# Promoting Public Trust in Nigeria's Election Administration: Explaining the Role of INEC's Electoral Integrity

**By**

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*Abstract*

This paper aimed at examining how the integrity of Nigeria's Election Management Body (INEC) influences public trust in the outcomes of general elections. A conceptual model was developed and was tested empirically in Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria. Four research propositions were developed for this research to be conducted and a sample size of 400 respondents. Using questionnaire, the data collected from 348 participants were analysed. Majority of the participants were female (58.6%), graduates (42.2%), within the ages of 26 and 45 years (69%), and married (62.4%). The result of the study reveals that integrity of Nigeria's Electoral Management Body, INEC, influences the public trust in the outcome of Nigeria's elections. In other words, compliance to rule of law, independence, openness and adequate capacity of an EMB affect public trust through influencing free media and election observers reports. In the light of the findings of this research and in line with the objective 5 of the study which asks the respondents to suggest strategies for improving the electoral integrity of INEC and boost public trust in elections, therefore, the suggested strategies are, among others, that INEC must be transparent, impartial and independent of the ruling party's control, there must be strict judiciary punishment for electoral offenders, free media and electoral reform.

*Keywords:* *Election, Integrity, Compliance to Rule of Law, Legitimacy & Public Trust.*

## 1. Introduction

Globally, election stakeholders, scholars and policy experts regard public trust in elections as vital for regime legitimacy (Moehler, 2009; Norris, 2014). Generally, EMBs have substantial responsibility to ensure decisions, policies and programmes are guided by the principles of, inter alia, integrity and objectivity (Itodo, 2021). Thus, for any electoral process to get public trust, there must be high level of integrity on the part of election management body. So, understanding the integrity of the electoral process is a vital precursor for understanding any other aspect of electoral politics. The recognition of the above assertion has led to the development of electoral integrity as a lively 'new agenda' in political science (Norris, 2013). Current challenges in electoral administration in both advanced and developing democracies have highlighted the need for an examination of electoral integrity in such contexts (Penar, Aiko, Bentley & Han, 2016; Clark, 2015; James, 2012). In particular, it is important to establish

how the integrity of an election management body (EMB) influences public trust in the entire electoral process, and to understand what factors may drive or impede the delivery of high-quality elections in such contexts.

According to Norris (2014) electoral integrity and the potential for occurrence of electoral manipulation have been sources of concern for policy makers and politicians. In situations, where there exists public mistrust of the electoral management body by sections of the populace, the integrity of the process can become subject of dispute. Where there exists lack of public trust in the electoral commission/process by some political parties and candidates, there is the likelihood that the legitimacy of the results would be challenged and in worse cases there may be widespread violence. Although INEC has been reported to be recording gradual improvement in quality of elections since 2011, several issues appear to raise concerns on electoral integrity and public trust in INEC capabilities to conduct credible, free and fair elections. Before, during and even after the 2015 and 2019 general elections, INEC has been subjected to so many integrity tests; these range from claim of wide compromise of the system, voter registration fraud (including registration of underage voters), various inconclusive elections, technical/logistics failure (which resulted in postponement of elections), alleged manipulation of results and large number of post-election petitions. All the above anomalies are factors capable of damaging public trust in elections. What this means literarily, is that, lack of integrity by the electoral management body can enable election fraud and, even swing an election, produce political alienation, public mistrust, protest, and violence.

Furthermore, the connection between the integrity of electoral commission and public trust in Nigerian elections has been much debated on conceptual and theoretical basis, it has received less attention in terms of empirical research on electoral integrity. So far, studies have focused on assessing the electoral fraud, documenting manipulative strategies and whether these strategies, used individually or in combination, could undermine regime legitimacy among political elites, collective domestic actors, and international actors (López-Pintor, 2010; Birch, 2011; Schedler, 2013; Simpser, 2013; Gehlbach, Sonin, & Svolik, 2015; Van Ham & Lindberg, 2015). However, these studies are unable to capture the multidimensional and thicker concept of electoral integrity; for example, compliance to rule of law, independence, openness and adequacy of capacity of an EMB and how these dimensions of electoral integrity could promote or otherwise be problems to public trust, have not been properly investigated. Also, the relationship between electoral integrity, free media and independent election observation reports has not properly investigated in Nigerian context. Based on the foregoing, the present study seeks to investigate role of electoral integrity of INEC in promoting public trust in Nigeria's elections. Thus, the general objective of this study is to examine how the integrity of Nigeria's Election Management Body (INEC) influences public trust in the outcomes of general elections. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Verify whether electoral integrity of INEC significantly affect public trust via affecting observers' reports in Nigeria's elections;
- Examine whether there is significant relationship between compliance to rule of law by INEC and level of public trust in Nigeria's general elections;
- Determine whether openness and adequacy of capacity of an EMB have significant effect on the acceptance or rejection of election results in Nigeria;
- Find out whether independence of an Election Management Boby has insignificant relationship with public trust in general elections in Nigeria; and

- Suggest strategies for improving INEC electoral integrity and public trust in Nigeria's general elections.

