to political interference is a possible alternative for assuring the impartiality required to garner voter trust.

Election management bodies, sometimes known as election commissions, are in charge of overseeing and administering elections. They have extensive powers to implement election laws, make regulations, handle complaints, and oversee the campaigning, voting, and counting processes. The successful administration of elections, as well as the establishment and maintenance of public confidence in the electoral process, depends on these entities operating in an honest and unbiased manner. The challenges that these bodies face can be

great, particularly in emerging democracies where procedures are new, political stakes are high, and democratic commitment is shaky.

According to the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room Report (2020), on August 27, 1991, Kogi State was carved out of Kwara and Benue States, with a population of 3,314,043 according to the 2006 Census. It is one of Nigeria's states in the country's north-central geopolitical zone. The state is known as the "Confluence State" because of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers in Lokoja, the state capital. The Igalas, Ebiras, and Okuns are the three primary ethnic groups in the state, with the Igalas being the largest.

On November 16, 2019, the Kogi State Governorship election was held. Yahaya Bello, the incumbent APC governor, won the poll. He was re-elected for a second term, defeating PDP candidate, Musa Wada and candidates from many minor parties.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Since independence, the electoral process has been at the center of a number of problems that have hampered Nigeria's democratic experimentation. The integrity of Nigeria's electoral process is perceived to be associated with election administration in Nigeria.

During the 2019 Governorship election, there were many court cases filed by some of the contestants challenging the election result. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), along with their governorship candidates in the election, alleged that the poll was marred by corrupt practices and non-compliance with the provision of the Nigerian Constitution, the Electoral Act and the Independent National Electoral Commission's Electoral Guidelines (Punch 31 August, 2020).

Given that the credibility of an election is critical to the long-term viability of democracy in any civilized country and bearing in mind that the credibility of an election plays a major role in the sustainability of democracy in any civilized country, assessing the integrity of the 2019 Kogi State Governorship election becomes critical.

1.3 Research Questions

How was the 2019 Governorship election conducted?

What was the level of electoral integrity attained by the 2019 Kogi State governorship election?

How can the level of electoral integrity be enhanced in future elections in Nigeria

1.4 Objectives of the study

1. To determine how the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State was conducted by INEC.
2. To determine the level of electoral integrity attained by INEC in the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State.
3. To ascertain how the level of electoral integrity of future elections in Nigeria could be enhanced.

1.5 The Scope of the research

The scope of the research is to cover the 2019 Kogi State Governorship election. It does not cover previous governorship elections in Kogi State. The conduct of Political parties' primaries for the conduct of the 2019 governorship election is not part of this study and also the internal running of the political parties in the state does not form part of this study. The

work also evaluated the perception of the people as regards electoral integrity in the conduct of the Kogi State 2019 governorship election.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Understanding the integrity of the electoral process is essential before delving into any other aspect of electoral politics (Norris, 2013). Most developing countries have been confronted with various political, socioeconomic, and economic challenges at some point, partly because the results of their elections were questionable and unacceptable due to manipulation. Every aspect of the election process must be considered for a country to be seen as being above board in its conduct. As a result, before concluding on the credibility or otherwise of an election, all aspects of the electoral process should be evaluated. The integrity of elections has been a major concern of national and international organizations all over the world, to the point where enormous sums of money have been spent to improve electoral integrity. For example, between 2007 and 2010, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights spent approximately EUR 307 million on over 700 democracy-related projects. Nigeria as a country reaped enormous benefits from the funding (Omoleke, 2018). Since Nigeria's independence, the issue of electoral integrity has been a major source of concern.

Electoral integrity is thus a democratic culture in which the will of the people is held sacred and immune to subversion by anti-democratic and anti-people elements. According to Maduagwu (1996), democratic principles include majority rule, rule of law, and equality before the law, free choice, and the absence of any form of partisan manipulation.

To that end, Kofi Annan (2013) observed that when citizens go to the polls to vote, they hope not only to elect their leaders but also to determine the direction of their country. As a result,

he cautioned that while elections with integrity can strengthen democracy, flawed elections can undermine it.

1.7 Definition of the Key Concepts

Election: An **election** is a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may fill offices in the legislature sometimes in the executive and judiciary and for regional and local government. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporation.

Electoral integrity: Any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012).

Democracy: Democracy is a form of government in which the people have the authority to deliberate and decide legislation or to choose governing officials to do so. Who is considered part of "the people" and how authority is shared among or delegated by the people has changed over time and at different rates in different countries, but over time more and more of a democratic country's inhabitants have generally been included. Cornerstones of democracy include freedom of assembly and speech, inclusiveness and equality, membership, consent, voting, right to life and minority rights.

Election Management Body: Election management body (EMB) is the authority charged with administering the electoral process. Due to the complexity and extraordinary skills necessary for electoral management, a specific institution to be responsible for managing the electoral activities is being required. Such bodies have a variety of forms and sizes, with several titles which include; Electoral Commission, Electoral Council, Electoral Unit, Department of Elections, Electoral Board...etc. The main electoral management body (EMB) is responsible for administering elections. Such bodies are expected to fully, fairly and impartially implement the norms, regulations and procedures contained in the legal framework. This involves dealing with technical issues, as well as making decisions about policy-related matters.

In many countries, the main EMB is also authorized or required to issue electoral regulations, including those with binding force over some or all of the following: Election officials and workers, political parties and candidates, party/candidate representatives and supporters, voters, and other government officials. (ACE, 2012).

Electoral fraud:

Deliberate wrong-doing by election officials or other electoral stakeholders, which distorts the individual or collective will of the voters (Vickery and Shein, 2012).

Electoral malpractice: The breach by an election professional of his or her relevant duty of care, resulting from carelessness or neglect (Vickery and Shein, 2012).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter focuses on the literature review and the theoretical framework used in this study. It also tries to discover the gap in knowledge which this research is expected to fill.

2.1 Literature review

Democratic elections remain the required and preferred means of facilitating representation and participation in the political process and government in many cases around the world, and have rapidly become the norm (KAIPTC, 2020). Nigeria has enjoyed continuous democratic administration for nearly two decades and has undergone six presidential elections since 1999. However, since the country's return to constitutional democracy, many scholars and practitioners who study democracy through elections have highlighted worries about Nigerian politics' zero sum nature, as evidenced by the rising tide of controversial elections and the resulting legitimacy issue. . The number of claims filed by unsatisfied parties against the election results, for example, demonstrates the prevalence of malpractices that occurred during the 2019 elections (The Nation, 2019).

According to the Independent National Electoral Commission, over 1,689 court cases arising from the 2019 general elections were recorded, claiming that the electoral process saw some of the most acrimonious party primaries in the history of Nigerian elections, resulting in a large number of lawsuits (The Punch, 2019). Since the beginning of democratic rule in 1999, this has been the general pattern. As a result, how can Nigeria's electoral process ensure inclusion, transparency, accountability, and security, as well as provide the primary opportunity for most ordinary citizens to participate in politics, thanks to a synergy between

the legal framework and political will, resulting in improved Electoral Integrity (Omilusi and Gbenga, 2021).

