

## **The Challenges of Conducting and Managing Presidential Elections in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja**

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### **Abstract**

*The integrity and legitimacy of presidential elections are significantly shaped by electoral management within the framework of Nigeria's democratic development. Nigeria's electoral history since the return to civil rule in 1999 has been marked by both successes and failures, illustrating the challenges of governing a big and diverse country (Ekundayo, 2015). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders play a crucial role in guaranteeing free and fair elections, but they face numerous obstacles, including political meddling, logistical inefficiencies, and security risks. This study investigates the effects these issues have on election integrity and the democratic process as a whole. The efficiency of current election management is evaluated in this research using both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This study advances knowledge of best practices for holding free and fair presidential elections in Nigeria and adds to the conversation on electoral reforms. In the end, the results highlight the necessity of all-encompassing approaches that include community engagement, accountability, and openness in order to improve the electoral process and rebuild public confidence in the democratic system.*

**Keywords:** *democracy, elections, Abuja, security, electoral process*

### **1. Introduction**

The integrity and legitimacy of presidential elections are significantly shaped by electoral management within the framework of Nigeria's democratic development. Nigeria's electoral history since the return to civil rule in 1999 has been marked by both successes and failures, illustrating the challenges of governing a big and diverse country (Ekundayo, 2015). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders play a crucial role in guaranteeing free and fair elections, but they face numerous obstacles, including political meddling, logistical inefficiencies, and security risks. In order to prepare for a more thorough analysis of the unique difficulties encountered during presidential elections and their consequences for democratic government in Abuja, Nigeria, this study offers an overview of the country's electoral administration framework encumbrances.

In a number of important ways, electoral management shapes the legitimacy and integrity of presidential elections. Effective electoral administration, as suggested by Jinadu (2011), creates precise guidelines that control the election process. This framework is crucial to make sure that everyone involved—candidates, political parties, and voters—understands their rights and obligations. Building public trust in the electoral process requires accurate and inclusive voter registration, which is ensured by a strong electoral management system. It guarantees that all qualified voters have the chance to cast a ballot and helps prevent disenfranchisement. Additionally, effective logistical planning is essential for enabling seamless electoral operations, including the

distribution of voting materials and the setup of polling places (Osumah & Ahmelo, 2010). This reduces the potential for chaos on election day and enhances the overall voter experience.

Election management organisations must also put in place systems for keeping an eye on the election process, including how security personnel and election staff behave. These procedures' transparency increases public confidence and can discourage electoral fraud (Sklar, 2004). Grievances and disagreements that may come up throughout the election process can be resolved with the help of an efficient electoral management system. Maintaining peace and order is crucial, especially in a multicultural community like Nigeria. Cooperation and trust are fostered via interacting with political parties, civil society organisations, and the general public (Jega, 2012). Enhancing the electoral process' credibility and making sure it represents the people's will depend on collective participation.

These crucial functions of electoral management are pertinent to this study since they have a direct bearing on comprehending difficulties in overseeing Abuja's presidential elections. This study emphasises the significance of accountability, openness, and community engagement in enhancing election integrity and re-establishing public confidence in the electoral process by looking at how these tasks are carried out and the challenges faced. However, it is crucial to remember that electoral management examines the procedures, structures, and difficulties involved in managing elections in Nigeria in a number of ways, as listed below:

#### **(a) Organisation**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which plans and conducts elections, is principally in charge of overseeing Nigeria's electoral management system. Under this framework, a number of departments manage aspects of the electoral process, such as voter registration, logistics, and monitoring. Understanding these mechanisms is required to assess how well they work to provide legitimate elections.

#### **(b) Procedures**

Voter registration, campaigning, voting, and result announcement are some of the steps in the electoral process. To guarantee equity and openness, each of these phases needs to be carefully planned and carried out. Voter education and outreach procedures, for example, are crucial for educating the public about their rights and the voting procedure, which is especially important in a multicultural metropolis like Abuja.

### **Organising and managing Nigerian elections**

Nigerian election management poses particular difficulties, including logistical problems, security threats, and political meddling. Establishing polling places and distributing voting materials might be made more difficult by the urban setting. Furthermore, protecting voters' and election officials' safety is crucial, particularly in an environment where political tensions can rise. To improve the process's overall integrity, these issues need to be resolved. It is possible to gain a better understanding of Nigerian electoral management by looking at these structures, procedures, and difficulties. This will help to highlight the need for reforms and policies that encourage accountability, transparency, and community involvement in subsequent elections.

