

Independent National Electoral Commission and the Management of 2015 General Election in Rivers State

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Abstract

The paper interrogated the challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission in its policy implementation in the management of electoral violence in the 2015 general election in Rivers State. The Independent National Electoral Commission is a body created by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended) to organize elections, orientate the public on the methodology of the conduct of election, the offences and possible punishment that may arise from any violation of the election norms and declare winners of elections as well as issue certificate of return to such winners of elections. Methodologically, the study adopted mixed research method; utilizing both survey and descriptive techniques. Primary data were sourced through questionnaire and interviews, while newspaper publications, journals, the Electoral Act of 2010 and 2022 respectively, as well as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended) were adopted for secondary data. The inferential statistics (ANOVA) was adopted to validate the hypothesis. The findings revealed that the policy implemented by the Commission in the management of the 2015 General Election in Rivers State were good, but yielded minimal result because it was bedeviled by some challenges. Consequently, the paper recommended that Independent National Electoral Commission should start preparing Nigerian for electronic voting and the use of robotics in places of humans during elections, this would stem the tide of hostilities experienced during the elections.

Key Words: Commission, Conduct, Election, Independent, Management, National.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key pillars of democracy is competitive election. According to Egobueze (2020):

Elections are archetypal for democratic systems, but some undemocratic systems adopt it as a process in the organization of their activities. Critically, election is the formal process through which the citizens chose public and political office holders, especially the members of the Legislature, the Chief Executives of the State, namely, the President and his Vice, the Prime Minister and his Deputy, the Governor and his Deputy, the Mayor or Chairman and his Deputy and others that exist in different nomenclatures but are performing similar responsibilities, or a process of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting (p. 292).

In Nigeria, elections from the inception of democratic rule up till date have continually spin up vicious cycle of turmoil and electoral malpractices by political juggernauts, hence, prompting the attention of local and international communities (Suberu, 2007; Onu, 2015). The challenges in restructuring the dilemma of electoral system in Nigeria deepen with transiting power from ruling party to opposition parties peacefully which has promoted bad governance (Rakner and Svasand, 2002). In the same vein, Omodia and Egwemi, (2011) reiterated that the history of elections in the Nigerian State has been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulations of ethnicity as divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors, the fragile nature of political cum democratic institutions is acquainted with poor democratic culture among Nigerian citizens. The process of conducting election in the First and Second Republics was terminated with coup d'état through military juntas (Kurfi, 1983). This tied good governance in the stagnant hands of political leaders and the saboteurs from the opposition parties on the basis of government in power to reconcile cracks in statehood due to electoral contest (Azelama, 2010).

Politics in the South-south region especially that of Rivers State has often been characterized as a contest between personalities as much as it is between their platforms, hence, in Rivers State violence and malpractices have continued to mar the process of elections, especially during governorship and local government election. For instance, while Nigeria experienced incidents of electoral upheaval during the 2011 General Election in Nigeria, Rivers experienced the most electoral violence incidents and fatalities than any Nigerian State during the 2015 and 2019 contest; this was largely due to increasing competition between the ruling party and the opposing party in the state. Furthermore, Rivers State is politically significant due to its size, location, and natural resource wealth.

According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, Rivers has the second largest GDP after Lagos and contains vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas. ACLED (n.d), revealed that in 2015 Rivers State witnessed most number of recorded casualties in the South-south and this number of casualties continued in 2016, with fatalities in the state finally decreasing in 2017. As gubernatorial candidates vie for control of Rivers in 2019, ongoing grievances within each of the state's three senatorial districts -- Rivers South -East, Rivers West, and Rivers East -- fuelled violence in the State. The rotational senatorial system has heightened the feeling of marginalization among some communities, which perhaps can be attributed as one of the facilitators of electoral upheaval, that has been one of the most challenging factors facing electioneering in Nigeria under purview of the Independent electoral body known as INEC in Nigeria (Chukwu, 2007; Ajayi, 2006).

Despite the violence associated with elections in the Niger Delta during previous elections, especially electoral violence in the famous 2015 General Election, that has earned the Electoral Commission some applause by scholars and politicians alike for conducting one of the transparent elections in the Fourth Republic, though, this was contrary to the national and foreign electoral analysis of the election. Therefore, one would wonder how the electoral body managed the 2015 General Election especially in Rivers State. What would have made the process stand out amidst the tension before the election? The management scheme applied by the electoral body in the 2015 General Election is the thrust of this study.