The institutional frameworks which contribute to the technical and organizational procedures that sustain electoral integrity include, electoral commission, personnel of the election commission, election observers and voters themselves. Hence, only the above-mentioned stakeholders were covered in this study. It is instructive to note that this study was interested in developing a new paradigm for election administration in terms of boosting electoral integrity and enhancing public trust in general elections in Nigeria. For the purpose of data collection, the study was limited to Lagos State and Federal Capital Territories, Abuja. Only voters who participated in 2015 and 2019 elections were included in the study.

## 2. *Significance of the Study*

Prior studies of electoral management in Nigeria have taken insufficient notice of the role of the electoral integrity in building public trust in general elections. This study provided insights into various dimensions of electoral integrity and how they impact public trust in elections. By identifying dimensions of electoral integrity, the study drew attention of election management body in Nigeria (INEC) to key indicators for building public trust in elections. Given the prevalence of electoral disagreements between contenders in this part of the world, knowledge gained from this study would be of prime importance to a variety of stakeholders including INEC, voters, candidates, political parties, government, media, observation missions, development partners, and so on. It would potentially help policy makers to come up with necessary regulations that can improve INEC integrity which in turn may result in public trust in the electoral process.

## 3. *Literature Review*

Electoral integrity can be approached from either a broad or more narrowly defined perspective. Having universal suffrage and free, competitive, and fair elections is a minimal requirement and essential component of the quality of democracy (Morlino, 2004). Recent accounts define electoral integrity as being rooted in 'international conventions and global norms, applying universally to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on polling day and on its aftermath' (Norris, 2013). Such norms emphasize fundamental freedoms, democracy promotion, and human rights, without which elections cannot be classified as 'free and fair'.

Electoral integrity refers to international commitments and global norms which have been endorsed in a series of authoritative conventions, treaties, protocols, and guidelines by agencies of the international community, notably by the decisions of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, by regional bodies such as the OSCE, the Organization of American States, and the African Union, and by member states in the UN (Carroll & Davis-Roberts, 2013). Following endorsement, these standards apply universally to all countries. By contrast, 'electoral malpractices' refer to violations of these international commitments and global norms (Norris, Frank & Coma, 2014).

Public trust is a catalyst of democratic institutions and lack of it can lead to electoral institutions being called to question. "Trust has both theoretical and practical significance in the study of public organizations" (Fard & Rostamy, 2007: 332). Public trust links citizens to public organisations with the implication that effective administration of public organisations would result in mutual trust. Public trust is one of the most valuable social capitals in any given

society. When there is lack of trust there would be negative consequences for the electoral process. Lack of trust can lead to erosion of public confidence and loss of legitimacy of governments. Consequently, distrust or lack of trust, can pose serious challenge to working of election management body. To Ejalonibu (2019) "lack of public trust and confidence in the country's EMB is a question that remains unanswered except for normal media comments." Building public trust in general elections is about ensuring compliance with legal obligations, the effective performance of the electoral management body and the absence of electoral malpractice. The basis for public trust is shaped by the broader political context in which elections take place, though, not just by the quality of the electoral process itself. Public trust in elections is essential for the legitimacy of elected representatives and the regime (Norris, 2014).

According to Kerr & Lührmann (2017) scholars and policy practitioners have widely recognized independent, proficient, and transparent election commission as the cornerstone of electoral integrity (Pastor, 1999; Elklit & Reynolds, 2002; Mozaffar, 2002). Election commissions are often viewed as institutions that provide both vertical and horizontal accountability during elections by holding elites accountable to the rules of the electoral game and also ensuring that citizens' right to vote is not violated during various stages of the electoral process. Ultimately, election commissions, if they are independent, can act as a bulwark against attempts to manipulate the electoral process.

The media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election is impossible without media. Free media has been conceptualized as the ability of media entities to collect and publicly disseminate political and official information, independent of government control or interference. Various scholars have noted how media freedom increases the costs of manipulation, not only directly, as journalists investigate and expose electoral fraud, but also indirectly, as media entities provide opposition parties, domestic civil society groups, and international observers with alternative venues to propagate their assessments of the election. According to Birch (2011: 59), independent media raise the domestic legitimacy costs of manipulation and provide an indication of "the extent to which the population is capable of monitoring, exposing, and reacting to various aspects of the electoral process." Additionally, Norris (2014: 96) argues that traditional and social media accounts that are critical of electoral manipulation "provide benchmarks that the general public uses to assess electoral malpractices." For Schedler (2013: 274), "media restrictions shape the window through which citizens see the political world. It is no surprise, then, that media, especially the most independent entities and personalities, are often the target of repression and censorship because of their potential to inform citizens about the manipulative strategies of regime elites (Schedler, 2013). Consequently, if media lack freedom, citizens are less likely to be exposed to information about electoral manipulation, including attempts to undermine the quality of the process.

A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices. Furthermore, media acts as a crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the process. Indeed, a democratic election with no media freedom, or stifled media freedom, would be a contradiction.