The analysis of Nigeria's election management, especially in light of its difficulties, emphasises how important it is to have strong frameworks and efficient procedures. The difficulties of managing elections in the nation's capital highlight important operational and structural issues that need to be resolved to guarantee free and fair elections. Restoring public confidence in the electoral process requires strengthening the ability of electoral management organisations, encouraging transparency,

and encouraging community involvement, as stressed in this study. In the end, a dedication to changing electoral management procedures will be essential to bolstering Nigeria's democracy and guaranteeing that the opinions of its people are heard and scrutinised during presidential elections.

This research explores the challenges inherent in overseeing presidential elections in Abuja, Nigeria.

## **2. Theoretical foundation**

Understanding the intricacies and difficulties involved in overseeing Nigeria's presidential elections, especially in Abuja, requires a theoretical foundation in electoral management. This framework offers a prism through which to examine the different ideas and models that influence governance, election procedures, and the function of institutions in maintaining electoral integrity. One can gain a better understanding of how these ideals interact with the actual political environment in Nigeria by investigating ideas like legitimacy, accountability, and transparency (Afolabi, 2011). In the end, a strong theoretical foundation will support better electoral management techniques, creating a democratic atmosphere in which voters may take part in the election process with confidence.

The Principal-Agent theory is one that can most effectively explain the difficulties in overseeing presidential elections. Michael Jensen and William Meckling (1976) are prominent proponents. From their groundbreaking work "Theory of the Firm; Managerial Behaviour, Agency Costs and Ownership Structure," they are frequently given credit for formalising the idea. They examined how conflicts of interest between principals and agents might impact organisational effectiveness and created the idea of agency costs. The theory looks at the relationship between the agents, like the Independent National Electoral Commission and law enforcement agencies, who are tasked with carrying out the electoral processes and the principals, like the electorate and political parties, who delegate authority (Agbaje and Adejuwobi, 2016). The theory emphasises accountability concerns in the Nigerian environment, where agents may not always work in the principals' best interests because of issues like corruption, a lack of funding, or insufficient training. It also tackles the issues of information asymmetry, which can cause voters to become suspicious and mistrustful as the principals may not fully understand the acts of the agents or the political process (Ajayi, 2007). One can learn more about the structural problems impeding efficient electoral management and investigate reform options that would improve accountability and transparency in the Abuja electoral process by utilising Principal-Agent Theory.

A useful analytical framework for comprehending the dynamics between the electorate and the election management bodies is provided by applying the Principal-Agent Theory to the current study (Afolabi and Agunyas, 2017). This highlights the relationship in which law enforcement organisations (agents) and voters (principals) assign authority to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in order to hold free and fair elections. This theory's applicability also stems from its capacity to draw attention to the fundamental problems with trust and accountability that frequently afflict the political process. For example, electoral malpractice such as fraud, violence, or result manipulation may occur if the agents put their own interests ahead of the principles.

Furthermore, the theory emphasises how crucial it is to have systems in place that can match the interests of the principals and the agents, like strict oversight, transparency programmes, and community engagement tactics (Anifowose, 2003). The study may analyse the intricacies of Abuja's electoral administration system by applying Principal-Agent Theory as an analytical tool. This reveals the urgent need for reforms that improve accountability and foster public confidence in the voting process. This method not only helps pinpoint the underlying reasons of electoral bottlenecks, but it also opens the door for the creation of plans and solutions that enable law enforcement and electoral organisations to carry out their duties in an efficient manner.

In any case, this study is best explained by the viewpoint of Michael Jenson and William Meckling (1976). Particularly pertinent is their examination of agency costs and conflicts of interest between agents (the police and election management authorities) and principals (the electorate). The difficulties in holding free and fair elections in Nigeria are frequently caused by a misalignment of interests, when agents may put their personal objectives ahead of the expectations of the public. By highlighting the necessity of procedures that hold agents accountable to the principals, this theory contributes to the analysis of how these conflicts might result in electoral malpractices and improves the democratic process's integrity.