However, the main objective of this paper was to examine the challenges encountered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in implementing policies that led to the management of 2015 General Election in Rivers State. Based on this objective, a research question was posed thus: "What were the challenges encountered by the Independence National Electoral Commission in the implementation of policies adopted for the management of 2015 General Election in Rivers State?" In order to elicit answer to that

above question, a hypothesis was tested thus: “There is no significant relationship between the challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission in its policy implementation and the management of 2015 General Election in Rivers State.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of structural functionalism is a concept coined from sociology and anthropology perspective which explains the State as a framework with interrelated parts (Tahorschool.edu.pu/academics/lectures/anis/functionality.pdf). The proponent of the structural functionalism theory is the British sociologist, Herbert Spencer in his work “Principles of Sociology” (1814 – 1996). As a sociologist, Herbert Spencer demystified the society’s behavior and social relationship. The theory is called ‘functionalism’ because it tends to deal the functions performed by the structures of the society. The society or state in this spectrum is regarded as formation of diverse structures that work together directly or indirectly to advance the state. These structures are diverse but interrelated or interdependent on each other. The state can be seen as a framework of jigsaw puzzle parts that is combined together to enhance solidarity and stability of society. It can also be exemplified with the human body configuration that possesses different parts such as the five sense organs that function differently but in every sense contribute to the proper functioning of the human body. Such relationship is mutual in the sense that these organs are independent but interrelated to function properly.

The French Sociologist, Emile Durkheim re-established the Spencer’s ideology of sociological-functionalism and made it more broader to the scope of structural functionalism in his work “Division of Labour” (1895), Emile Durkheim (1895) focused on a unique pattern concerned with social change and the sustenance of modern society, he argued that society is concept of diverse parts that work together to maintain the solidarity of the society. Emile considers the society as a body of individuals but the individuals that exist in the

society is a component of social components. These social components according to Durkheim are morals, values, laws, belief influence social inhabitation (Emile, 1895). Durkheim emphasizes that one way or the other these social facts contribute general sharpening of a society. For instance, a society's religions belief of the individuals helps the individuals to eschew from certain action and behaviours in the society but where the religious beliefs fail then the law agencies would step in and put the individual in check according to the law of the state. While one organization like the police protect the individual peace and order, the law court prosecute offenders and the correction centers rehabilitates the individual. These organizations are there for different purposes but unilaterally they sustain the society. (<https://courses/lumenlearning.com/wing-introductionsociology/chapter/structure-funtion-their>). This is the core assumption of the structural-functional theory.

Another prominent structural functionalist that gave a clearer perspective of the assumption of the theory was Robert Merton (1919 – 2003). He argued social action through what is known as 'manifest function' and 'latent function'. Merton posits that every social process have consequences or repercussion, these repercussions are either expected or unexpected. The latent functions are those repercussions that are not expected while the manifest functions are only expected. For instance, the manifest function of going to university is to gain admitted into a field of study, gain knowledge and get employed but the latent or unexpected function of going to school is the meeting of good and bad friends, joining bad gang and getting rusticated. In order words, social institution creates social processes and those processes have manifest and latent outcome on an individual who could be good or bad. However, to be able to link the structural functional theory, it would be pertinent to demystify the term "structural" and "function". Akinyetun (n.d) opted that "the word structure is used in a sense different from sociological sense. Structure means institutions every political system

has several institutions such as political party, legislature, executive judiciary” (p.3). “Function” on the other hand clearly means duties or role. Therefore, if structural means institution in the public sphere then function means the role or duties, that is structural-functionalism means the role or duties that these institutions performs to create synergy and stability in the society. Independent National Electoral Commission like every other commission or authority is regarded as an institution of government pivotal to democracy and good governance.

Its prime function of hosting elections that produces political leaders into executive and legislature arms goes a long way to elucidate the thrust of structural functionalism. Without INEC there would be no democracy in Nigeria. Omeiza (2012) aver that in delivering democracy they carry out civic education, regulate political parties, register voters and declare winners. By doing so, they manage electoral process to be free and fair and devoid of violence. To do this, they interact and interrelate with other agencies in government such as police, the civil society organization, the press, external observers and other executive agencies.

Summarily, a democratic society cannot do without an electoral umpire that is unbiased and just in carrying out their activities because if they are corrupt in their activities it would affect other interrelated institution in Nigeria and especially good governance. Therefore, with an electoral body like INEC, legitimacy and democracy which is people oriented is born and enshrined.

CONCEPTUALIZING ELECTION AND ELECTORAL PROCESS

One of the indispensable features of democracy is the avenue created for periodic election. This practice is important as it gives the citizenry the ability to determine through transparent measures on who and how political power is shared at every level of government

periodically. Elections are essential also because it builds legitimacy on the candidates that the people entrust to represent and make public policy that affects the state; hence, the people truly governs only through the nexus of periodic elections. This was why Dye (2001) aptly defined election thus: Election is a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies; the key to participation in a democracy; and the way of giving consent to government (Dye, 2001); and allowing the governed to choose and pass judgment on office holders who theoretically represent the governed.

Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary (2006) defines election as the process of organizing periodic voting process for candidates to make themselves available through political parties for the citizenry to choose the best candidate to exercise representation and political power. Roberts and Edwards (1991) cited by Omotola (2007) define election as "a method for the selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by an electorate; those citizens who are qualified to vote under the rules and procedures of the electoral system" (p.32). The concept of election is associated with several meanings. In political parlance, Ojo (2008) further defines election, as a "formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern, who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out" (p.6). In support, Awopeju (2011) explains that, election is a process that gives members of a given society the opportunity to select candidates that would fill executive and legislative offices. According to Dye (2001) election is an important mechanism for the employment of administrative governance in democratic social order, a major involvement in consolidating democracy; and means of ensuring legitimacy of any regime.

Robert (2011) traces modern and democratic elections to the 17th century, basically, as a means through which modern democracies and newly independent colonies of formal colonial masters can choose those to represent them in the affair of governance and effective management of the common wealth of the country to the benefit of all. Organizing elections to public offices are always branded with various preparatory events and political schemes that contenders embrace. Prior to state elections, party election is been carry out in advance before candidates can contest against other party's candidates in a general election.

These strategies range from campaign, political movements, lobbying, promotions, and private connections (Olujide 2010). Elections overtime have been mentioned as the peak pointer of a post-conflict state in regard to a nonviolent representative outlook. The capacity to choose one's ruler is believed to be vital in driving a government forward after scarring internal or external battles. Sadly, though the conduct of vote-casting is usually not as easy as it may initially look, with several experts and researchers classifying them as turning points for violent acts. Elections have become a climax for violence and uncertainty in many states in Nigeria (Ikyase & Egberi, 2015).

Afro Barometer (2014) applauded elections in Africa, as the catalyst to the emergence of democracy in countries like Benin, Ghana, Cape Verde, Mali, Senegal and South Africa. The institute went further to credit the thrust of election as the reason why most troubled countries in Africa that have seen scourge in military war and regime, society up rise and violence, finally, could come to a stable society and environment due to elections that gave the citizens the opportunity to decide wisely and their choices respected in the results of the elections. Countries like Guinea, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone have testimonies of Liberalism due to elections carried out in their states. O'neil (2006) while assessing elections in Africa narrated that elections in Africa have stirred competition amongst elites in the society because it pulls

various people in the society from all walks of life, with different background and orientation to aspire to rule the state. Africa's elections have also promoted social awareness and propensity to participate in governance process. Therefore, creating a relationship between the public and the public office holders (Ayee, 2008).

Also, in the African context, elections have become the route to the most significant power on the surface of the earth, which is political power that cuts across all facets of human endeavour (Geekye-Jandoh, 2014). Geekye-Jandoh (2014) citing Huntington (1991) explained that elections in Africa that have ushered in democracy is the main course of the third wave of democracy, through the end of cold war in the late 1990's, particularly election beginning in 2001. Africa has witnessed an upsurge of elections through military and civilian contestation. Invariably, as observed by Hayward (1987) cited by Gyekye- Jandoh (2014) opined that "elections in Africa in the 21st Century, from all indication, seem to have a residence that is here to stay. Country like Democratic Republic of Congo, that have been autocratic or in turmoil, new elections as the threshold to ways in order to legitimate the government, embark on different policies, and prevent public unrest" (p.187). This means that election is a two edged sword to the continent of Africa: to cut through autocracy and turmoil, and to strengthen political legitimacy and democracy. The values of election are to provide the much needed and desired political leaders. The needed and desired leaders are those duly voted for by the electorates.

Elekwa (2008) posit that the "electoral process relates to the entire cycle ranging from the provision of voter education to the dissolution of the National Assembly" (p.30). According to Akamere (2001), electoral process has to do with all the events and procedures indulged in the election of representatives by the electorates. It involves the entire pre and post-election activities without which an election is meaningless. These involve the registration of political parties, review of voters' register, outlining of constituencies, resolving electoral disputes,

return of elected representatives, swearing elected representatives. In addition, electoral process is the rules that guide the conduct of election, and important activities that make up an electoral process. Any conduct that threatens the electoral process is a subversion of the peoples' sovereignty (Akamere, 2001).

Similarly, INEC (2006) outlined different stages of the electoral process as follows: (i) scope of electoral constituencies (ii) Registration of voters (iii) Notice of elections (iv) Nomination of candidates (v) Election campaigns (vi) Elections, announcement of results and completing tribunal sittings (vii) Participation of other organizations (viii) Resolution of electoral conflicts from the participation and other organizations or groups. The electoral process is a vast procedure that involves the competency and desirable conduct of electoral administration, mostly in advancing democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices.