> *"Elections constitute a basic challenge to the media, putting its impartiality and objectivity to the test. The task of the media, especially national media outlets, is not and should not be to function as a mouthpiece for any government body or particular candidate. Its basic role is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for the free debate of all points of view" (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2011: 27).*

It is for this reason that election observation teams, for example, routinely comment upon media access and coverage of elections as a criterion for judging whether elections are fair. Again, election observation by independent bodies, whether domestic or international, has significant additional benefits. the presence of observers has a primary focus on promoting an atmosphere of openness and transparency, thus enhancing public confidence in the election processes and their outcomes. Observer access to voting processes acts as a deterrent to improper practices and attempts at fraud. Properly researched reports from observers are also an important means through which the performance of election frameworks and operations can be assessed. Such reports are useful tools for legislators, political activists and election officials in effecting future improvements to election systems.

Empirical studies have found that citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity are closely related to such indicators of election quality as expert perceptions of electoral integrity (Norris, 2014), the performance of election management body (Bowler, Brunell, Donovan, & Gronke, 2015), and the incidence of electoral violence (Mattes, 2014). A study by Bratton (2013), indicates that citizens possess the cognitive capacity to evaluate the quality of elections and such evaluations are developed either through (1) personal experience during various stages of the electoral process or (2) information gathered from a variety of second-hand sources, including the media, political parties, and informal conversations. Furthermore, researchers like Watson (2011), Kerr and Lührmann (2017), Rosas (2010) have carried out works on 'public trust/confidence in elections', while Clark (2017), Mattes (2014), Kerr, (2014) and others have also carried out studies on EMB performance and perceptions of electoral integrity in Africa. However, there is paucity of literature on the consequences of low level of integrity on the part of election management body on public trust in elections. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring how the integrity of electoral management body (EMB) shape public trust in general elections.

### 4. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model below shows a logical linkage between the dimensions of the independent and the dependent variables.

*Independent Variable*                                    *Dependent Variable*

**Integrity of an EMB**

- Compliance to rule of law,
- Independence,
- Openness, and
- Adequate capacity of EMB

**Public Trust in Elections**

- Acceptance of election results
- Rejection of election results

**Moderating Variables**
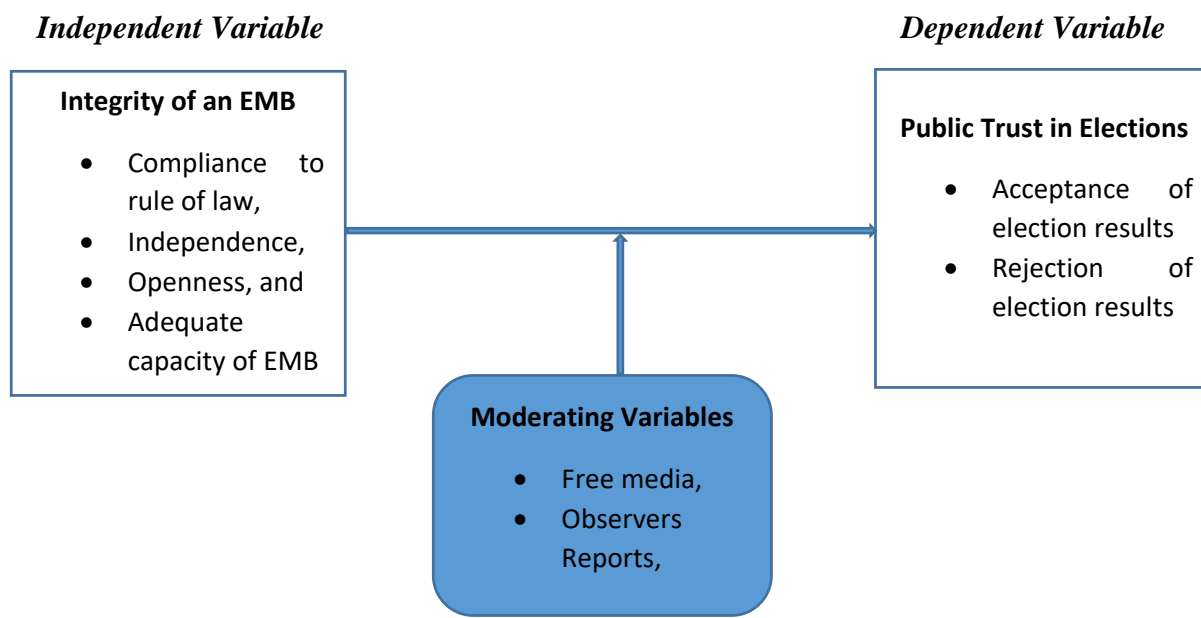
- Free media,
- Observers Reports,

Fig. 1: Relationship Model between Integrity of Election Management Body and Public Trust in Elections.