Although it is helpful in examining the difficulties in overseeing Nigeria's presidential elections, especially in Abuja, the Principal-Agent Theory has a number of weaknesses. Assuming a sharp division between principals and agents, the theory frequently oversimplifies their relationship. With several groups (political parties, civic society, electoral commissions, and law enforcement) involved, the reality of Nigerian election is more complicated. This might cause overlapping interests and make analysis more difficult. Similar to this, Principal Agent Theory frequently overlooks external elements like political culture, historical circumstances, and the function of public opinion, media scrutiny, and civil society initiatives in holding agents accountable in favour of concentrating on the internal dynamics of the interaction. These drawbacks imply that, even though the Principal-Agent Theory offers a useful framework, additional ideas and viewpoints should be added in order to completely comprehend the difficulties in overseeing Nigeria's presidential elections, particularly in Abuja.

Notwithstanding its flaws, the Principal-Agent Theory offers a number of advantages when it comes to examining the difficulties in overseeing the Abuja presidential election. The idea sheds light on the duties and responsibilities of the electorate, police, and electoral administration authorities, among other parties involved in the voting process. This clarity can make understanding how each party's actions affect electoral integrity easier.

The significance of accountability in the principal-agent relationship is emphasised by the theory. This is especially important in Nigeria, where free and fair elections depend on the presence of electoral management organisations and police responsibility to the people. It draws attention to strategies that can be implemented to match agents' interests with those of the principals (Ajayi and Tongo, 2007).

A framework for examining the incentives influencing agents' behaviour is offered by principal-agent theory. Knowing what drives law enforcement and electoral officials can help identify possible areas for electoral management reform and improvement in the context of the Nigerian elections. Conflicts of interest between the agents and the voters can be identified as agency costs thanks to the theory. Through improved oversights and reform initiatives, stakeholders might endeavour to reduce these costs after acknowledging them. Applying the Principal-Agents theory can yield valuable insights that can guide strategic approaches to election change in Abuja. The idea can direct efforts to improve election integrity by resolving interest misalignments and increasing accountability. The theory can direct efforts to improve election integrity by resolving interest misalignments and increasing accountability. All things considered, despite its shortcomings, Principal-Agent theory offers important insights into the challenges of overseeing Abuja's presidential elections.

The theory identifies crucial areas where reforms are required to improve electoral integrity by clarifying the dynamics of accountability, incentives, and the responsibilities of various stakeholders. In order to promote trust and transparency in the election process, it highlights the necessity of a strong framework that is in line with the preferences of the voters. Utilising the Principal-Agents

Theory's insights can help Nigeria continue its democratic journey by directing practical approaches to resolving the challenges of electoral management and guaranteeing that elections are held.

### 3.Methodology

A mixed-methods approach will be utilized, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the electoral landscape. Quantitative techniques, encompassing questionnaire administration and interview with key stakeholders, including electoral officials, law enforcement, and civil society organizations was conducted and analyzed using chi-square statistical analysis to garner insights into the perceptions and experiences surrounding electoral management in Abuja. Two hundred questionnaires (200) were administered and one hundred and eighty-five were retrieved. The respondents comprised civil servants, students, businessmen, among others. Three local government areas in Abuja were randomly chosen for the questionnaire administration namely; Abuja municipal, Gwagwalada and Kuje. The researcher chosed seventy (70) from Abuja municipal, seventy (70) from Gwagwalada and sixty (60) from Kuje, totalling two hundred (200).

Assumptions of the study are briefly stated bewlo:

- i. Weak election- related institutions constitute a challenge to presidential elections in Abuja.
- ii. Poor logistics planning constitute a challenge to the conduct of credible presidential elections in Abuja.
- iii. Political gladiators pose a threat to conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Abuja
- iv. Security concerns constitute a challenge to successful conduct of polls in Abuja

Table 1: Responses to selected questions from the questionnaire

S/N	Questions	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
1	Does INEC's mode of operation form a challenge to credible presidential elections in Abuja	98	66	21	185
4	Are election-related bodies in Abuja independent	43	132	10	185
6	Does non-independence of INEC affect its mandate in delivering credible elections in Abuja	107	69	9	185
8	Are the challenges of elections in Abuja related to weak institutionalization of core institutions of elections	180	39	26	185
10	Does INEC have the capacity to conduct credible elections in Abuja	33	121	31	185

Source: fieldwork 2024

Table 2: Poor logistics planning constitute a challenge to presidential elections in Abuja

Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
99	65	21	185
43	131	11	185
103	71	11	185
118	41	26	185
33	121	31	185
406	429	95	925