In Nigeria's case, the truth remains that the electoral procedure is immensely characterized by a culture of electoral malpractices. Ezeani (2004) stated that "electoral malpractices refer to illegalities committed by government officials responsible for the conduct of elections, political parties, groups or individuals with sinister intention to influence an election in favour of a candidate or candidates" (p.145). Intense electoral malpractices cause political and societal upheavals and crisis to every polity and this is considered undesirable. Reynolds, Reilly & Ellis (2005) describe electoral system as votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The key variables of the electoral formula (plurality/majority, proportional, mixed or other system), ballot structure (voter-votes for a candidate or party and voter makes a single choice or series of preferences) and district magnitude (how many representatives to legislature the district elects).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The Independent National Electoral Commission is an organization that is bestowed with the constitutional authority to organize election that concerns the entire nation. The powers of the Commission to oversee general election in Nigeria are enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) (as amended) in section 153(f). The function and duties of the Commission is and clearly spelt out in the Third-Schedule in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and Part 1(2) of the Electoral Act which states thus:

- (i) Undertake, prepare and coordinate all elections that gives power to the office of the Senate president, House of Representative and the House of Assembly of various State in the nation.
- (ii) Incorporate political parties in Nigeria to be legible to carryout political function such as registration of candidates to contest for election into offices stated above in consonant with the Constitution and the Electoral Act or the Act of the National Assembly.
- (iii) Oversee the activities of the political parties including their finances.
- (iv) Auditing the fiscal account of political parties and the publication of the result of such action for public consumption.
- (v) The conduct of electorate registration, to quality eligible voters and also disqualify ineligible voters; create and maintain voters register.
- (vi) Supervise political parties' campaigns; create rules and regulations that guides political activities channeled towards election.
- (vii) Control the Electoral officers to avoid contravening the rules of the Electoral Act and the Constitution.
- (viii) Distribution of delegated powers to resident Electoral Commissioners.
(<https://www.inecnigeria.org/home/the-Commission/>).

The Commission mission is directed towards ensuring free, fair and credible election for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The commission in its vision statement and value cited through their official site, published thus; “The vision of INEC is to be one of the best Election Management Bodies (EMB) in the world that meets the aspiration of the Nigerian people” (<https://www.inecnigeria.org/home/the-commission/>).

In achieving these targets, the commission has gone through several stages and development. The establishment of an electoral umpire began with the colonial masters, as the electoral commission of Nigeria (ECN) in 1959 which ushered in the much anticipated political emancipation in today’s Nigeria. The Electoral Commission in Nigeria gave rise to the First Republic (1960-1966), the victors of the election was Tafawa Balewa, as the prime minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President of Nigeria (Babayo, Azizuddin and Bakri, 2017). The Electoral Commission of Nigeria came crashing under the first military coup in Nigeria in 1966 bringing the First Republic into an end.

The Commission came into being again but under military supervision, known as the Federal Electoral Commission in 1978 under the auspices of General Olusegun Obasanjo. The Federal Electoral Commission held the 1979 election and the second Republic emerged under Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The Commission also conducted the 1983 general election. Babayo Azizudddin Bakri (2017) citing INEC (2017) revealed that “FEDECO remained the electoral umpire in the country until after the military coup of 1983 which ended the Second Republic (1979-1983) in Nigeria and Introduced another military rule for many decades” (p.18). One of the most significant electoral body was the National Electoral Commission formed in 1990 by the military General Ibrahim Babangida that went further to conduct the controversial June 12th, 1993 Presidential Election, which still today was considered by most Nigerians as the one and true fairest election of the historical Republics of Nigeria (aceproject.org). The

National Electoral Commission was short-lived mainly through the ordeal of the June 12th, 1993 election that threw the country into a pandemonium; shortly, after the General Sani Abacha military regime claimed power and established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria. Babayo Azizuddin and Bakri (2017) revealed that “the military regime of General Sani Abacha dissolved NEC and established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) in an attempt for another civilian rule that failed before the actualization as a result of the eventual death of General Sani Abacha” (p.15).

His demise claimed his ambition of becoming a Civilian President after severe military regime. Due to his demise in 1998, military powers were transferred to General Abdusalami Abubakar who scrapped the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) and established the current Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), through Decree no.17, Part 1 under the distinct Constitution of Nigeria, 1979. The 1998 Independent National Electoral Commission gave rise to the Fourth Republic under the former General Olusegun Obasanjo, now celebrated as the first President of the Fourth Republic and also the most consistent Republic in Nigeria’s electoral history. Ever since the inception of the Independent National Electoral Commission in 1998, the electoral body has successfully conducted five consecutive elections in the country.

Babayo Azizuddin & Bakri (2017) opined that “INEC as the national electoral body has conducted five consecutive general elections, more than any other electoral body in the history of the country” (p.21). Despite the huge contribution of the Independent National Electoral Commission in the 7 democratic elections, the electoral body has come under severe criticism. Human Right Watch (2007) reported that the 2003 and 2007 General Elections were open day robbery, the watch observed that due to the lapses of the electoral body, the electorates right to vote was subverted with a lot of electoral malpractice such as

ballot stealing, violence, massive riggings massive vote buying, and ballot stuffing etc. The General Election was viewed to be the world's most controversial election (The Observer Book of Scandal, 2010, cited by Babayo Azizuddin & Bakri, 2017).