In the above conceptual model, the independent variable is electoral integrity and the dimensions being compliance to rule of law, independence, openness, adequate capacity, etc. The moderating variables are free media, election observers' reports and number of electoral litigations. The dependent variable on the other hand is public trust in elections whose dimension is acceptance or rejection of election results. This is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 1 above. On the basis of research hypotheses, an empirical test is conducted. In summary, we suggest that the integrity, independence, and adequacy of capacity of INEC has a strong and positive influence on citizens' trust in Nigeria's electoral processes. The research hypotheses are as follows:

$H_01$: Electoral integrity of INEC will significantly affect public trust via affecting observers' reports in Nigeria's elections.

$H_02$: There is a significant relationship between compliance to rule of law by INEC and level of public trust in Nigeria's elections.

$H_03$: Openness (as to the level of free media) and demonstration of adequate capacity by an EMB will determine the level of acceptance or rejection of election results in Nigeria.

$H_04$: Independence of an Election Management Boby has a significant relationship with public trust in Nigeria's elections.

## 5. Methodology

**Research Design**: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design involves the use of quantitative methods of data gathering for the study (Cresswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). The study population - the target population in this study was the total registered voters in Lagos and the FCT which is 7,915,147 as at 2019 (i.e. Lagos = 6,570,291; FCT = 1,344,856). The study population include electoral commissioners, Commission staff, some selected ordinary voters, journalists and stakeholders in Nigerian elections.

**Sampling technique:** Multistage sampling technique was adopted in selection of respondents for the study. Lagos State and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja were purposively selected. Lagos state was selected because it is one of the States with largest number of registered voters and had been experiencing disputed election outcomes based on INEC performance since 1999. Abuja was selected because it is the FCT, and the location of the headquarters of INEC. At the next stage, simple random sampling was employed in selection of three local governments in Lagos state (one from each senatorial district) and 3 Area Councils in Abuja. The last stage was simple random selection of respondents from two wards in each local government selected alongside urban and rural parameters.

**Sample size:** The sample size for the study was selected from a population of 7,915,147 using the Taro Yameni's formula. This formula is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n     =     Desired sample size
N     =     Population size
e     =     Level of significance or Accepted error margin or limit (0.05)
1     =     Constant value

Using the above formula, the sample size is determined as follow:

$$n = \frac{7,915,147}{1+7,915,147\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{7,915,147}{1+79,151.47} = 399.9$$

Therefore, the sample size (n) is rounded up to 400.

Furthermore, the proportional stratified sampling technique was used to arrive at the number of respondents to be selected from each of the two (2) strata of the population (i.e. registered voters in Lagos and FCT). This was done in proportion to each stratum using the formula below:

$$\frac{n}{N} \times \frac{S}{1}$$

Where:

n     =     Population of each stratum
N     =     Total Population
S     =     Sample size

Using the formula, the sample size for each stratum was worked out below and as shown in Table 2:

$$S_1 \text{ (Lagos)} = \frac{6,570,291}{7,915,147} \times \frac{400}{1} = \frac{2,628,116,400}{7,915,147} = 332$$

$$S_2 \text{ (FCT)} = \frac{1,344,856}{7,915,147} \times \frac{400}{1} = \frac{537,942,400}{7,915,147} = 68$$

**Table 1: Proportional Representation of Sample size**

| S/N | Components of the Study Setting | Population | Sample Size |
|-----|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Lagos | 6,570,291 | 332 |
| 2 | FCT, Abuja | 1,344,856 | 68 |
|   | **Total** | **7,915,147** | **400** |

**Source:** Authors' compilation, 2020

***Sources of data collection:*** Sources of data collection shall be both primary and secondary. Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Questionnaire will be administered to selected respondents from the Lagos State and Abuja, who actually voted in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. In-depth interviews will be conducted with officials of INEC, officials of CSOs who were involved in election observation and journalists who reported the election in the selected States and FCT. The secondary data

will be gathered through a documentary review which shall cover publications from INEC, Reports of Election Observers (International and Local), Newspaper reports and relevant journal articles.

*Method of Data Analysis:* Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Regression and correlation analysis).

### 6.  Demographic Data of the Respondents

*Table 2: Demographic Data*

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 144 | 41.4% |
| | Female | 204 | 58.6% |
| Age | 18-25 | 46 | 13.2% |
| | 26-35 | 111 | 31.9% |
| | 36-45 | 129 | 37.1% |
| | 46-55 | 34 | 9.8% |
| | 56-65 | 25 | 7.2% |
| | Over 65 | 3 | 0.9% |
| Qualifications | Ph.D. | 5 | 1.4% |
| | M.Sc./MBA, etc. | 93 | 26.7% |
| | B.Sc./HND | 147 | 42.2% |
| | Diploma | 6 | 1.7% |
| | GCE/SSCE | 97 | 27.9% |
| Annual income | Less than ₦ 1 Million | 167 | 48.0% |
| | ₦ 1 Million – ₦ 1.8 Million | 100 | 28.7% |
| | ₦ 1.9 Million - ₦ 2.5 Million | 74 | 21.3% |
| | Above ₦ 2.5 Million | 6 | 2.0% |
| Marital status | Married | 217 | 62.4% |
| | Single | 95 | 27.3% |
| | Separated | 22 | 6.3% |
| | Divorced | 6 | 1.7% |
| | Widow/Widower | 8 | 2.3% |

Source: Field Survey Data (2020).