As a result, electoral integrity can be defined as a situation in which all electoral processes are free of any partisan political manipulations that might cause people to have doubts or suspicions about the outcome or result of an election. Electioneering in the country has practically become synonymous with logistical difficulties and delays, misconduct and irregularities, violence, challenges to internal party democracy, corruption, and a biased court (Omilusi & Gbenga 2021).

Electoral integrity is at the heart of democratic administration. Electoral integrity exists when people have voiced their popular will and that will is upheld by the electoral body without overturning the people's will. The integrity of the electoral process so determines whether or not an election is credible. The integrity of the Nigerian voting systems has been repeatedly questioned in both procedural management and administration, putting the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in jeopardy (Idakwoji *et al*, 2018).

The 2019 elections within the context of article 13 of the African Charter

The legitimacy of electoral democracies is predicated on the legitimacy of the mechanisms used to determine election winners, keeping in mind that individuals may have differing preferences for candidates running for public office (Saffon and Urbinati, 2013). Nigeria has signed a number of regional and international treaties and obligations related to the conduct of elections in order to achieve long-term democracy. The framework for good government and citizen participation is provided by these instruments (The Commonwealth Observer Group, 2019) - including the vulnerable groups. One of these instruments is the African Charter on

Democracy, Elections and Governance requires state parties to establish and strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights and independent electoral systems. Specifically, Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which states that:

1. Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law.

2. Every citizen shall have the right of equal access to the public service of his country.

3. Every individual shall have the right of access to public property and services in strict equality of all persons before the law. The rights of every Nigerian citizen are entrenched in chapter four of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In Nigeria, a voter is a citizen who is 18 years old and above and is duly registered, whose names and details are in the register of voter. Anyone who contests in an election and votes is not only a voter for the purpose of that election, but also a candidate (The Independent National Electoral Commission, 2020). Ordinarily, the 2019 elections provided an opportunity to consolidate democratic governance in the country after two decades of uninterrupted experiment. But, as with previous five election cycles, the opportunity was again scuttled, owing to the recurring issues earlier raised. For instance, before, during and after the elections, it was expected that the Nigerian authorities ought to protect people from violence and ensure full respect for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association (Amnesty International, 2019) as entrenched in the constitution and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Within the context of citizens' rights to participation however, it is glaring that imposition of

candidates, violence, malpractice, and neither offer equal opportunities to political party members nor provide the general public with conducive environment to meaningfully participate in both primary and general elections. Apart from Article 13 (2) the right of equal access to the public service and (3) - the right of access to public property and services in strict equality of all persons before the law, which grossly undermined in Nigeria, the right of citizens to participate freely in the government by freely choosing their representatives has remained a tall dream. For thousands of voters who were deprived of collecting their permanent voter card or voting for the candidates of their choice, the 2019 election was far from fulfilling the provisions of article 13 of the African Charter (Omilusi and Gbenga, 2021).

Concept of electoral integrity

There is no single, universal definition of electoral integrity, but it can be broadly defined as "any election that is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle, and is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements." (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012)

Without electoral integrity, leaders and officials are not accountable to the public, public trust in election outcomes is low, and the government lacks the legitimacy it requires. Electoral integrity enables peaceful conflict settlement, open communication, debate, and information exchange between leaders and the general public. The public's trust in election and political processes is essential for integrity. It is not enough to reform institutions; citizens need to be convinced that changes are real and deserve their confidence. To ensure that elections have integrity, other factors outside of the electoral institutions themselves

need to be taken into account and strengthened. Election officials, judges and courts must have independence that is respected by politicians.

The idea of 'electoral integrity,' according to Pippa Norris *et al.* (2014), relates to international standards and global norms controlling the proper conduct of elections. These standards have been endorsed by the international community in a series of authoritative conventions, treaties, protocols, and guidelines, including UN General Assembly decisions, regional bodies such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Union (AU), and UN member states. Following their approval, these standards become universally applicable to all countries. The political and personal stakes are high in any election, and they can lead people to commit acts of questionable integrity, including unethical personal behaviour aimed at swaying the election result. There must be a set of standards of good conduct to maintain election integrity. The electoral process itself should be conducted based on the principles and values that ensure free and fair election (ACE, 2012).

Fundamental liberties, democracy promotion, and human rights are examples of such norms or criteria, according to Omoleke (2018), without which elections cannot be classified as free and fair. Nigeria has ratified a number of international treaties, including the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. People are expected to be given equal opportunity to participate in politics, for example. Similarly, in the case of Nigeria, individuals who are eligible to vote (18+) should be given an equal chance. A strong electoral process should ensure that the rule of law is followed, with fair, transparent, and equitable election administration that allows for successful vote aggregating. As a result, these and

other criteria are crucial to electoral integrity (Schaffer, 2008). Consequently, these variables and others are germane to electoral integrity (Schaffer, 2008)

Ethical Behaviour

Ethical behaviour is essential to election integrity. Standards for ethical behaviour vary depending on the social and political context of each country. However, some common principles are universal for ensuring confidence in the way elections are conducted (ACE, 2012)

The requirement of proper ethical behavior also applies to all participants in an electoral process. However electoral administrators and others involved in election administration, in particular, must adhere to their country's constitution and laws, which provide the framework for their efforts. Electoral administrators and election officers must perform their duties for the public good, and must not use their position for personal or partisan gain.

Many electoral systems formalize principles of ethical behaviour related to elections in codes of conduct. Codes of conduct vary by system and country, but there are often specific codes for candidates, political parties, election officials and workers, as well as the media and accredited observers.

Codes incorporated into the legal or regulatory framework have official binding force. They may specify procedures leading to penalties and sanctions for violations. Other codes set forth standards of behaviour, which participants are expected to follow voluntarily. Some codes specify procedures for alleged violations to be reviewed by code signatories. Many codes of conduct are the outcome of negotiations among stakeholders in the electoral process.

The following standards of ethical behaviour are among those used in elections around the world:

Standards for Electoral Administrators and Election Officers

According to the ACE (2012), the standards for electoral Administrators and Election officers include to:

- Uphold the constitution and abide by the legal framework, its rules and regulations.
- Maintain a neutral approach in performing the duties of office. This includes not giving any preferential treatment or displaying political party logos, symbols or colours.
- Do not accept anything of value (money, offers of employment, gifts, travel, etc.) in exchange for preferential treatment or access to official or non-public information.
- Do not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, colour, religion, class, gender, national origin, age or disability.
- Hire staff for their professional skills, not political connections or affiliation.
- Use office facilities (time, space and equipment) to perform official duties, not for personal or partisan purposes.
- Do not pressure other officials or personnel to favour a particular candidate or party, and refrain from intimidating them from doing so.
- Disclose financial information on a regular basis, as required by law.
- Inform the appropriate authorities of cases of waste, fraud, abuse or corruption

Legal Framework of Electoral Integrity

The legislative framework serves as the foundation for the development of state institutions. The legal foundation for election integrity issues is usually laid out in a series of interconnected statutes, reinforced by by-laws (sub-laws) or regulations. In the Fairness and Impartiality section of the Overview, we looked at a variety of techniques for developing and constructing the legal framework for elections, including requirements for electoral integrity (ACE, 2012). The legal framework is one of the foundations for protecting the integrity of elections. Constitutions enshrine the political freedoms needed for competitive elections. Regulations ensure the fairness of the process, equality of opportunity and accountability of all participants. Codes of conduct help prevent unethical behaviour.