Furthermore, Ismalia & Othman (2015) cited by Udu (2015) posit that the elections conducted by INEC in the Fourth Republic has not been far from the menace of the elections held in previous republics that has been characterized with huge malpractices especially the 1993 Presidential elections. Summarily, Babayo, Azizuddin and Bakri (2017) revealed that the core issue facing the electoral body and the nation at large is the transition process of authority; which mostly do not meet international best practices according to the author, the transition process of authority by military government is not purely innocent as they possess undemocratic actions. It is evident that most of the electoral commission since the inception of every democratic republic has come under military auspices. The obvious is that most of the elected leaders were former military head of state. Therefore, there is high militarization such as imposition of candidate, rigging and other electoral malpractices. This is so therefore, pertinent to note that despite the mandate of the electoral body to be independently stable to organize free and fair election, INEC has flawed a lot of rules occasioned by the political heads (Yagboyagu, 2011).

The structure of the Independent National Electoral Commission is constructed to create vertical powers sharing means, as designed by PLAC (2019), the commission is made of:

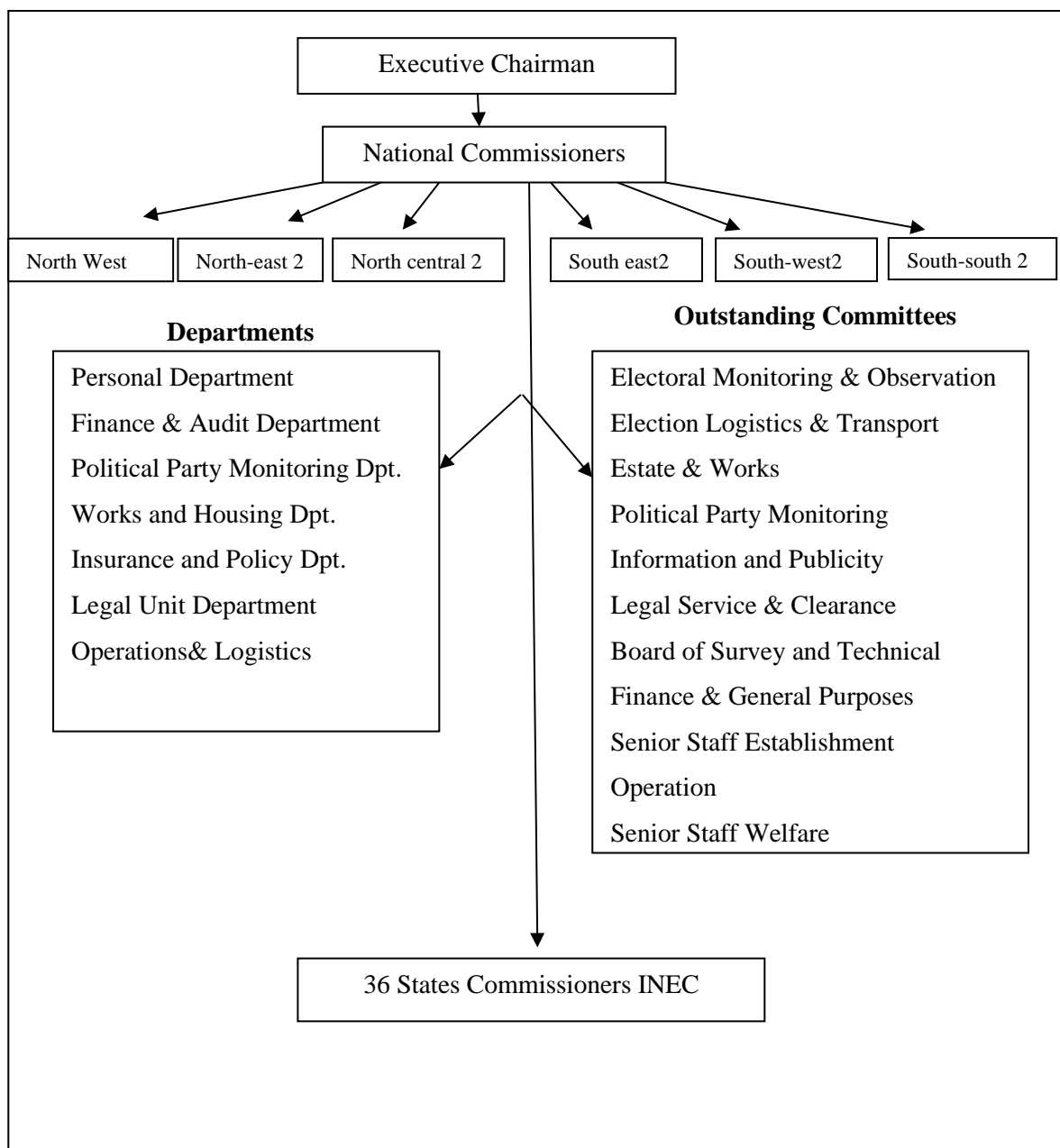


Fig. 1: Organizational chart of independent national electoral commission

Source: Babayo, Azizuddin & Bakri (2017)

