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Electoral Integrity and Democratic Resilience in Nigeria: Election Management, Political Competition and Public Confidence.

Hassan Kachallah Inuwa [1]* and Fatima Mohammed Nuhu [1]

[1]Department of Political Science, Peace Studies, Conflict and Resolution, Faculty of Social and Management Science, Kashim Ibrahim University, Bornu, Nigeria; +234808034437971; inuwahassan9@gmail.com

[1]Department of Political Science, Peace Studies, Conflict and Resolution, Faculty of Social and Management Science, Kashim Ibrahim University, Bornu, Nigeria; +2348067408372; mohammedfatimanuhu@gmail.com

* Correspondence: inuwahassan9@gmail.com

Abstract

Electoral integrity is central to democratic resilience because credible elections provide citizens with meaningful opportunities to choose leaders and hold governments accountable. In Nigeria, recurring concerns over electoral administration, political competition, electoral violence, vote-buying, misinformation and declining public confidence continue to challenge democratic consolidation. This article examines the relationship between election management, political competition and public confidence in Nigeria's democratic process. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis and secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed literature, academic books, institutional reports, electoral documents and election observation materials, with particular attention to the 2019 and 2023 general elections. The data were purposively selected and subjected to thematic analysis guided by the Electoral Integrity Perspective and Democratic Resilience Theory. The analysis focuses on administration, procedural fairness, transparency, credibility, institutional impartiality and compliance with electoral rules, alongside institutional capacity, management of electoral disputes, resistance to political pressure, peaceful competition and public confidence. Evidence was triangulated across academic, institutional and independent sources to enhance analytical credibility. The findings indicate that institutional reforms, particularly technological innovations and improvements in electoral procedures, have strengthened aspects of election administration but have not eliminated concerns regarding transparency, electoral violence, political interference and implementation gaps. The study further finds that intense political competition can undermine electoral integrity when political actors prioritize electoral victory over democratic rules. The article concludes that strengthening electoral integrity requires sustained institutional independence, transparent procedures, accountable political competition and greater public confidence in electoral institutions.

Keywords: Electoral Integrity, Democratic Resilience, Election Management, Political Competition, Public Confidence.

Introduction

Elections constitute one of the principal mechanisms through which citizens participate in democratic governance. Beyond determining who occupies political office, credible elections provide opportunities for political accountability, peaceful competition and the legitimate transfer of power. Electoral integrity is therefore fundamental to democratic stability because elections perceived as unfair can weaken institutional legitimacy and public confidence (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2011).

Across Africa, the expansion of multiparty elections has strengthened the formal foundations of representative government, yet electoral processes remain uneven. Electoral malpractice, violence, manipulation of electoral institutions, vote-buying and disputed results continue to affect perceptions of democratic governance (Cheeseman, 2015; Lindberg, 2006). Regular elections do not automatically guarantee democratic resilience; rather, resilience depends partly on the capacity of electoral institutions to withstand political pressure, manage disputes and maintain public confidence during periods of intense political competition.

Nigeria provides an important context for examining these challenges. Since the restoration of civilian rule in 1999, elections have become a regular feature of political succession, but successive electoral cycles have been accompanied by concerns about electoral violence, logistical failures, manipulation, vote-buying, misinformation and disputed results. These challenges have raised persistent questions about the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to administer elections impartially and effectively and about the willingness of political actors to comply with electoral rules and accept outcomes.

Electoral reforms have nevertheless produced important institutional changes. The introduction and expansion of technological mechanisms, including the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic transmission of results, were intended to improve accreditation, reduce manipulation and strengthen transparency. However, technological reforms alone cannot resolve broader problems arising from political competition, institutional weakness and declining public trust. As Norris (2014) observes, electoral integrity encompasses the entire electoral cycle rather than election-day procedures alone. Electoral reforms must therefore be assessed within the wider institutional and political environment in which elections occur.

Political competition is another critical dimension of electoral integrity. While competitive elections are essential to democracy, competition can become destabilizing when political actors employ violence, financial inducements or misinformation to influence voters. Such conditions can place electoral institutions under pressure and increase citizens' scepticism about the fairness and credibility of elections (Schedler,

2002). The quality of political competition is consequently closely connected to the capacity of electoral institutions to operate independently and enforce established rules.