Table 2 shows that a total of 348 questionnaires (representing 87%) were correctly filled and returned. It shows that majority of the respondents are female; most of the respondents are between 26 – 45 years old and are highly educated. Less than half of the respondents earn less than N1 million naira per annum.

### 7.  Findings and Analysis

The study made four propositions; hypothesis one was tested by multiple regression analysis, the second hypothesis was tested by correlation analysis, direct logistic regression was used to test the third hypothesis, while the fourth and the last hypothesis was tested by Canonical correlation analysis.

**Hypothesis one:** *Electoral integrity of INEC will significantly affect public trust via affecting observers' reports in Nigeria's elections.*

Multiple regression analysis is used to test this hypothesis. The dimensions of electoral integrity of INEC used for the study are compliance to rule of law, independence of EMB, openness and adequate capacity.

Independent variables: $X_1$ = Compliance to rule of law

$X_2$ = Independence of an EMB

$X_3$ = Openness

$X_4$ = Adequate capacity

Dependent variable: Y = Public trust in Nigeria's elections

*Table 2a: Model Summary on Electoral Integrity of INEC effect on the level of public trust in Nigeria's elections.*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .628[a] | .394 | .387 | .40806 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Adequate capacity, Independence, compliance to rule of law.

The model summary above shows the extent to which electoral integrity of INEC affect the level of public trust in Nigeria's elections. Coefficient of determination ($R^2$ = 0.394) shows that 39.4% of the variance recorded in public trust in general elections is *jointly* accounted for by compliance to rule of law, independence, openness and adequate capacity of an EMB. The result is not statistically significant because the p-value for the result (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) used for the study.

*Table 2b: ANOVA[a]*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 37.198 | 4 | 9.300 | 55.849 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 57.114 | 343 | .167 | | |
| | Total | 94.312 | 347 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Public trust in election

b. Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Adequate capacity, Independence, compliance to rule of law

The results of ANOVA (overall model significance) of regression test which revealed that the combined Electoral Integrity dimensions have significant effect on public trust in Nigeria's general elections. This can be explained by the F-value 55.849 ($F_{4,343}$ = 55.849) and p-value (0.000) which is statistically significant at 95% confidence interval.

| Table 2c: Coefficients[a] | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .828 | .147 | | 5.632 | .000 |
| | Adequate capacity | .198 | .064 | .164 | 3.070 | .002 |
| | Compliance | .134 | .052 | .150 | 2.556 | .011 |
| | Independence | .153 | .054 | .158 | 2.841 | .005 |
| | Openness | .229 | .049 | .286 | 4.699 | .000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Public trust in election | | | | | | |

Source: Field Survey Data (2020).

Table 2c presents the results of regression coefficients which revealed that significant effects are reported for all the components of electoral integrity; at 95% confidence level, adequate capacity (β = 0.198, t = 3.070, p = 0.002), compliance to rule of law (β = 0.134, t = 2.556, p = 0.011), independence of an EMB (β = 0.153, t = 2.841,  p = 0.005) and  openness (β = 0.229, t = 4.699, p = 0.000),  are  all statistically significant as their p-values are less than 0.05 and their t-values greater than 1.96. Based on coefficient of regression table above, the regression model below is developed;

Public trust  = 0.828 + 0.198 Adequate capacity + 0.134 Compliance + 0.153 Independence + 0.229 Openness.

On the strength of this result ($R^2$ = 0.394, $F_{(4,343)}$ = 55.849, p = 0.000), this study therefore concludes that electoral integrity of INEC will significantly affect the level of public trust in Nigeria's elections.

**Hypothesis two:** *There is a significant relationship between compliance to rule of law by INEC and level of public trust in Nigeria's elections.*

Table 5: Correlation analysis of the relationship between compliance to rule and the level of public trust in general elections.

|  |  | Compliance to rule of law | Public trust in election |
|---|---|---|---|
| Compliance to rule of law | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .508** |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
|  | N | 348 | 348 |
| Public trust in election | Pearson Correlation | .508** | 1 |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
|  | N | 348 | 348 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of the correlation analysis above shows that there is a positive relationship between Compliance to rule of law and public trust in Nigeria's election (r = 0.508). The relationship is statistically significant because the p-value of the result (p-value = 0.000) is less than the level of significant used for the study (0.05). This implies that the level of compliance to rule of law by INEC has significant positive relationship with the level of public trust in general elections.