Source: fieldwork 2024

Table 3: Political gladiators pose a threat to conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Abuja

Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
98	66	21	185
43	131	11	185
103	71	11	185
118	41	26	185
33	121	31	185
405	420	90	925

Source: fieldwork 2024

Table 4: Security concerns constitute a challenge to successful conduct of polls in Abuja

Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
102	64	19	185
47	129	9	185
107	69	9	185
122	39	24	185
37	119	29	185
405	425	95	925

The test is significant @0.05 = 12.59

#### 4.Result and discussion

Nigeria has held six general elections since the country's return to civil rule in 1999: in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. In 1999, the present Fourth Republic had its first election. According to the evidence gathered, Abuja presidential elections share characteristics that point to the deliberate subversion of the electorate's choices by political elites in order to thwart true democratic procedures. Unthinkable landslide wins, losers rejecting the election results, rioting, vote inflation, and—above all—poor election management and organisation are some of these characteristics.

It has been determined from the data analysis that weak election-related institutions challenge Abuja elections. These issues focus on the primary election administration body's budget, makeup, and lack of autonomy or independence. Seven presidential elections were held between 1999 and 2023, and each one was marked by a lacklustre administration and inadequate planning of the electoral process. Because the problems with Abuja elections are not due to new developments but rather to the institutions and processes of election management, problems still exist even after the implementation of the Permanent Voters Card and Continuous Voters Registration. Elections cannot solidify sustainable democracy or, at most, democratisation in this circumstance.

Additionally, the study has demonstrated that Nigeria's election institutions lack democracy and independence. This is demonstrated by the structure, financing, and management of INEC and other associated organisations. Because of the way these organisations are set up, their officials might be more vulnerable to executive manipulation. This is obviously feasible, particularly when the national assembly is dominated by the president's party. When INEC publicly witnessed vote buying during elections and proceeded to announce the results of the impacted units, it cannot be considered impartial and democratic. Suspected political thugs, accompanied by individuals wearing police and military uniforms, were seen during elections in some parts of Abuja stealing and destroying ballots, interfering with the voting process, and chasing away party agents, especially opposition parties, from the polling places and collation centres. It is impossible to claim administrative autonomy for electoral institutions in these conditions.

According to Omotola (2010), election administration entails constitutional interaction, including institutional regulations and organisational procedures that determine the foundation for competition and electoral processes. Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) assert that electoral commissions are an important component of institutions that work together to determine the legitimacy of elections and other electoral procedures. Based on the aforementioned factors, Birch (2008) argued that as election management organisations rely on institutional frameworks that support the impartiality and freedom of democratic and electoral processes, their democratic standing is essential to people's assessments of the quality of elections. Dahl's (1963) conclusion that an election is a good election when the outcome is uncertain made this point clear.

Data gathered from respondents in Abuja made it clear that election management organisations deal with a number of operational challenges and logistical inefficiencies. For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced major logistical difficulties during the 2023 presidential election, such as the delayed delivery of voting materials and insufficient preparation of electoral officials. Confusion at polling places and a decline in public confidence in the political process were the results of these problems. Law enforcement has also played a crucial part in these elections. Reports of military and police presence at polling places in 2015 sparked worries about the possibility of violence and voter intimidation. Although law enforcement was used to maintain security, the harsh tactics used in some places created a tense environment.

According to responses from different stakeholders, political parties in Abuja voiced their displeasure with the way the 2019 elections were conducted, pointing to anomalies and a lack of transparency. The necessity of better electoral administration procedures and more responsibility among electoral officials was also emphasised by observers. These incidents highlight the need for extensive reforms to improve electoral integrity going forward by illuminating the intricate interactions between operational difficulties, law enforcement responsibilities, and stakeholder reactions in the administration of the Abuja presidential elections.

Regarding security issues, claims of voter intimidation, accusations of fraud, and incidents of electoral violence have weakened the perceived fairness of the Abuja election process, notwithstanding occasional periods of tranquil tension. Significant violence occurred in some areas during the 2011 elections, which not only had an impact on the results right away but also made voters fearful and mistrustful. Similar to this, allegations of bias against law enforcement and electoral authorities during the 2023 elections raised questions about voters' freedom and safety in expressing their preferences. These difficulties demonstrate the ongoing need to promote political tolerance and guarantee the impartiality of electoral processes. Promoting democratic values and fostering active voter participation depend heavily on fostering trust among the people. Ultimately, while some elections have shown progress, the overarching narrative suggests that there is still much

work to be done to achieve genuine impartiality and political tolerance in Abuja's electoral landscape electoral integrity. The logistical difficulties faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, coupled with the role of law enforcement underscore the multifaceted nature of electoral management.