Public confidence is equally important to electoral legitimacy. Citizens are more likely to accept electoral outcomes when they believe that electoral institutions operate impartially, votes are accurately counted and political competition follows established rules. Conversely, perceptions of manipulation, institutional bias or unequal treatment can weaken confidence even where formal procedures have been followed (Norris, 2014). Public confidence is therefore both an outcome of electoral administration and an important condition for democratic resilience.

The central argument of this article is that electoral integrity in Nigeria emerges from the interaction of effective election management, responsible political competition, institutional independence and public confidence. It is understood as a multidimensional process involving administration, procedural fairness, transparency, institutional impartiality, credibility and compliance with electoral rules. Institutional reforms can strengthen electoral administration, but their democratic impact depends on the broader political environment and on whether citizens and political actors regard electoral institutions and outcomes as credible and legitimate.

Despite the growing literature on electoral governance, an analytical gap remains in explaining how election management, political competition and public confidence interact as connected dimensions of electoral integrity and how their interaction relates to democratic resilience in Nigeria. Existing scholarship has examined electoral administration, malpractice, political competition and public trust extensively, but these dimensions are often treated separately. Less attention has been given to how institutional performance, political behaviour and citizen confidence jointly shape electoral credibility and the capacity of democratic institutions to withstand electoral pressures, disputes and declining public confidence. This study addresses this gap through an integrated analytical framework.

The study examines the relationship between electoral integrity and democratic resilience in Nigeria, focusing on election management, political competition and public confidence. It considers how the effectiveness and perceived impartiality of electoral institutions, the conduct of political actors and citizens' confidence in electoral institutions and outcomes interact to shape electoral credibility and democratic resilience. The study contributes empirically by bringing these dimensions together in an integrated assessment of Nigeria's electoral experience; theoretically by connecting the Electoral Integrity Perspective with the Democratic Resilience Perspective; and conceptually by treating election management, political competition and public confidence as interconnected dimensions of electoral integrity.

The study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis and secondary data. Evidence is drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, institutional reports, electoral documents, election observation reports and credible studies on elections and democratic governance in Nigeria and Africa. Sources are purposively selected according to their relevance to election management, institutional independence, political competition, electoral malpractice, public confidence and democratic resilience, with particular attention to Nigeria's 2019 and 2023 general elections and relevant comparative African evidence.

The analysis employs thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, relationships and institutional responses across the selected evidence. The framework is derived from the two theoretical perspectives and operationalized through the principal dimensions of electoral integrity and democratic resilience. Evidence is organized around election management, political competition and public confidence and examined in relation to administration, procedural fairness, transparency, credibility, institutional impartiality and compliance with electoral rules. The analysis also considers institutional capacity and adaptability, management of electoral disputes, resistance to political pressure, peaceful political competition and the maintenance of public confidence. Evidence is triangulated across academic, institutional and independent sources to enhance analytical credibility. The study does not treat the framework as a statistical causal model; rather, the theoretical concepts are used to interpret patterns and relationships within Nigeria's electoral experience. This approach enables the study to examine electoral integrity beyond election-day administration and assess how institutional, political and public-confidence conditions shape democratic resilience.

Littérature Review

Electoral integrity refers to the extent to which elections conform to democratic standards throughout the electoral cycle, including electoral laws, voter registration, campaigning, voting, counting, result declaration and dispute resolution (Norris, 2014; Norris et al., 2015). This perspective moves analysis beyond election-day malpractice by emphasizing the quality and fairness of the entire electoral process. Birch (2011) similarly argues that electoral malpractice can weaken democratic legitimacy because citizens assess both electoral outcomes and the procedures through which they are produced. Where elections are perceived as credible, citizens are more likely to accept political outcomes, while perceptions of manipulation can weaken institutional legitimacy and encourage political contestation outside established democratic channels (Birch, 2011; Norris, 2014). International IDEA (2023) further emphasizes that electoral integrity faces institutional, political, technological and security-related risks that can affect democratic stability.

Across Africa, the expansion of multiparty elections has strengthened the formal foundations of representative government, but electoral processes remain uneven.

Problems relating to electoral administration, political competition, institutional accountability and electoral violence remain significant (Cheeseman, 2015; Lindberg, 2006). Thus, the existence of competitive elections does not necessarily guarantee electoral credibility or democratic resilience.

Election management bodies (EMBs) play a central role in maintaining electoral integrity through voter registration, candidate nomination, logistics, voter education, polling, counting and result declaration (International IDEA, 2014; Norris, 2014). Their effectiveness and perceived neutrality can significantly influence public confidence in electoral outcomes. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has introduced legal, administrative and technological reforms intended to improve electoral credibility. The Electoral Act 2022 strengthened the legal framework for election administration and provided a basis for wider use of technological mechanisms in voter accreditation and results management. These reforms were intended to improve transparency, strengthen INEC's operational arrangements and expand public access to electoral information (International IDEA, 2023).