**Hypothesis three:** *Openness (as to the level of free media) and demonstration of adequate capacity by an EMB will determine the level of acceptance or rejection of election results.*

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the effect of openness (free media) and demonstration of adequate capacity by an EMB on the likelihood that respondents would accept or reject election results in Nigeria. Logistic regression, a predictive analysis, is used to test models aimed at predict categorical outcomes with two categories (dichotomous dependent variable). the acceptance (1) or rejection (0) of election results in Nigeria represent the dichotomous dependent variable; acceptance of election results is represented by 1 while rejection of election results is represented 0. The model contained two independent variables (openness and adequacy of capacity). The model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $X2$ (2, N = 348) = 75.598, p = 0.000, indicating that the model is able to distinguish between respondents who accepted and those who did not accept election results.

Table 6a: Model Summary of openness and adequacy of capacity effect on the acceptance or rejection of election results in Nigeria

| Step | -2 Log likelihood | Cox & Snell R Square | Nagelkerke R Square |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 207.272[a] | .195 | .351 |

the model summary in table 6a shows that the model as a whole explained between 19.5% (Cox and Snell R square) and 35.1 Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in election result outcome, and correctly classified 86.5% of the cases (table 6b).

Table 6b: Classification Table[a]

| | Observed | | Predicted | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Election decision | | Percentage Correct |
| | | | Rejection | Acceptance | |
| Step 1 | Election decision | Rejection | 15 | 34 | 30.6 |
| | | Acceptance | 13 | 286 | 95.7 |
| | Overall Percentage | | | | 86.5 |

a.  The cut value is .500

Source: Field Survey Data (2020).

The variables in the Equation table shows that both openness and adequacy of capacity by INEC made unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The regression equation is given thus:

IN(ODDS) = -5.287 + 1.384 Openness + 1.549 Adequate capacity

Table 6c: Logistic Regression predicting the likelihood of accepting or rejection election result (variables in the equation)

| | | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | *Exp(B)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Openness | 1.384 | .300 | 21.326 | 1 | .000 | *3.992* |
| | Adequate capacity | 1.549 | .439 | 12.457 | 1 | .000 | *4.708* |
| | Constant | -5.287 | 1.015 | 27.150 | 1 | .000 | *.005* |

Source: Field Survey Data (2020).

| | |
|---|---|
| Chi-square | 75.598 |
| df | 2 |
| Sig | 0.000 |

According to table 6c, the strongest predictor of reporting accepting or rejection election result is Adequate capacity, recording an odds ratio of 4.71 (exponential value of 1.549). This indicates that for every additional capacity, respondents were 4.71 times more likely to accept an election result. For openness, an odds ratio of indicate 3.99 (exponential value of 1.384) indicates that for every additional level of openness, respondents were 3.99 times more likely to accept an election result.

**Hypothesis four:** *Independence of an Election Management Boby has a significant relationship with public trust in Nigeria's general elections*

Canonical correlation analysis is used to test this hypothesis

Table 7: Canonical correlation analysis of independence of *an Election Management Boby and* public trust in general elections in Nigeria

|  |  | Public trust in election | Independence | Adequate capacity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public trust in election | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .493[**] | .480[**] |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 | .000 |
|  | N | 348 | 348 | 348 |
| Independence | Pearson Correlation | .493[**] | 1 | .488[**] |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  | .000 |
|  | N | 348 | 348 | 348 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). | | | | |

Source: Field Survey (2020).

The result of the canonical correlation analysis in table 7 above shows that there is a significant positive relationship between independence of an EMB and Public trust in election (r = 0.493, p = 0.000). The relationship is significant because the p-values of the results is less than the level of significant used for the study (0.05). This implies that independence of the Nigeria's EMB (INEC) has a significant relationship with public trust in general elections in Nigeria.

## 8. *Discussion*

This study sought to explore the influence of electoral integrity on public trust in Nigeria's elections through the use of a "relationship model between integrity of election management body and public trust in elections." The operationalisation of the independent variable was based primarily on the dimensions of electoral integrity, while dependent variable (public trust) was based on acceptance or rejection of election results. The scale items indicated high internal consistency. Data used for testing the model were gathered using survey method. Most of the respondents were female, most of the respondents are between 18-45 years old and are highly educated. Less than half of the electorates earn less than N1 million naira per annum. Majority of the participants had participated in one or more elections in the past.

The study found out that electoral integrity of INEC will significantly affect the level of public trust in Nigeria's elections. Thus, the higher the integrity of the INEC the higher the public trust people have in election administration. This result is in consonance with findings of Okoi and Iwara (2021: para. 3) whose result indicates major doubt in the integrity of INEC to conduct free and fair election. In their findings they state that "the outcome of the 2019 presidential election further eroded public trust in the ability of the independent electoral commission to organize competitive elections unfettered by the authoritarian influences of the ruling class;" though they opine that this challenge is an indicator of the systemic failure in Nigeria's

governance system;" but they however, warn that "a continuation of the current system will only accelerate the erosion of public trust and democratic institutions." The result is consistent with the findings of the Commonwealth Observer Group (2015) which in its report "*Nigeria Elections 2015: Interim Statement*," opines that the determination of the Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission to improve its electoral integrity through the introduction of innovative ideas, in their view, is a major factor that boost public trust in electoral process.