In most situations, the Constitution — a country's supreme law — lays the foundation for the election system. (By electoral system, we mean the process by which citizens can seek elective office and the manner by which those posts are granted as a consequence of elections.) While the Constitution has a complete description – such as the exact number of mandates available in the national parliament – the particular specifics are frequently addressed through legislation (sometimes high-level organic [constitutive] or constitutional legislation). In many countries, for example, the constitution specifies a range for the number of seats in parliament. In some countries, the basis for election administration proper – such as the appointment, structure and functions of a national electoral commission – is also established under the Constitution. This strong basis raises the perceived rank of electoral administrators and helps to guarantee their independence and professional status. However, the electoral administration structure can also be established effectively through other law(s).

Just as there are two broad approaches (professionalism and impartiality *vice* political balance) in the membership of national electoral commissions, there are different approaches to making appointments to electoral administration. In some systems, Parliament itself supervises electoral bodies and makes appointments to them (although both such roles could be seen as contrary to Separation of Power principles, in that the Legislative branch would be exercising certain Executive functions). In other systems, checks-and-balances approaches are followed, whereby a body or bodies (which could include Parliament as well as non-governmental associations such as judicial or juridical councils) propose appointments and Parliament and/or the Head of State makes the appointments or *vice versa* (ACE, 2012).

The confidence in and credibility of an EMB can be increased by putting checks and balances into the nomination process, or more broadly, the principle that appointments must be based on political consensus. The process of appointing the chair, particularly if she or he holds a tie-breaking vote in a commission, is a significant political difficulty in this setting. This issue became a major sticking point in negotiations between political parties in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which were facilitated by the OSCE, the EU Special Representative, and the US Embassy, prior to the 2002 parliamentary elections, which were the first such elections after a civil war. (Ultimately, it was agreed that the President of the Republic would nominate a person for Chair of the State Election Commission, subject to approval by Parliament.)

Other legislation including electoral laws, judicial and penal codes and civil rights statutes, as well as regulations and codes of conduct/ethics promulgated by electoral authorities,

usually in consultation with the affected organizations (such as political parties, civil society, the media and the civil service) is also included in the legal framework.

Certain bodies may be given powers over specific functions under the legal framework. It could also limit these powers by distributing them among other organizations and subjecting them to a process of checks and balances. For example, electoral administration and enforcement may be separated; alternatively one electoral agency may be given the authority to conduct elections while another entity is in charge of delineating electoral districts and administering public funds for political parties. Delegating responsibilities to an oversight agency or office (e.g., an inspector general) to monitor election administration, uncover flaws, and offer solutions might provide checks. The Constitutional Court has supervisory and appellate jurisdiction over the electoral process in various nations, including Austria, Croatia, Germany, and Romania (ACE, 2012).

Protecting election integrity necessitates enforcement. The legislative framework should include procedures for implementing electoral norms, assuring electoral authority and other participants' accountability, and discouraging improper or unlawful behavior. The judicial system, the police, and the courts normally have enforcement jurisdiction, but administrative and civil sanctions can be used in less serious cases.

The norms for holding free and fair elections may still be evolving in emerging democracies. In such cases, it may be necessary to integrate basic election administration concepts in the legal framework. The creation of the institutional and administrative frameworks for elections can begin after the basic legal framework is in place. In countries in transition from authoritarianism to democracy, “the challenge is to negotiate electoral rules that all parties can accept and respect.”(Pastor, 1998)

A reform of the legal framework for other purposes can be used to bring greater integrity into the electoral process. This was the case in *Mexico*, where legal reform led to democratic changes. A new institutional framework, including the Federal Electoral Tribunal, and new modes of citizen participation were created. The new institutions then established procedures and operating methods that reinforced the electoral integrity provisions in the new legislation (Schdler, 1999).

In most countries, the legal framework for elections has evolved into a complex combination of statutes, regulations, judicial rulings and actual practice. Some election laws may be new and up-to-date, while others remain not amended but still in effect. For integrity purposes, it is important to review the entire legal framework periodically and determine whether changes are needed. It is important to address gaps, overlaps and conflicts among various provisions in the legal framework. Whether designing a new system or revising an existing one, electoral administrators and policy makers would need to take a comprehensive look at all of the different laws, regulations and procedures that help protect election integrity (Schdler, 1999).

Electoral administrators must be able to comprehend how the various legal and administrative parts work together to create a consistent legal framework for promoting and maintaining electoral integrity. Does the Penal Code, for example, encompass election fraud that is criminal in nature? Do national or state governments have jurisdiction over election conduct under a federal system? Is it possible that a breach will go unnoticed or unpunished due to a flaw in the legal or administrative framework? (Schdler, 1999).

Electoral Integrity in the Nigerian Context

Most developing countries have been challenged with numerous political, socioeconomic, and economic issues at some point, partially as a result of manipulated election results. Every aspect of the election process must be considered if a country is to be perceived as being above board in its election process. As a result, all parts of the electoral process should be assessed before concluding on the election's credibility or otherwise (Omoleke, 2018). Conducting an election, especially in a transitional democracy, is a significant challenge that requires complicated management of the 3ms, or men, materials, and money, among other things. While many elections around the world are done to a high quality, evidence of badly conducted elections in underdeveloped countries, particularly in African countries, has been produced (James, 2014). Election integrity has been a major concern of national and international organizations around the world, to the point that a huge sum of money has been spent to improve electoral integrity. Between 2007 and 2010, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, for example, spent around EUR 307 million on over 700 democracy-related projects. Nigeria as a country reaped enormous benefits from the funding (Omoleke, 2018). Since Nigeria's independence, the question of electoral integrity has been a major source of worry. However, since Prof Atahiru Jega took office in 2011, there have been numerous reforms, restructurings, and innovations in the country's election system. (Omoleke, 2018).

During her closing remarks to the conference on electoral integrity in Latin America, Laura Chinchilla, the former president of Costa Rica, declared that if there is anything that can stop the erosion of democracy in Latin America, it is electoral integrity. According to Omoleke

(2018), a Latin American conference on electoral integrity identified six ingredients for a fair election.

1. Gender perspective in electoral process

2. Impact of political finance- the relevance of electoral act is important.

3. Measures one may consider in the prevention and control of election related violence e.g encourage openness in the conduct of the election

4. Access to justice and the role of media 5. Building resilient institutions to safeguard electoral integrity. Other measures include but not limited to:

Inclusiveness – equal opportunities to participate as voters, men, women, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), prisoners, elderly persons, and a host of others.