However, technological innovation does not automatically guarantee electoral integrity. Its effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, implementation, transparency and public understanding. The 2023 Nigerian elections demonstrated that technological reforms could coexist with operational difficulties and declining public confidence (International IDEA, 2023). Electoral management therefore requires technical competence, institutional independence, transparency and effective communication (Norris, 2014; International IDEA, 2023).

Public perceptions of institutional neutrality are particularly important. Afrobarometer data indicate that Nigerians continue to support elections as a means of selecting political leaders, but confidence in INEC has remained comparatively low. In 2023, only 23% of Nigerians reported trusting INEC somewhat or a lot, while 78% expressed little or no trust in the institution (Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023). This gap between support for elections and trust in the institution responsible for administering them highlights the importance of institutional credibility in democratic governance.

Political competition is fundamental to democracy because citizens require meaningful alternatives through which they can choose and replace political leaders (Dahl, 1971; Lindberg, 2006). Competitive elections can promote accountability, but competition can also undermine electoral integrity when political actors prioritize victory over democratic rules. Schedler (2002) observes that elections may retain formal democratic characteristics while political actors manipulate competition through restrictions, intimidation and other forms of unfair advantage. In African contexts, the intensity of competition is also reinforced by the political and economic benefits associated with control of state power (Cheeseman, 2015).

In Nigeria, electoral competition has frequently been associated with vote-buying, intimidation, patronage and electoral violence. Afrobarometer evidence shows strong support for multiparty competition, with 69% indicating that multiple political parties are necessary to provide meaningful choices, while about one-third of respondents reported fear of intimidation or violence during the 2019 election (Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023). Electoral integrity therefore cannot be secured through election-management reforms alone. Political parties and candidates must respect electoral rules, accept legitimate competition and refrain from practices that restrict citizens' political choices (Schedler, 2002; Cheeseman, 2015).

Electoral violence remains a major threat because it can intimidate voters, restrict participation and undermine confidence in electoral institutions (Bekoe, 2012; Höglund, 2009). Vote-buying similarly transforms political participation into an exchange of material benefits and can shift competition away from policy preferences and political programmes toward access to financial and state resources (Bratton, 2008; Cheeseman, 2015). Political manipulation also extends into the information environment. Although digital platforms have expanded political communication and citizen engagement, misinformation and disinformation can influence perceptions of candidates, electoral institutions and results and intensify political polarization (Persily, 2017; Tucker et al., 2017).

Nigeria's electoral environment illustrates the interaction of these challenges. International IDEA reports significant security concerns during the 2023 electoral cycle, including attacks against electoral infrastructure, while the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute reported significant concerns regarding electoral violence (International IDEA, 2023; IRI & NDI, 2023). These developments demonstrate that electoral integrity depends not only on administrative arrangements but also on the wider security and political environment.

Public confidence is an important component of electoral legitimacy because citizens must regard electoral institutions and procedures as sufficiently credible to accept electoral outcomes. Norris (2014) argues that perceptions of electoral fairness influence trust in democratic institutions and willingness to accept results, while Birch (2011) emphasizes that perceptions of electoral malpractice can damage political legitimacy even where formal procedures exist.

Nigeria illustrates the tension between citizens' commitment to elections and doubts about electoral institutions. Afrobarometer reported that 71% of Nigerians considered elections the best method for choosing political leaders, while only 23% expressed substantial trust in INEC (Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023). More recent Afrobarometer evidence across 39 African countries similarly found that 75% supported fair, open and honest elections, while only 39% expressed substantial trust in their national electoral

commissions. Nigeria remained among the countries with particularly low levels of trust, at 23% (Akinocho, 2024). These findings suggest that citizens may support democratic elections while questioning the capacity of electoral institutions to deliver credible outcomes.

Public confidence is therefore not simply a consequence of election administration but also an important element of electoral resilience. When citizens trust electoral institutions, disputes are more likely to remain within institutional channels; when confidence declines, disputed outcomes may contribute to protests, political polarization and broader challenges to democratic legitimacy (Norris, 2014; International IDEA, 2023).

Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic institutions and political actors to withstand political pressures, crises and disruptions while preserving democratic rules and practices. It includes institutional adaptability, accountability, peaceful political competition and the capacity to manage political conflict without abandoning constitutional procedures (International IDEA, 2023). Electoral integrity contributes to democratic resilience because credible elections provide legitimate mechanisms for political competition, leadership replacement and peaceful political succession. Conversely, perceived manipulation or unfairness can encourage political actors to challenge institutional outcomes and reduce citizens' willingness to trust democratic mechanisms (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2011).

The Nigerian experience demonstrates this relationship. Although Nigeria has maintained electoral democracy since 1999, persistent concerns regarding electoral credibility, political violence, institutional trust and electoral malpractice continue to place pressure on democratic institutions (Cheeseman, 2015; Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023). At the same time, continued public preference for elections and multiparty competition indicates that electoral dissatisfaction should not automatically be interpreted as rejection of democracy (Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023).

The literature therefore suggests that electoral integrity and democratic resilience are mutually reinforcing. Strong electoral institutions can enhance public confidence and facilitate peaceful political competition, while public trust and responsible political behaviour can strengthen institutional resilience. Sustainable democratic resilience consequently requires more than periodic elections; it requires credible electoral administration, accountable political competition, institutional independence and public confidence (Norris, 2014; International IDEA, 2023).

Conceptual Clarification

Electoral integrity refers to the extent to which electoral processes conform to democratic principles, legal provisions and standards of fairness, transparency, accountability and procedural consistency throughout the electoral cycle. It extends beyond election-day voting to include voter registration, electoral administration, campaigning, voting, counting, result declaration and dispute resolution (Norris, 2014). In this study, electoral integrity is examined through the quality and credibility of electoral administration, adherence to electoral rules, procedural transparency, fairness to political actors and voters, and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

Election management refers to the institutional, administrative and operational arrangements through which elections are planned and implemented. It includes voter registration, recruitment and training of electoral personnel, logistics, voter accreditation, polling, counting, result collation and electoral technologies. The study focuses particularly on administrative effectiveness, institutional autonomy, transparency, accountability and technological capacity within Nigeria's electoral management system.

Political competition denotes the contest among political parties, candidates and interests for electoral support and political office. While competitive elections provide meaningful choices and promote accountability, competition can also become destructive when it involves electoral violence, vote-buying, intimidation or manipulation. The study therefore distinguishes between rule-based political competition and practices that undermine electoral fairness and public trust.

Public confidence refers to citizens' perceptions that electoral institutions and processes are credible, impartial, transparent and capable of producing legitimate outcomes. It reflects trust in electoral institutions, perceptions of fairness and acceptance of election results. Declining confidence can discourage participation, weaken acceptance of electoral outcomes and raise broader concerns about democratic legitimacy.

Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic institutions, political actors and citizens to withstand political pressures, institutional weaknesses and crises while maintaining democratic procedures, accountability, pluralism and peaceful competition. In this study, electoral integrity is treated as an important foundation of democratic resilience because credible and rule-based elections can strengthen institutional legitimacy, facilitate peaceful political competition and reinforce public confidence. Democratic resilience is therefore examined through the capacity to manage electoral disputes, political pressures, institutional weaknesses and declining confidence while preserving democratic procedures.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Electoral Integrity Perspective, complemented by the Democratic Resilience Perspective. The Electoral Integrity Perspective provides criteria

for assessing electoral quality, while the Democratic Resilience Perspective examines how democratic institutions and political actors respond to electoral pressures, disputes and declining confidence. Their combined application connects election management, political competition and public confidence to the broader question of democratic resilience.

The Electoral Integrity Perspective, strongly associated with Pippa Norris, argues that elections should be assessed according to democratic standards across the entire electoral cycle rather than only on election day (Norris, 2014). In this study, its principal dimensions are electoral administration, procedural fairness, transparency, credibility, institutional impartiality and compliance with electoral rules. These are examined through evidence concerning voter registration, logistics, accreditation, polling, counting, results management, dispute resolution, technological reforms and the perceived neutrality of electoral institutions.

Applied to Nigeria, the perspective examines whether administrative reforms and practices improve electoral credibility and whether institutional weaknesses undermine confidence. BVAS and electronic results-management mechanisms are therefore considered not merely as technologies but in relation to transparency, procedural reliability and public perceptions of credibility. The perspective also recognizes that electoral integrity may be weakened when political parties and candidates employ intimidation, vote-buying or other practices that violate electoral rules.