The INEC Chairman also known as the Chief Electoral Commissioners, Chief Administrator and head of the organization. He is appointed by the President. The electoral commission also have a secretary of the secretariat appointed by the commission for 4 years renewable stated on the criteria in the Electoral Act. The secretary is the head of administration and human resources of the commission. The commission can further appoint any other officers or delegated authority or committee when seemed fit. Therefore, the Electoral Act critically recognizes the offices of the chairman and the secretary but notwithstanding, it is expected for the commission to create other important offices, in line with the Act for 12 national commissioners and 37 president electoral commissioners.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the paper adopted the mixed research design (qualitative and quantitative); the qualitative design presents and applies first hand descriptive perspective of the respondents views on the challenges faced by Independent National Electoral Commission in management of the 2015 General Election in Rivers. The quantitative design was applied through cross-sectional design and statistical ingredients which were used to examine the factor responsible for electoral vices, nature and character of electoral vice in Rivers State.

The study's population comprised entire twenty-three (23) Local Government Area in Rivers State. The total population of Rivers State according to the 2006 National head count was stipulated at 5,198,716 million. However, it is imperative to note that the population of Rivers State as stipulated by the National Population Council in 2006 cannot be valid due to population growth from 2006 to 2015. Therefore, a projected population size of 6,695,946 was derived for the study using the population projection formula with a projected growth rate of 3.2 percent (NDP, 2014, cited in Apah, 2017).

The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the population. This is because it gives each member of the department a known and equal chance of being selected. The

emphasis here is on chance so as to ensure objectivity. Strictly speaking, it avoids all hints of bias.

The primary data was sourced through questionnaire and interviews. Therefore, 400 questionnaires were distributed, and six persons were interviewed. Secondary data was generated through textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet, to name but a few. All these were used in for the analysis.

The paper analyzed quantitative data by the use of tables and simple percentages. The hypothesis was tested by means of inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and analysis of variance: ANOVA). Firstly, the Pearson correlation was used to assess the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study. Secondly, ANOVA was used to ascertain the significance or variation of relationship between INEC challenges and management approach and the actual outcome of the election.

Additionally, concurrent quantitative dominant approach was adopted in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed at the same time (concurrently). However, the former (quantitative) was given more weight (importance). This approach allowed the integration of data at all phases of the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**Examining the challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission in implementing policies for managing the 2015 General Election in Rivers State****Table 1: There were hitches with the use or implementation of policy initiated by INEC in the 2015 General Election?**

S/N	Items	No. of Response	Percent
1.	Strongly agree	130	33.7%
2.	Agree	120	31.2%
3.	Strongly disagree	73	19.0%
3.	Disagree	62	16.1%
	Total	385	100.0

Field Survey, 2022.

Table 4.4.1 signifies the response of respondents issued and retrieved questionnaire. The subject matter here reveals that most of the respondents that assert that despite the massive mobilizations and policies in the 2015 General Election, the electorate still witness hitches and challenges. Further into the interrogation, an interview was conducted with Hon. Christian Tamuno-Iminabo, Councilor Ward 7 of Port Harcourt Local Government Area in the Rivers State. Responding to the question, “in your opinion, what were the causes of the challenges faced by INEC in the management of the 2015 General Election and how?” He replied thus:

The causes of these challenges I witnessed during the 2015 general election were; Election is based on finance only those who have money to spend on election day would win the election on that particular unit or particular center. People who have money will definitely buy votes, INEC officials, security agents and also thugs are used to achieve victory. Again another cause of some of these challenges, like those going to the River Nile axis because of the insecurity of the sea most electoral officers were afraid of going to the River Nile areas to conduct their election, they prefer to stay in the hotels where the money banks have provided for them to stay and at the end of the day they will come back to declare the result that was not true, also some of the causes

of these challenges are because most of the persons that have come out to vote on that day were denied of voting in their various units so they tend to causes trouble when they are denied to cast their ballot for their favorite candidate (Personal Communication, 26 April, 2022).

In another interview with Robertson Jack, Special Adviser on Media to the Major of Port Harcourt while responding to the same question revealed thus:

Most of the causes of the challenges were caused by INEC staff themselves, insincerity, partisanship and you know corruption where you take bribe and try to manipulate the system, so I think part of the challenges came from INEC itself and part of the challenges came from political leaders who want force their ways on INEC so the challenges basically are desperate measures to win elections, if Nigerians can develop to seeing elections as a sport or as a game where the best player wins or the most popular candidate win the challenges will reduce (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2022).