From findings previous presidential elections in Abuja reveal a complex interplay of operational challenges and the overarching need for in Abuja. These instances not only highlight the persistent issues of voter intimidation and mistrust, but also emphasize the importance of fostering a culture of political tolerance and accountability.

## **5.Recommendations**

Examining practical suggestions that can improve electoral management is essential to tackling the difficulties in overseeing Abuja's presidential elections. A thorough framework that covers a number of important areas, such as the following, can be constructed to enhance the efficacy and integrity of the electoral process:

### **i. Electoral Institutions' Strengthening**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ought to be given more authority and funding so that it can function on its own. To improve transparency, this entails making sure there is enough money, providing staff with training, and utilising contemporary technology for voter registration and result transmission.

### **ii. Improving Police Accountability and Capability**

Police involvement in election administration needs to be clarified and reinforced. This entails giving them specific training on human rights and electoral rules, making sure they behave impartially, and setting up accountability systems to stop power abuse during elections.

### **iii. Encouraging civic engagement and education.**

It is essential to raise public understanding of the electoral process. To educate the public on their rights and obligations as voters, the value of voting, and how to detect electoral fraud, extensive civic education campaigns should be launched.

### **iv. Motivating Stakeholders to Work Together**

It is imperative that INEC, law enforcement, political parties, and civil society organisations work together. Frequent discussions and collaborations can assist in resolving issues, exchanging best practices, and cultivating an environment of respect and collaboration during the election process.

### **v. Putting Technology to Work**

The use of technology, such as electronic voting machines, biometric voter registration, and real-time result transmission, can greatly lower electoral fraud and improve election process transparency. It is equally crucial to make sure that cybersecurity safeguards are in place to protect these systems.

### **vi. Establishing the legal foundation for voting behaviour.**

To make sure they are strong and enforceable, the legislative frameworks controlling elections should be reviewed and strengthened. This entails strict sanctions for electoral offences, unambiguous rules on campaign funding, and dispute settlement procedures.



vii. Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluation

Accountability can be improved by establishing impartial oversight organisations to supervise the election process. These organisations ought to have the authority to evaluate how elections were conducted, present their results, and suggest changes in light of the data acquired during the process.

The study's proposals for enhancing election management emphasise the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy. A more transparent and accountable voting process can be achieved by bolstering electoral institutions, increasing police capabilities, encouraging civic education, and utilising technology. Additionally, encouraging cooperation between interested parties and putting strong legal frameworks in place will guarantee that the electoral process is not only efficient but also represents the democratic goals of the Nigerian people. By putting these suggestions into practice, electoral integrity will be protected and public confidence in the Abuja election process will eventually be restored.

## **6.Conclusion**

Examining the lessons from previous election cycles is crucial while examining the future of elections in Abuja. Future elections will be influenced by the dynamics of electoral integrity, stakeholder responsibility, and the efficiency of policing, which have shaped the existing situation. When thinking about the future, it is imperative to address the structural problems that have historically weakened the political process while simultaneously adopting cutting-edge strategies that can improve openness and public confidence.

Critical elements including the function of the police, stakeholder responsibility, and the impact of political dynamics have been found through the examination of historical viewpoints and current issues. By emphasising the discrepancies between electoral agents and the electorate, the application of Principal-Agent Theory has yielded important insights into the complexity of election management.

It is clear that in order to enable law enforcement and other stakeholders to protect voting integrity, substantial reforms are required. Nigeria may strive towards a more open and accountable voting system by encouraging cooperation between different organisations, strengthening law enforcement's capabilities, and encouraging civic engagement. In the end, resolving these issues is essential to boosting public confidence in the electoral process and guaranteeing that subsequent elections accurately represent popular desire, so fortifying Nigerian democracy for future generations.

Fostering a more open and efficient voting process requires addressing issues with focused reforms and improved stakeholder participation. In the end, the knowledge gathered from this research not only advances scholarly discussions but also offers a route forward for workable remedies that will fortify Nigeria's democratic system in next elections.

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