The level of compliance to rule of law by INEC is another important factor that influence public trust in elections significantly. This finding is in consonance with the view of Kofi Annan Foundation (2015) which states that protecting electoral and political rights through constitutional and other legal provisions can offer a guarantee against potential abuse, and mitigate the fear of such abuse on the part of the opposition and its supporters, irrespective of who is in power. Indeed, where compliance to rule of law rule is strong, people uphold the law not out of fear but because they have a stake in its effectiveness. It requires the cooperation of state and society, and is an outcome of complex and deeply rooted social processes.

The study also found that openness and demonstration of adequate capacity by an EMB will determine the level of acceptance or rejection of election results. The finding here is in agreement with the finding of Oliva, (2010) whose paper discusses academic studies around the acceptance of electoral loss. "Learning to lose" is defined as a process that involves accepting the "finality" of the electoral outcome and thereafter granting support to political institutions until the next election. The author notes that loser support is possible when the system is able to guarantee predictable timeframes, provide concrete post-election rewards (e.g., a recognized role for the opposition or power-sharing mechanisms) and produce positive perceptions about the electoral process (e.g., unrestricted participation, open competition and procedural fairness). Also, this finding is consistent with the findings of scholars and policy practitioners such as Elklit & Reynolds (2002); Mozaffar (2002) and Pastor (1999); who in their various studies have widely documented that professionalism (which can be regarded as adequate capacity) and transparent election administration (i.e., openness of an EMB) are the linchpin of electoral integrity which are in turn capable to engender citizens' trust in elections.

Another finding is the lack of significant evidence to conclude that that independence of the Nigeria's EMB (INEC) has a significant relationship with public trust in Nigeria's elections. This finding is similar to the finding of Kerevel (2009) who finds that individuals tend to have greater trust in EMBs that are non-partisan, independent and professional. Conversely, the study rejects the finding by Birch (2008) that formally independent EMBs are related to lower

levels of voter confidence. The study also finds that confidence in EMBs is a strong predictor of voter confidence in election outcomes. Again, this finding does not correlate with the finding of Kerr and Lührmann (2017) whose result shows that, an EMB's independence is less likely to boost public trust in elections especially at low levels of media freedom. They opine that when media freedom is low, there may be no significant difference in public trust in elections between EMBs with high and low levels of independence. One reason for this is that in such contexts, media reports are less likely to reflect opposition or civil society viewpoints that could potentially reveal information about EMB performance. Hence, the positive effect of EMB manipulation on public trust in elections is most likely to be observed during elections where media exercise some degree of independence from government control. In other words, rulers who manipulate election management as well as the media seem to be more likely to avoid a public backlash than those who allow public media to flourish.

In order to fulfil their roles, the media need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy and impartiality in their coverage. Regulatory frameworks can help ensure high standards. Laws and regulation should guarantee fundamental freedoms essential to democracy, including freedom of information and expression, as well as participation. Meanwhile, provisions such as requiring government media, funded out of public money, to give fair coverage and equitable access to opposition parties, help ensure appropriate media behavior during elections.

## 9. *Strategies for Improving INEC Electoral Integrity and Public Trust in Elections*

In the light of the results of this research and in line with the objective 5 of the study which asks the respondents to suggest strategies for improving the electoral integrity of the Independent National Electoral Commission and public trust in Nigeria's elections, the Tables 7a and 7b below present summary of these suggestions as provided.

Table 7a: Case Summary of strategies for improving INEC electoral integrity

|  | Cases | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Valid | | Missing | | Total | |
|  | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| SUGGESTIONS | 278 | 79.9% | 70 | 20.1% | 348 | 100.0% |

Table 7a shows that 278 out of the 348 respondents suggested a total of 329 strategies that would improve INEC electoral integrity and ensure public trust in Nigeria's elections which adds up to 118.3 percent.

Table 7b: Frequency of strategies that would improve INEC electoral integrity and ensure public trust in general elections in Nigeria.

| Strategies | Responses | | Percent of Cases |
|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Percent | |
| Transparency and impartiality | 123 | 37.4% | 44.2% |
| INEC should be independent and not controlled by the ruling party | 68 | 20.7% | 24.5% |
| E-voting | 42 | 12.8% | 15.1% |
| Strict judiciary punishment for offenders | 20 | 6.0% | 7.2% |
| Electoral reform | 15 | 4.6% | 5.4% |
| Reducing the number of political parties in the country | 13 | 4.0% | 4.7% |
| Educating the electorate before the election | 9 | 2.7% | 3.2% |
| Use of card reader must be enforced totally | 9 | 2.7% | 3.2% |
| Announcement of election result should be made publicly | 5 | 1.5% | 1.8% |
| Avoid corruption | 4 | 1.2% | 1.4% |
| Scrutinize candidates and disqualify aspirants not qualified | 3 | .9% | 1.1% |
| Election into all offices must be done in one day | 3 | .9% | 1.1% |
| All INEC ad-hoc must be paid without delay | 3 | .9% | 1.1% |
| Government should sack INEC chairman | 2 | .6% | .7% |
| Government should sack chief judge | 2 | .6% | .7% |
| By not allowing ruling party influence the order of elections | 2 | .6% | .7% |
| Adequate time | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| The chairman of INEC must be a person with trust and credibility | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| Allowing peoples opinion count | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| INEC as a body should stick to their lay down laws | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| Only people with integrity should be appointed to INEC | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| INEC must be adequately funded | 1 | .3% | .4% |
| Total | 329 | 100.0% | 118.3% |