Transparency – each step of election is open to scrutiny and stakeholders can independently verify whether the process is conducted honestly or accurately. All the pre and post-election activities as well as election-day activities should be transparent

Accountability – all stakeholders in election such as EMB, security agent, political party candidates must be accountable.

Competitiveness – elections are competitive when citizen have reasonable and equitable opportunities to be elected. Parties and candidates must be able to campaign, voters should cast their votes freely.

The integrity of any election is a function of how an election is run. A number of checklists have been suggested to allow an assessment of electoral administration within a country (Elklit, and Reynolds, 2001). Theoretically, twelve steps have been highlighted in the

electoral process and subdivided these steps into 47 different variables. One of the approaches of assessing the integrity of election is to identify these steps and do a national and international comparison. The best practice may be identified when objective comparison is made. Part of the processes to monitor and observe include but not limited to registering of potential voters, registering of political parties, opening of poll, campaign finances, voting procedures, collation and counting of votes. On a global level the following factors have been identified to determine electoral integrity of a country.

1. The size and concentration of the electorate: Proponents of this school of thought believe that the more the size of electorates the greater the pressure on electoral administrators and consequently the performance is negatively affected. A smaller concentration of electorates would affect positively the performance of the election administrator (Clark 2014).

2. The number of election conducted at a time simultaneously might affect the integrity of the election as more pressure would be too much on the election management body.

3. Organizational or institutional factors. This could be in the form of resources committed to the conduct of election. A well-funded election may not likely have integrity problem since money will be available to do all that are necessary. It has been established in the literature that there is a link between the amount of fund made available for the election and malpractice, stating that there could be a reduction in malpractice if adequate fund is made available.

4. Ability of EMBs to compare procedures and use the best standard to influence policies that would lead to improvement in the integrity of the election.

5. Independence: EMBs should be free from governmental interference or dictation by the government in power. An EMB that enjoys non-interference would be the best to provide best service to the people.

6. Leadership skill: This involves the already acquired and on the job acquired skill by members of the EMB. Emphasis is laid on training and retraining both locally and internationally.

7. Centralization/decentralization. The question here is to what extent the local electoral officials should be given power to use their discretion. Should they always take policy directive from the center or allowed to use their discretion? Research has shown that there are both advantages and disadvantages of centralization and decentralization.

8. Performance benchmarking. Comparing notes from neighboring electoral bodies as well as international monitoring of election is a good tool towards improving electoral integrity. Hence the commission should encourage this.

9. Poll Worker Survey. Knowledge about the quality of electoral management is vital for diagnosing the problem with a process. Research work should be carried out by EMBs on the integrity of electoral process. This can be done by questionnaire method of finding out the feelings of stakeholders as regards the entire process, taking into consideration various variables that determine the integrity of election.

10. Voting and registration procedures. The way and manner voters register is compiled matters a lot. One of the major instruments of measuring the integrity of an election is the quality of register used for the election. The credibility of the register partly determines the

credibility of election. Similarly, the procedure for voting should be simple. If technology is deployed, such technology should be user friendly, robust and accessible to the electorates.

The status of electoral integrity in Africa

Omoleke (2018) reported that in a study carried out by Hanns Seidel foundation, it was amongst others revealed that;

1. The degree of threats to electoral integrity is more severe in Africa when compared to the rest of the world.
2. Election can fail long before the Election Day so attention should be paid to the electoral dynamics and institutional quality over the entire election cycle, not just Election Day
3. State resources are important in the conduct of election but not absolutely the determinant
4. The types of problems in Africa are similar to those found in the rest of the world. Put simply, there is no African electoral exceptionalism.
5. The difficulties in regulating campaign finance extend across the continent
6. The vote count is consistently the highest rated part of the election cycle.

According to Omilusi and Gbenga (2021), issues such as logistical failures and delays, misconduct and irregularities, violence, challenges of internal party democracy, corruption and a biased judiciary, have almost become permanent features of electioneering in the country. Omilusi and Gbenga (2021) proposed a barometer to gauge the overall health of Nigeria's electoral democracy in the context of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, where only a third of the 84 million eligible voters participated, according to them. He investigated the value mechanisms and processes that can enable an electoral process that ensures

transparency and accountability based on Nigeria's electoral laws and regional instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, provides a credible opportunity for broad-based participation, allows significant roles for the judiciary, anti-corruption bodies, civil society organizations, and political parties, and provides strategic tools to elicit votes.

Global Commission of Koffi Annan identified five obstacles to Election with integrity:

- Weak rule of law and weak protection of voters' rights
- Inadequate electoral management bodies, either because they are insufficiently resourced, incompetent or not independent enough to enjoy public confidence
- Denial of future political opportunity to those who lose, leading to a win-at-all cost mindset
- Barriers to universal and equal political participation
- Uncontrolled, undisclosed, and opaque political financing

According to Koffi Annan (2012), some of these challenges have been recognized in Nigeria.

Election Management Body (EMB)

The word electoral management refers to both the organization in charge of elections and the numerous methods, duties, and functions that this organization may have. While all democracies have some form of election administration (commonly referred to as an Electoral Management Body), the functions of this organization might differ significantly. In Nigeria, for example, the tasks include conducting free and fair elections, registering political parties, registering potential voters, and conducting referendums. As a result, as EMB, we must ensure that all parts of any electoral contest satisfy global standards and

norms. Following that, the EMB should adhere to the key guiding principles of elections, such as independence, impartiality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, and professionalism, among others (Omoleke, 2018). The electoral management body (EMB) is responsible for administering elections. Such bodies are expected to fully, fairly and impartially implement the norms, regulations and procedures contained in the legal framework. This involves dealing with technical issues, as well as making decisions about policy-related matters.

The primary EMB is also authorized or obligated to establish electoral regulations in many countries, including those with binding force over some or all of the following: Election authorities and workers, political parties and candidates, representatives and supporters of political parties and candidates, voters, and other government officials (In addition to voter and candidate registration, voting, and vote counting, the main EMB usually establishes unique processes.)

To assist electoral administrators in maintaining election integrity, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1997) produced a model code of conduct. According to IDEA (1997), an EMB's major duty is to hold credible elections, and it typically performs the following tasks:

To administer the electoral process in full accordance with the law.

To maintain a professional, neutral and transparent administration.

To assist electoral administrators in maintaining election integrity, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance has prepared a model code of conduct.

The internal management and operational procedures adopted by the EMB have a significant impact on the perceived integrity of the electoral process. The procedures that

are adopted and implemented are generally recorded and regularly made available for public information and inspection. The relevant procedures usually cover every aspect of electoral administration, including election management, internal management, recruitment and supervision, and operating procedures, including rules for procurement (IDEA, 1997).

Identify and assess integrity risks, and take preventive or corrective action

EMB internal management and operational procedures could include mechanisms for identifying integrity risks, assessing them, and ensuring that the proper persons or agencies are contacted and corrective action is taken as soon as possible. An EMB will often need to ensure it has a functional mechanism for receiving and dealing with complaints made by political parties, observers or oversight agencies. This is an important factor contributing to the integrity of the electoral system and promoting accountability on the part of administrators and participants (IDEA, 1997).