Major Findings

The findings demonstrate that electoral integrity in Nigeria is a multidimensional institutional and political process rather than a product of election-day administration or technological innovation alone. Election management, institutional independence, political competition, electoral security, transparency, public confidence and the digital information environment interact in shaping the credibility of elections. This finding supports Norris (2014), who conceptualizes electoral integrity across the entire electoral cycle rather than restricting assessment to voting day. It also reinforces Birch's (2011) argument that the quality of electoral processes is closely connected to the institutional and political conditions under which elections are conducted. The Nigerian experience therefore suggests that improvements in individual aspects of election administration may have limited effects when broader institutional and political weaknesses remain unresolved.

The findings on election management show that technological reforms, particularly the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic result-management mechanisms, have strengthened some aspects of accreditation and administrative transparency. However, these improvements have existed alongside

logistical difficulties, insecurity, inadequate technical capacity and disputes over the credibility of electoral processes. This finding is consistent with the broader literature which cautions against treating electoral technology as an automatic solution to institutional problems. As Persily (2017) and Tucker et al. (2017) demonstrate in relation to contemporary electoral and information environments, technology can improve electoral processes but can also generate new challenges when institutional capacity and public understanding are inadequate. In Nigeria, therefore, the effectiveness of technology depends on reliable infrastructure, competent personnel, transparent implementation and public confidence in the institutions deploying it.

The findings further indicate that institutional independence remains central to electoral credibility. Although electoral institutions may possess formal legal autonomy, the practical meaning of independence depends on professional conduct, adequate resources, impartial decision-making and consistent application of electoral rules. Perceptions of political interference or selective implementation can weaken confidence even where formal institutional arrangements remain intact. This finding supports Cheeseman's (2015) broader observation that the quality of democratic institutions depends not only on formal rules but also on how political actors and institutions operate within those rules. It also reinforces Lindberg's (2006) argument that the institutional quality of elections has important implications for democratic development. In the Nigerian context, strengthening institutional independence therefore requires more than legal provisions; it requires conditions that enable electoral institutions to exercise their responsibilities consistently and credibly.

Political competition constitutes another important dimension of the findings. Elections can strengthen democracy when parties and candidates compete within established rules and respect political rights, but competition can become destabilising when political actors employ vote-buying, intimidation, violence or manipulation. This finding is consistent with Dahl's (1971) emphasis on meaningful political competition and participation as essential elements of democratic government. It also reflects Höglund's (2009) observation that electoral competition can become associated with violence where political stakes are high and institutional safeguards are weak. The Nigerian experience therefore demonstrates that competitive elections do not automatically produce democratic outcomes. The quality of competition matters because political behaviour can either reinforce electoral integrity or place additional pressure on electoral institutions.

The findings on transparency and accountability similarly demonstrate that electoral credibility depends on the ability of citizens and political actors to understand and verify electoral procedures and outcomes. Accessible procedures, transparent result management and credible mechanisms for resolving disputes can reduce uncertainty and improve acceptance of electoral outcomes. Conversely, limited transparency or contested dispute-resolution processes can sustain perceptions of manipulation. This is consistent

with Schedler's (2002) emphasis on the institutional conditions required to make electoral competition meaningful and credible. It also corresponds with International IDEA (2014, 2023), which places institutional accountability, electoral integrity and citizen confidence within the broader framework of democratic governance. Transparency should therefore be understood not simply as disclosure of information but as a mechanism through which electoral institutions demonstrate procedural credibility.

Public confidence emerges from the findings as both an outcome of electoral integrity and an important condition for democratic resilience. The evidence that 71% of Nigerians regard elections as the best method for choosing political leaders, while only 23% express substantial trust in INEC, illustrates the distinction between support for elections as a democratic principle and confidence in the institutions responsible for administering them (Mbaegbu & Amoah Twum, 2023). This distinction is particularly important. Citizens may continue to support democracy and elections while simultaneously questioning the credibility of electoral institutions. Such a situation creates a form of democratic vulnerability in which formal commitment to elections remains strong but institutional legitimacy is weakened. The finding is also consistent with Norris et al. (2015), who emphasise the importance of electoral performance and perceptions of electoral legitimacy in sustaining democratic confidence.

Electoral security represents another important element of electoral integrity. The findings indicate that intimidation, threats, violence and disruption can restrict participation, influence political behaviour and undermine citizens' confidence in electoral institutions. This supports Bekoe's (2012) observation concerning the relationship between electoral processes and political violence in Africa. Security should therefore not be treated as an external issue separate from electoral administration. Where voters, candidates, election officials or observers cannot participate freely and safely, the fairness and credibility of the electoral process are directly affected. Electoral security consequently forms part of the institutional conditions necessary for meaningful participation and democratic competition.