According to Table 7b, it was discovered that the highest strategy suggested by majority of the respondents is transparency and impartiality as 123 respondents representing 44.2 percent of the respondents (which is 37.4% of the responses) agreed that religion and ethnic sentiments, which are forms of partiality, should be totally removed from matters related to election so election can be free and fair without compromises. Transparent collation of results should be by only INEC staff members only. This is followed by independence as 68 respondents representing 24.5 percent of the respondents (which is 20.7 percent of the responses) agreed that INEC should be independent and not be controlled by the ruling party. They upheld the

idea that the funding of INEC should be free from the executive control and direct from consolidated revenue fund since INEC ought to be financially autonomous.

Next to independence, the respondents suggested E-voting. 42 respondents representing 15.1 percent of the respondents (which is 12.8 percent of the responses) agreed that electronic voting is the best strategies that would improve INEC electoral integrity and ensure public trust in general elections in Nigeria, since it also encourages Diaspora voting. Strategies such as strict judiciary punishment for offenders (12.8 percent of the responses), electoral reform (12.8 percent of the responses), reducing the number of political parties in a country (12.8 percent of the responses) among others were also strongly suggested by the respondents. Some of the respondents suggested to avoid corruption, prosecute and disqualify aspirant canvassing for vote, election into all offices should be done in one day, INEC should be adequately funded and all ad-hoc staff should be paid promptly. The above suggestions are summarily captured in Fig. 2 below.
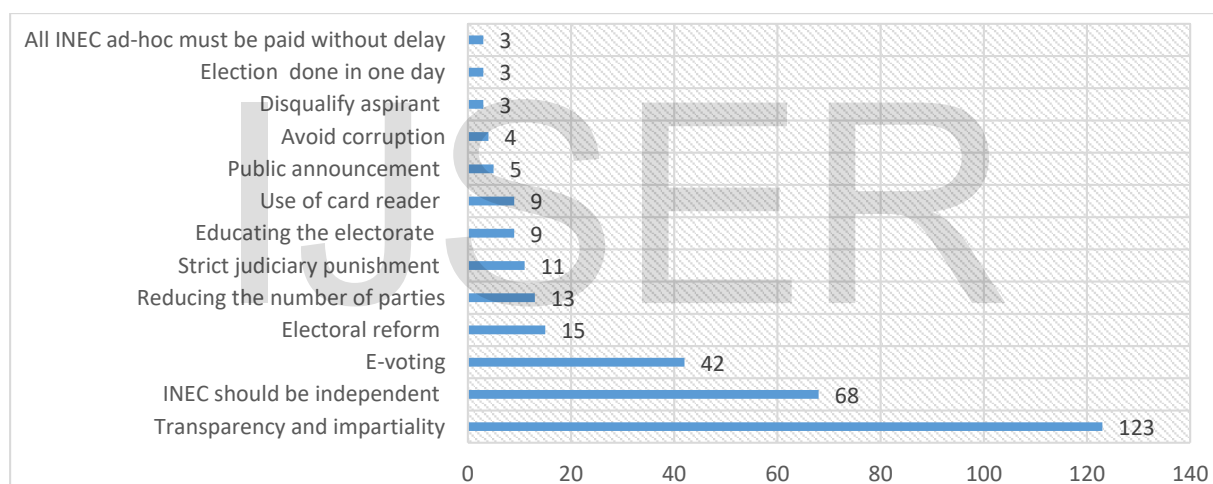


Fig. 2: Strategies for improving INEC electoral integrity and public trust in Nigerian election.

## 10. Conclusion

This paper investigated the effect of electoral integrity of an EMB on public trust in Nigeria's elections. In sum, it is clear from the findings of the study that the integrity of an EMB depends largely on whether such an EMB is independent, transparent, competent and acts in compliance with rule of law. All the dimensions of electoral integrity of an EMB mentioned above together with the independent report of election observers and availability of free media influence the level of public trust in election as to whether citizens accept or reject the election results. More importantly, we have been able to demonstrate that public trust in Nigeria's elections is positively associated with the integrity of an EMB. Hence, the findings in this study provide strong empirical support for the notion that, all things being equal, lack of integrity on the part of INEC is likely to reduce public trust in Nigeria's elections. Furthermore, our findings concerning the moderating effect of free media and observers' reports on public trust in elections are confirmed. In the light of the above, it is suggested that to ensure public trust in Nigeria's elections, INEC should not only be independent of political control, but there should

equally be rule of law, openness, competency, free media and independent election observers.
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