Promote voter awareness of electoral integrity

To the extent possible, the EMB should provide information to citizens about the electoral system, the mechanisms safeguarding its integrity and the need for citizens to take an active role in the protection of their electoral rights. Such information may be distributed through press briefings, voter education programs and civic education programs in schools (IDEA, 1997).

Election management bodies in Nigeria

According to Agbu (2016), before the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established in Nigeria, there were other Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). These

EMBs, which had similar powers to INEC, mirrored Nigeria's political life. The figure reflects Nigeria's ability or inability to build a political culture to a considerable extent. What is evident is that each time democracy is stifled by military intervention, the country's desire for democracy grows, prompting it to seek refuge in a new EMB. The Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN), which conducted the pre-independence elections in 1959, was the first Election Management body. He set up the National Electoral Commission (NEC). NEC worked assiduously until the annulment of the presidential election in June 1993. General Sani Abacha, who took over power as Head of State from Chief Ernest Shonekan, Head of the Interim National Government (ING), then replaced NEC with the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) which conducted another set of elections to the local government councils to the National Assembly. The elected officers had not, however, been sworn into office before Abacha suddenly died in June 1998, aborting the process. General Abdulsalami Abubakar dissolved NECON in 1998 and established The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (INEC'S Retreat, Kaduna 16-20 August 2009). Since independence, Nigeria has had eleven Chief Electoral Officers, the first being Chief Eyo Esau, who midwived the 1964/1965 elections, while Dr. Abel Guobadia was in charge in 1999, and Professor Maurice Iwu superintended the body from 2005 to 2010. Professor Attahiru Jega, a political scientist was in charge as INEC Chairman from 2010 to 2015 (Momah, 2016). Prof Mahmood Yakubu succeeded Amina Zakari who was in acting capacity from July 30, 2015 assumed office as INEC Chairman on 9th November, 2015. Prof Mahmood Yakubu was re-appointed by President Buhari in 2020 and remains till date (Agbu, 2016).

Most Nigerians believe that electoral commissions are central to the problems associated with the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) conducted the 1959 elections that led to the first neo-colonial civilian government in Nigeria. The outcome of the election was controversial and it led to the controversial 1964 regional elections in the Western Region. The military's decision to topple the civilian administration in 1966 was based on the problems surrounding the 1964 elections (Iyayi, 2006). FEDECO was in charge of the elections that resulted in the historic two-thirds of nineteen states crisis in 1979. The military was accused of favoring a particular group of persons to whom they wished to hand over control, escalating the conflict (Iyayi, 2006). FEDECO was credited in 1983 with helping NPN, the reigning party, reclaim power by declaring that the number of registered voters had climbed from 48, 499, 07 in 1971 to 65, 304,818, despite the fact that the 1979 figure was widely seen as overstated (Iyayi, 2006). Similarly, the results of the 1999 elections were seen to have been prearranged with INEC so as to make the electoral process and results legitimate (Iyayi, 2006). Again INEC was seen as part and parcel of the enormous fraud that characterized the 2003 and 2004 elections. According to the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), INEC contributed its own fair share of electoral problems in the 2003 elections. The lack of clearly designated compartments for thumb-printing undermined the secrecy of the vote and exposed the voters to machinations of those that would have preferred 'community voting'. INEC also did not make adequate arrangements for the transportation of sensitive election materials to the polling stations and collation centres. At collation centers, result sheets vanished and reappeared in various forms, while dishonest party agents simply sold unused ballot papers to the highest price. Voters boycotted the state House of Assembly elections because INEC reversed the process for determining the election order. As a result,

there was no voting in these elections, albeit winners emerged from the process (Momah, 2016). The 2007 elections failed to meet national, regional, and international democratic election requirements. Poor organization, a lack of vital transparency, numerous procedural flaws, and substantial evidence of fraud damaged them.

According to the European Union Observer Mission, the voter registration exercise conducted by INEC was marred by delays due to lack of available Direct Data Capturing Machines, technical breakdowns and establishment of illegal voter registration centres. The final voter registration was of poor quality, including underage voters, double entries, and missing or blurred voter photos. The voter registration was partially posted prior to Election Day for orientation purposes only, rather than being exhibited at the municipal level as required by law. Due to the late publishing of the final register, permanent voter registration cards were not issued. As a result of the foregoing observation, electoral commissions in Nigeria have tended to serve the interests of the ruling party in power, contributing to Nigeria's election troubles. These insights, however, do not always explain why these commissions exist (Iyayi, 2006). There have been instances when the election tribunals set up to adjudicate on the conduct of some elections had established that INEC was partisan, but the full weight of the law was never brought on those INEC officials. Lack of punishment, of course, results in impunity. Elections cost billions of naira, and with repeated nullifications and high turnover of results, billions of naira are squandered, with yet another big sum allocated for yet another re-run. Nobody has ever been brought to justice for such a massive waste of the country's resources (Agbu, 2016).

2.2 Gap in knowledge

From the literature review it was discovered that the existing literatures did not determine how the 2019 governorship election in Kogi state was conducted.

The existing literature did not reveal the level of electoral integrity attained in the 2019 Kogi state governorship election.

The existing literature created a gap on how the electoral integrity of future elections can be enhanced.

Therefore, this research work focused on filling these gaps which forms the specific objectives of this research.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This work is supported by two theories: Sociological and Rational Choice Theories. The sociological theory emerged following the work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, entitled “The People’s Choice”, published in 1944. It was about the U.S. presidential election at the time. The theory holds that the behavior of the electorate is tied to their sociological constructs. That is the groups, class, age grade and association etcetera. It maintains that voters or electorate remain rooted in the group interest and reflections, rather than having feelings for a political party due to family influence.

Theory of rational choice: The rational choice theory is also known as Economic Theory of Democracy is attributed to Anthony Downs, following his work entitled “An economic theory of Democracy” published in 1957. According to Rui (2010), the model's operation is based on three fundamental premises: (1) all decisions — those made by voters and political parties —

are rational, i.e., guided by self-interest and enforced by the principle of maximization of action utility; (2) the democratic political system implies a level of consistency that supports predictions about the consequences of decisions made by voters and political parties, i.e., their agents — voters and political parties; (3) the democratic political system implies a level of consistency — the democratic system assumes — despite the consistency stated in the previous point — a level of uncertainty, sufficiently important to allow different options. From the above submissions, it means that the theory holds that voters' behavior and decision are based on interest and the utility (benefits) to derive from voting. The theory is not categorical about whether voters' interest is immediate or futuristic. That is, whether they will gain immediate gratification or fulfillments that will come when a government is formed. However, it has established that voters are rational, and even when persuaded by politicians and their parties, they react or respond based on their interests and envisaged gains. It means that voters are active participants in electoral processes.

The two theories are, therefore, relevant to this study. There is an interface between the theories. While the sociological theory posits that voters behavior is dependent on groups to which they belong as well as their personality. The Rational Choice theory talks about voters' interest and benefits which are pursued rationally (Ata-Awaji and Momoh, 2020).