Table 2: Some of the challenges encountered by INEC in managing the 2015 General Election in Rivers State:

S/N	Items	No. of Response	Percent
1.	Electoral tugs	62	16.1%
2.	Malfunctioning of card readers	100	26.0%
3.	Network services	45	11.7%
4.	insufficient security	28	7.3%
5.	Transportation	58	15.1%
6.	Insufficient man power	35	9.1%
7.	None of the above	23	6.0%
8.	All of the above	34	8.8%
	Total	385	100.0

Field Survey, 2022.

Table 4.4.2 signifies the response of respondents issued and retrieved questionnaire. The subject matter here reveals that most of the respondents experienced one challenges or the other during the election. Further into the interrogation, an interview was conducted with Hon. Christian Tamuno-Iminabo, Councilor Ward 7 of Port Harcourt Local Government Area in the Rivers State, responding to the question, “in your opinion, what were the

challenges that you noticed that the Independent National Electoral Commission encountered in the 2015 General Election?” He replied thus:

The challenges encountered during the 2015 general election in my opinion, one on the part of the political parties, no party after signing the accord want to play according to the rules of the elections, no political party want to exercise patience or follow the processes of the election, every political party at all cost want to win election so ballot box snatching were one of the challenges, dogs attacking voters were also one of the challenges , using security agents to barricade some persons not to even come out of their home to cast their vote is another challenge that I observed , also vote buying is a very serious case in 2015 were the people came out but they are demanding for money because of the failed electoral promises made by various leaders during their campaign and after they won election these promises were not fulfilled so I observed that people who came out to vote who had their PVC’s they were demanding to be paid before casting their vote, that is what some areas witnessed in the 2015 General Election and 2019 General Election. (Personal Communication, 26 April, 2022).

In another interview with Robertson Jack, Special Adviser on Media to the Major of Port Harcourt while responding to the same question revealed thus:

The challenges were logistics, the inability to reach some of the areas on time, the rural areas, challenges of network for the voting machine and then security challenges, so for me I think that it’s a good thing that the National Assembly has passed the bill and the President has consented for electronic voting. The major challenge INEC had was the logistic and most importantly the challenges was the coalition center drama where you see people changing results at the coalition center, INEC staffs are like helpless, so I think that the challenges where the bureaucracy and the complexities coalition voting, the processes where too complex, so I think that the electronic transmission will cut most of these challenges that the INEC suffer (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2022).

Table 3: Ho1 There is no significant relationship between the challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission and the policies put in place to manage violence in the conduct of the 2015 General Election in Rivers State.

S/N	Hypotheses	SD	A	D	SD	Total
1.	The 2015 General Election suffered from noticeable challenges	150	108	80	47	100%
2.	INEC suffered mostly as a result of these challenges	130	155	30	70	100%
3.	The challenges faced by INEC were self-inflicting and avoidable	96	70	114	105	100%

4.	The challenges faced by INEC had resultant effect on the outcome of the election	70	50	115	150	100%
5.	The challenges faced by INEC affected the policies implemented	115	104	97	69	100%
6.	The policies implemented by INEC were the cause of the challenges faced in the election	118	84	104	79	100%
7.	Policies were effective despite the challenges faced by INEC in managing election?	119	104	83	80	100%
8.	INEC management policies in the 2015 General Election was better than previous elections?	135	110	70	70	100%

Field Survey, 2022.

There was no significant relationship between the challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission and the policies put in place to manage violence in the conduct of the 2015 General Election in Rivers State at the $p < .05$ level for the four conditions [$F(3, 28) = 2.13, p = 0.119$].

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study after interrogating the relationship of INEC and other related agencies in managing the 2015 General Election, the study dived into investigations into the measures and mechanism used to manage the 2015 General Election. The study found that the nature of electoral violence and mismanagement was tribal and party related violence and technical mismanagement that rocked the 2015 General Election, while the 2015 General Election was a test run into applying technological measures in electioneering in order to manage electoral violence and other related electoral fraud.

These measures did make stride and contributions into the success achieved in the election but the first time is not always the best as the electoral body was able to analyze the strength and weakness of applying electronic measure into electioneering. The study was concerned

with challenges faced by the electoral body in applying these electronic means in the electioneering process. This investigation into the challenges faced by the electoral body would enable them prepare better for subsequent elections in order to close the gap between what hindered free and fair elections in Nigeria.

Hon. Christian Tamuno-Iminabo, Councilor Ward 7 of Port Harcourt Local Government Area in the Rivers State, responding to the question, “in your opinion, what were the challenges that you noticed that the Independent National Electoral Commission encountered in the 2015 General Election?” He replied thus:

The challenges encountered during the 2015 general election in my opinion, one on the part of the political parties, no party after signing the accord want to play according to the rules of the elections, no political party want to exercise patience or follow the processes of the election, every political party at all cost want to win election so ballot box snatching were one of the challenges, dogs attacking voters were also one of the challenges , using security agents to barricade some persons not to even come out of their home to cast their vote is another challenge that I observed , also vote buying is a very serious case in 2015 were the people came out but they are demanding for money because of the failed electoral promises made by various leaders during their campaign and after they won election these promises were not fulfilled so I observed that people who came out to vote who had their PVC’s they were demanding to be paid before casting their vote, that is what some areas witnessed in the 2015 general election and 2019 general election. (Personal Communication, 26 April, 2022).

In another interview with Robertson Jack, Special Adviser on Media to the Major of Port Harcourt while responding to the same question revealed thus:

The challenges were logistics, the inability to reach some of the areas on time, the rural areas, challenges of network for the voting machine and then security challenges, so for me I think that it’s a good thing that the National Assembly has passed the bill and the President has consented for electronic voting. The major challenge INEC had was the logistic and most importantly the challenges was the coalition center drama where you see people changing results at the coalition center, INEC staffs are like helpless, so I think that the challenges where the bureaucracy and the complexities coalition voting, the processes where too complex, so I think that the electronic transmission will cut most of these challenges that the INEC suffer (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2022).

The paper in tables above interrogated the hitches observed and suffered by the electorates while using these electronic measures. Out of the 385 questionnaire retrieved and validated, 64.9% agreed that there were hitches that the system suffered especially with the electronic device and policies implemented, 35.1% disagreed otherwise. This means that the respondents that were mainly voters witness some bottlenecks with the implementation of policies and application of the electronic devices.

The paper outside these measures suffered that were policies and measures to curb electoral malpractices and violence, the study was keen to know if there are factors that contributed to the challenges faced by the electoral body in implementing these measures. Table 4.4.2 revealed that out of the 385 questionnaire retrieved and validated, 16.1% pointed at electoral thugs, 26.0% pointed at the malfunctioning of card readers, 7.3% pointed at insufficient security, 11.7% pointed at network services, 15.1% pointed at transportation, 9.1% pointed at insufficient man power while 6.0% and 8.8% pointed at none of them and all of them respectively. This revealed that the major factor that impeded the measures implemented was malfunctioning of the devices used as well as poor network.

In summary, the policies and instruments applied in managing the 2015 General Election in Rivers State suffered from overwhelming security issues, logistics, electronic malfunctioning, ballot box snatching, political parties contestation that disrupt the process, INEC staff compromise, network inadequacies and most importantly the backdrop of the numbers of registered voters as against the number of electorates that had voter's card.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, the Independent National Electoral Commission is an institution of government created by statute to conduct election in Nigeria. Towards achieving this

function, the body is saddled with the responsibility of regulating political parties, orientating on the methodology for elections, sanctioning and handing over to the Police for prosecution electoral offenders and also declaring the winners of elections as well as issuing certificate of return to the elected candidates. The powers and function bestowed on the INEC is very potent, given the key role of election as a cardinal pillar of democracy.

Bases on it mandate, it is hereby advocated that INEC should start preparing Nigerian for electronic voting and the use of robotics in places of humans during elections. The new Electoral Act of 2022 has paved new windows for the Commission to manage elections in Nigeria. One of the newly introduced clauses is Clause 47 that provides legal backings for smart card readers and any other voter accreditation technology that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deploys. Section 50 of the Act gives the Commission the right to determine how elections result would be transmitted and how election should be conduct either manually or technologically. This is clear that the nation has seen the impact of the smart card readers and other technological measures which was almost close to perfection in ensuring voter's accreditation but the obvious is that Nigeria needs more than voter's accreditation technologies.

The country needs to look at getting ready for technologies such as ATM machines that would allow voters to vote anywhere as long as they have their voter's card and can do so by just slotting their cards and vote with no stress of accreditation as these machines does the accreditation immediately with face recognition and as well send the total votes to the Commission's database. Bullet proof robotics could also be enforced as election observers to reduced human bias while the commission increases security to voters around the nations.

E-voting has been instituted in many countries around the world especially developed nations which has continued to prove a sustainable means to free and fair elections as well as the

most credible democracy. Africa is yet to put it in full swing application and this is a continent that has the most structural issues and electoral malpractices. Hence, a country like Nigeria that has continued to search for free and fair election can do this by eliminating the caprices of human interference with the sacred means of voting by introducing E-voting to the citizens by has a task of educating the citizens of the measures, procedures and conditions it would require because the number of illiteracy is high and proper knowledge of how use this technologies would rest on the electoral body. E-voting is definitely a veritable means of eliminating the challenges that the electioneering suffers in the 2015 General Election in Rivers State and Nigeria at large even in subsequent elections.

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