2.4 Relevance of the theories to study

Sociological theory is a hypothesis that seeks to consider, analyze, and explain social reality objects from sociological perspectives, drawing connections between individual concepts in order to organize and substantiate sociological knowledge. According to Kenneth Allan (2006), sociological theory consists of abstract and testable propositions about society that

heavily rely on the scientific method, which aims for objectivity and avoids passing value judgments.

The rational choice theory assumes that economics has a large influence on human behavior. That is, people are frequently motivated by money and the prospect of profit, and they weigh the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do. This mode of thought is known as rational choice theory.

Combining these two theories therefore, it is possible to see that the objectivity of people's actions can be tested, and that these actions and decisions are largely determined by economic factors and interests. Elections, and how people vote in them, are influenced by their social interactions. Economic considerations influence some of these interactions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter addressed the research methodology adopted in this study. It also described the sources of data and analytical procedures used in the research. The study made use of data from both secondary and primary sources. To achieve this, interviews, questionnaires, focused group discussions (FGD) and content analysis were considered suitable to the objectives of the study.

3.1 Research Design

This research combined the qualitative and quantitative method. The research methodology that was used in this study was both the positivistic and phenomenological methodologies. This involved surveys and case studies. It was also designed to use a focus group discussion guide reflecting the three objectives of the study. The focus group discussion (FGD) technique being a participatory method was conducted to elicit maximum participation from the discussants.

3.2 Sources of Data

In this research, both primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Primary data includes the administration of questionnaire on relevant stakeholders in electoral process, interviews of stakeholders and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) while secondary sources were derived from the consultation of books, journals and internet search. Others included government official documents, resolutions and declaration of International organizations. A set of questionnaire was administered on relevant stakeholders such as electorates, INEC staff, and political party members from five local government areas in Kogi state Nigeria.

INEC is a national body whose functions are the same all over the 36 states and FCT. Hence, the results got from five local government areas of the state are assumed to be representative of the entire state. Similarly a focused group discussion was carried out amongst some purposively selected stakeholders in the five local government areas.

3.3 Data Analysis

FGD and questionnaire data were analyzed using content analysis based computer software. The software facilitated the construction of a coding index for identifying key words, phrases, themes and patterns that emerged from the discussions.

3.4 Study Setting, Sampling Technique and Sample size

Five different local government areas in Kogi state were randomly selected. The qualitative data was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), interviews and questionnaires. A total of twenty five (25) persons were involved in the FGD. Five participants were purposefully selected from each of the five local government areas. The participants were made up of people of eighteen (18) years and above from all works of life. The criteria for the selection of participants were based on eligibility to vote, party membership, voters, opinion leaders and gender.

3.5 Instruments for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The instrument entitled Focus Group Guide on Political Participation (FGGPP) was used for primary data collection. The FGGPP was designed to elicit participants' responses on their attitude to politics and the level of their involvement in political activities expert validity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter analyses the data obtained in this research through the use of questionnaires, and the focused group discussions. It also discussed the results of the analyses obtained in the research.

4.1 Analysis of Data from Primary Sources

Twenty five participants comprising of five groups were involved in the FGD. Each group had five participants. The groups were denoted by A, B, C, D and E. Group A had four males and one female. Group B had 3 males and 2 females. Group C had 5 males, Group D had 3 males and 2 females and Group E had 4 males and one female. The participants were chosen randomly with a little bias as regarding having lived in the state since before the 2019 governorship election, participated in the 2019 governorship election and being 18 years and above before the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State.

Two hundred and fifty well-structured questionnaires were distributed. Fifty questionnaires were distributed in each of the five local government areas. Two hundred and forty questionnaires were returned out of the 250 that were distributed. Ten out of the returned were invalid due to lack of proper filling of the questionnaires and serious mutilations. Out of the 230 valid questionnaires, 95 were females and 135 males. The questionnaires were distributed among some politicians across major political parties, Political Party enthusiasts, Civil servants, Public servants, Business persons and undergraduate students.

The data from the focused group discussions, and questionnaires were analyzed. The report of the discussions showed that all the participants registered for voting and had voters' registration cards. However, some of them did not cast their votes during the governorship

election. Some of the reasons they advanced for not voting in the 2019 governorship election include: the activities of thugs before and during the day of election, chaotic, violent and life-threatening situations that characterized the voting centres, long distances to voting centres, lack of means of transportation and lack of confidence in the electoral process. The result obtained during the FGD showed vividly that the male participants were more politically informed or conscious than their female counterparts. The results are as presented below

Table 4.1: INEC Integrity and Perceived Fairness of Election (%)

	5	4	3	2	1
1. How free and fair do you think the 2019 Governorship Election in Kogi was	40	29	20	10	1
2. Do you think INEC have the ability to organize credible election	19	49	18	12	2
3. INEC was efficient in the distribution of permanent Voter Cards ahead of the election	35	38	14	7	6
4. Did not see any weakness in INEC	40	30	15	10	5

Key: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 2 = strongly disagree, 1 = Do not know (DK)/No response (NR).

According to the findings, public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices are linked to proxy attitude indicators of political legitimacy, as measured by satisfaction with democracy's performance, respect for human rights, confidence in elected institutions, and willingness to obey the law. Even after controlling for a variety of other political beliefs and socioeconomic characteristics, such as education and age, which are frequently connected to sentiments of legitimacy, the findings remain substantial and persistent. Given the findings presented here, it is impossible to conclude that changes in electoral integrity affect emotions of legitimacy, or that faulty elections result in a loss of institutional trust. The intricate web of attitudes between judgments of integrity and sentiments of legitimacy are likely to interact over time. Nonetheless, it appears that the quality of elections was a hitherto widely overlooked missing piece in understanding the phenomena of critical citizens, as public perceptions of democratic performance are intimately related with their experience of how elections operate or fail to do so. The findings are consistent across indicators and countries compared in the models, including post-material cultural ideals, economic performance, and media coverage. Before making the bold assumption that lost elections lead to disillusionment with democracy, it's important to tread carefully. Although it appears that rigged elections diminish trust in democratic processes and procedures, it is still possible that there is a reverse flow in complex reciprocal causality patterns. Cynicism regarding democracy's success in general is likely to inspire more skeptical attitudes toward election quality.

4.2 Confidence in the credibility of INEC

From the findings of this research the general public's confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) increased, especially in the 2019 Kogi State governorship election. The perceptions of key informants (stakeholders) interviewed, who all saw

significant overall increases in trust in INEC during 2019, reflected the developments in trust among national experts more closely than the general population. Stakeholders attributed the rise in INEC trust to a number of factors, including the agency's enhanced independence as a result of legal and administrative reforms that began in 2010. INEC's readiness to improve its methods and better structure its operations, including a stronger commitment to transparency and inclusivity in election management.

4.3 Perception in the credibility of INEC

Election credibility is closely linked to levels of confidence in the INEC. In contrast to shifting assessments of overall election legitimacy, respondents believed INEC's capacity to manage elections improved with each election. There was also agreement that, over time, INEC's results became more representative of voters' choices. Stakeholders stated that elections in Nigeria were becoming more credible, but that election credibility might be hampered by variables such as how parties choose candidates, inadequate operations and logistics, a lack of security, and how court judgments influenced election outcomes.

4.4 Efficiency and Professionalism of INEC

Public perceptions of INEC's independence, professionalism, and transparency improved, following the 2019 elections in general and the Kogi State governorship election in particular. INEC's professionalism was frequently praised, yet its independence was frequently criticized. While their recalled judgments of INEC's professionalism and transparency remained generally similar between the 2015 and 2019 elections, their recalled assessment of independence grew in 2015 and increased in 2019. INEC's increasing professionalism and capabilities, particularly in terms of preparation, Election Day staffing, and mastery of

logistics, equipment, and personnel deployment, were also linked to higher election legitimacy by stakeholders interviewed.

INEC's results tabulation and collation processes have been criticized by stakeholders. Increased credibility and trust in electoral procedures were also linked to the adoption of new technology. Respondents also believed that INEC has improved its communication on electoral timetables, major events, problems, and results

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter focused on the summary, conclusion and recommendations from the results obtained in this research.

5.1 Summary of findings

It was observed from the result of this research that the variables of participation, competition and legitimacy seem to provide a broader concept of quality of elections. This agrees with the work of Lindberg (2006) and Dahl (1971) in their work “measuring the degree of citizenship participation, level of competitiveness, and degree in which elections confer legitimacy on the leaders. In Nigeria, among the most serious risks to democratic consolidation is the political class's complete inability to secure political power at all costs, irrespective of electoral rules and guidelines (YIAGA, 2020).

It is general knowledge in Nigeria that the country's political engagement is limited primarily by the country's volatile political scene, which is exacerbated by the country's manipulable voting system, which drives public indifference. It is also known that the legitimacy—a key component of representative democracy—that the electoral process is supposed to confer on the government is frequently contaminated by different malpractices and poor voter turnout. While advocating for a strong and politically active civil society, a free press, and an independent judiciary, the article also emphasizes the importance of enforcing the law. By extension, in 2019 the preponderance of malpractices that attended the 2019 elections could be seen in the number of cases filled by dissatisfied parties against the election results (The Nation, 2019). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) claims to have

recorded over 1,689 court cases arising from the 2019 general elections, claiming that the electoral process witnessed some of the most acrimonious party primaries in the history of Nigerian elections, resulting in a large number of lawsuits (The Punch, 2019). In Kogi State, the governorship election was no exception.

Hence, for legitimacy Nigeria's electoral process need to guarantee inclusion, transparency, accountability, and security; and provide the main opportunity for most ordinary citizens to participate in politics through a synergy between legal framework and political will. How Electoral governance and the quality of elections can be enhanced with a view to strengthening Nigeria's democracy. Understanding the electoral process's integrity is essential for comprehending any other facet of electoral politics (Norris, 2013). Most developing countries have been challenged with numerous political, socioeconomic, and economic issues at some point, partially as a result of manipulated election results. In order for a country to be seen as being above board in her process of conducting election, every step of the procedure must be considered in order for her to be perceived as being above board in her election process. As a result, all parts of the electoral process should be assessed before drawing any conclusions about the election's credibility.

Conducting an election, particularly in a transitional democracy, is a significant challenge that includes, but is not limited to, the complicated management of the three ms: men, materials, and money While many elections around the world are done to a high quality, evidence of badly conducted elections in underdeveloped countries, particularly in African countries, has been produced (James, 2014). Election integrity has been a major concern of national and international organizations around the world, to the point that a huge sum of money has been spent to improve electoral integrity. Between 2007 and 2010, the European Instrument for

Democracy and Human Rights, for example, spent around EUR 307 million on over 700 democracy-related projects. Nigeria as a country reaped enormous benefits from the funding.

Since Nigeria's independence, the question of electoral integrity has been a major source of worry. Except for the 1993 Presidential election, which was won by Chief M.K.O Abiola, most elections performed by various election administration organizations were marred by anomalies and allegations of violence (Omotola, 2010). The election was deemed the best in the history of election administration up to that point. Unfortunately, the result was overturned by President Ibrahim Babangida at the time (Jinadu *et al.*, 1993). In the annals of Nigerian election administration, the election years of 1999, 2003, and 2007 could be classified as poor, worse, and worst, respectively. The biggest number of election petitions against the Electoral Management Body (EMB) in the country were filed during the 2007 general election (1,475). This was backed up by the election's primary beneficiary, Alhaji Musa Yaradua, who committed to implement electoral reform in the country after recognizing the election's illegitimacy (National Mirror April 27th, 2007). However, since Prof Atahiru Jega took office in 2011, there have been numerous reforms, restructurings, and innovations in the country's election system.

INEC, as a democratic organization, is expected to play a key role in improving the country's election integrity. Table 2 shows that the commission's independence in the appointment of EMB members plays a significant influence in improving election integrity. This might be reinforced by existing literature, such as the Uwais report, which proposed a nonpartisan method of electing EMB members. The recommendation specifies that the appointment should be handled by the judicial council rather than the president. Other factors include INEC staff capacity enhancement and voter education. Since independence, the electoral

process has been at the center of a number of problems that have hampered Nigeria's democratic experimentation. The collapse of the First and Second Republics (1966 and 1983) was caused by electoral process manipulations that tainted the integrity of elections and the rule of law.

Electoral process which allows for the expression of the popular „will“ of the people is referred to as electoral integrity. Electoral integrity is a situation whereby all the necessary processes taken before, during and after elections are seen to be fair, transparent and trustworthy (Amuwo, 2009).

Electoral integrity is therefore the pivot of democratic governance. When people have expressed their popular „will“ (through election of candidates of their choice) and such „will“ is upheld by the electoral body without upturning the will of the people, then we have electoral integrity. The integrity of the electoral process, therefore, determines whether or not an election is credible. The integrity of Nigerian voting systems has been repeatedly questioned in both procedural management and administration, putting the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in jeopardy. The lack of a trustworthy births and deaths data base, non-adherence to a culture of integrity, inadequate technology and technical posture, and the existence of fundamental defects in the Nigerian constitutional and electoral setup are some of the issues that have been noted. Osibanjo (2010) backed up the idea that if one of the political institutions is bad, it will affect the others, noting that no free and fair election can be expected unless all institutions are trustworthy and reliable. It is important to remember that elections take place before the creation of a government. As a result, if the election process is flawed, the election conducted through that process will be flawed, and the government created as a result of that election would be flawed. That is why Nigeria has a government

cabal whose activities are a major hindrance to electioneering and good governance. Electoral integrity is thus a democratic culture in which the people's will is held in high regard and is unaffected by anti-democratic or anti-people elements. According to Maduagwu (1996), democratic ideals include: majority rule, rule of law, equality before the law and free choice and absence of political manipulations. To this aim, Kofi Annan (2013) highlighted that when citizens go to the polls to vote, they hope to do more than just elect their leaders; they also want to choose a path for their country. As a result, he cautioned that while elections conducted with integrity might strengthen democracy, bad elections can erode it.

From the result, it was observed that corruption and corrupt practices in the Nigerian electoral process take place at different levels and in varying degrees in the Nigerian electoral process. And this affect the outcome of elections and of course the electoral integrity. This was collaborated by Idakwoju *et al.*, 2018. The various levels of corruption in the electoral process in Nigeria include: party primaries and nomination level, governmental level, and the Electorates level.

It's crucial to remember that political democracy begins with the formation of political parties. Political parties are widely held to be a vital aspect of every modern democracy. They are the means through which citizens can freely campaign for public office and win seats in a legislature, express their concerns and demands, as well as establish their goals for the future. Parties must play a fundamental and perhaps a unique role in democracy in order for it to exist and develop responsibilities in politics (NDI, 2008). The many processes of electoral integrity and credibility begin at the level of political parties. As a result, the amount to which internal democracy exists at the party level determines the possibility of a free, fair, and credible election. Political godfathers in Nigeria have wreaked havoc on the country's internal party affairs. This is the start of the political process being tainted by corruption. Politics takes place at the party level. Godfathers utilize their ill-gotten gains to entice, coerce, and manipulate party officials and impose candidates who are unpopular.

According to Akeredolu (2010), the suggestion by then-President Goodluck Jonathan to allow party caucuses to create delegates at conventions demonstrated that internal democracy at the party level had been sabotaged, and that this was the start of election manipulation and fraud. According to Izenwa (2007), corruption at the party level stems from the activities of godfathers, which have hampered democratic choice and, as a result, reduced democratic space. He went on to say that godfathers' activities cause severe electoral problems since they use a variety of offensive tactics to be successful in elections

Official corruption is the most damaging aspect in Nigeria's electoral process. Under Nigeria's penal code, official corruption is a crime. As Jega (2007) pointed out, the more public and elected officials show irresponsibility, appear unaccountable, and are oblivious to popular demands, the worse the situation becomes. The larger their aspirations, and the worse their governance and statecraft, the greater the danger risks to democracy's strength and long-term viability. Officials, on the other hand, are involved in corruption impunity, as a result, creates a barrier to electoral integrity. Official corruption is defined as situation where an official abuses one's office for personal or group (financial) gains or purposes.

According to Obasanjo (1999), corruption is incipient in all human societies and in most activities. The irony of Nigeria's electoral process and integrity is that the electorate views election season as a time and channel for the masses to "get their booties" from politicians. As a result, election season becomes a time when many Nigerians, particularly the youth, focus on politics and start begging members of the political class for money. Because of this one-of-a-kind belief, the common person's thinking is that the masses must have their own "piece" of the national cake from politicians. Nigerians are more concerned with what part of the pie they would receive than with political ideologies of development to deliver his constituency, ward, or polling unit from the political class. Since the focus of the majority of the masses is how to corruptly enrich themselves through the election process, many of them now become agents of electoral malpractice with the politicians.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Mass perception of free and fair election, impartiality of INEC, capacity building play a dominant role in the improvement of electoral integrity as found in the literature and empirical investigation. INEC should further strengthen the training of both permanent and adhoc staff to enable them get acquitted with relevant skills to further the improvement of electoral integrity.
2. Openness and abiding by the rule of law in the conduct of election are germane to the integrity of Electoral Process. Hence, the commission should organize workshop on a continuous basis where these concepts are well taught and encouraged.
3. The INEC staff especially at the lower levels should be seen doing the right things during elections.

5.3 Conclusion

From the foregoing, this research thus concludes that the integrity of election is very critical in our democratic process. Transparency, the rule of law, independence of INEC, strong capacity building of the staff of INEC amongst others are the most important variables that would determine or improve the integrity of election in Nigeria.

Election integrity is critical for political representation. If elections are flawed, rigged, or fraudulent, political parties and candidates do not have a level playing field, and voters' preferences are unlikely to be accurately translated into election outcomes. Election fraud has a direct impact on preference formation as well as preference conversion into votes in the chain of representation, undermining elections' ability to generate accountability and responsiveness.

From the findings of the research, it was observed that the public perceptions of the electoral integrity is directly related to the level of trust on the Independent National Electoral Commission. The percentage of the perceived fairness and efficiency on the part of INEC was appreciable although the credibility of the election was low. It therefore shows that electoral integrity has other components other than the activity of INEC. This research work reveals that electoral integrity is a concept that cannot be underestimated in transitional democracies. From the findings of this research the general public's confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) increased, especially in the 2019 Kogi State governorship election. However, the perceived fairness of the people and the general electoral integrity is quite low. The general expression of the masses in Kogi state was that the electoral integrity of the 2019 governorship election in Kogi state was highly compromised.

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APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is solely for research purpose and any information supplied is confidential.

Topic: THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC) AND THE QUEST FOR ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: A STUDY OF THE 2019 KOGI STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Tick the option that most explains your response

Bio data

Gender: Male Female

Age: 18-25years 26-35years 36-45years 46-55years 56 years and above

Highest Educational Qualification Primary Secondary OND HND/B.Sc MA/M.Sc PhD

Occupation: Farming Business Civil/Public Service Student Not yet employed

Objectives

To examine perceptions of the integrity of the 2019 Governorship election, the electoral process and Election Day experiences.

To measure awareness of and trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

To measure exposure to voter education and information campaigns and knowledge of electoral procedures

A. Perceived Fairness of Election

1. The 2019 Governorship Election in Kogi State: How free and fair do you think the 2019 Governorship Election in Kogi was

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

2. What do you think the election was?

Completely free and fair somewhat free and fair not at all free and fair

3. In your opinion, how much did the election in Kogi follow democratic process

Very satisfied somewhat satisfied somewhat dissatisfied very dissatisfied
DK/NR

B. Confidence in INEC

4. Do you think INEC have the ability to organize credible election

Strongly agree somewhat agree somewhat disagree strongly disagree DK/NR

C. INEC’S Professionalism, Transparency and Independence

5. INEC was efficient in the distribution of permanent Voter Cards ahead of the election

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

6. INEC Staff were competent in managing electronic card readers

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

7. INEC was professional in organizing the 2019 governorship election in Kogi State

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

8. INEC was transparent and informed the public and the media about its activities during the 2019 governorship election

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

9. INEC performed its duties with honesty and integrity during the 2019 Kogi governorship election

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

10. INEC is an independent institution that is not influenced by political considerations

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

D. Electoral Weaknesses

11. Did not see any weakness in INEC

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

12. There was proper planning and logistics by INEC

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

13. There was violence and lack of security

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

14. INEC staff influenced/intimidated/bribes/corruption

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

15. There was vote buying

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

16. There was Card Reader malfunction

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

17. There was fake result announcement

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

18. There was proper training of INEC Staff

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

19. There was lack of adequate information

Strongly agree somewhat agree strongly disagree DK/NR

20. How much confidence do you have in the voter registration process in Kogi State

Great deal of confidence Fair amount of confidence very little confidence No confidence at all DK/NR