The digital information environment has also become increasingly significant to electoral integrity. Misinformation, disinformation and politically manipulated information can influence citizens' perceptions of electoral institutions and results, deepen political polarisation and complicate the management of electoral disputes. The findings therefore extend the conventional understanding of electoral integrity beyond physical administration to include the information environment in which elections are contested and interpreted. This is consistent with Tucker et al. (2017), who highlight the importance of digital communication and political information in contemporary democratic processes. Strengthening electoral resilience consequently requires not only reliable electoral administration but also credible institutional communication and effective mechanisms

for responding to misleading information without undermining legitimate political expression.

The interaction among these findings provides the clearest connection between electoral integrity and democratic resilience. The Electoral Integrity Perspective helps explain whether elections are administered according to standards of fairness, transparency, credibility and procedural consistency (Norris, 2014). The Democratic Resilience Perspective, in turn, helps explain how institutions and political actors respond when electoral systems encounter disputes, political pressure, insecurity, misinformation, institutional weakness or declining public confidence. The findings suggest that credible electoral institutions can reduce the intensity of these pressures by providing legitimate procedures for participation, accountability and dispute resolution. Conversely, weak institutions and low public confidence can amplify electoral disputes and make democratic institutions more vulnerable to political pressure.

The findings therefore demonstrate the complementarity of the two theoretical perspectives rather than treating them as competing explanations. Electoral integrity provides the criteria for assessing the quality of the electoral process, while democratic resilience provides a broader framework for understanding the capacity of institutions and political actors to manage electoral stress without abandoning democratic procedures. This relationship is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where electoral reforms have produced important institutional and technological changes but have not eliminated concerns relating to political competition, institutional independence, electoral security and public confidence.

Overall, the discussion shows that Nigeria's electoral challenges cannot be adequately addressed through isolated technological or administrative reforms. The evidence points instead to the need for an integrated approach in which effective election management, institutional independence, transparent procedures, responsible political competition, electoral security and public confidence reinforce one another. The central implication is that electoral integrity is both an institutional achievement and an ongoing democratic process. Where institutions are capable, impartial and transparent, political actors respect electoral rules, and citizens have confidence in electoral procedures, elections are more capable of contributing to democratic resilience. Where these conditions are weak, electoral disputes and declining confidence can become sources of democratic vulnerability.

Conclusion.

Electoral integrity is central to the capacity of democratic systems to manage political competition, sustain institutional legitimacy and withstand periods of political pressure. The findings of this study indicate that the quality of Nigeria’s electoral democracy

cannot be assessed solely through election-day administration or the deployment of electoral technology. Rather, electoral credibility is shaped by the combined performance of election management, fairness and transparency, political competition, participation, compliance with electoral rules, institutional independence and public confidence. Weaknesses in any of these areas can generate disputes, reduce trust in electoral institutions and create pressures that challenge democratic stability.

The study further shows that election management, political competition and public confidence are interconnected dimensions of electoral integrity. Effective administration, transparent procedures and consistent application of electoral rules can strengthen confidence and reduce opportunities for electoral disputes, while intense or poorly regulated political competition can place pressure on electoral institutions and weaken public trust. The findings also demonstrate the analytical complementarity of the Electoral Integrity Perspective and the Democratic Resilience Perspective. The Electoral Integrity Perspective provides a basis for assessing the quality, fairness and credibility of electoral processes, while the Democratic Resilience Perspective explains how democratic institutions and political actors respond to electoral disputes, political pressure, institutional weaknesses and declining public confidence without abandoning democratic procedures.

The findings have important implications for electoral reform in Nigeria. Reform should extend beyond technological improvements and isolated administrative interventions to address the broader institutional and political conditions that shape electoral credibility. Strengthening the independence and capacity of election-management institutions, improving transparency and procedural compliance, promoting responsible political competition, strengthening mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes and rebuilding public confidence are mutually reinforcing requirements. The resilience of Nigeria's democracy therefore depends not only on conducting elections but also on ensuring that electoral institutions are sufficiently credible, independent and accountable to withstand political pressures and retain public legitimacy.

Ultimately, credible elections require an electoral environment in which administrative effectiveness, institutional independence, political responsibility and citizen confidence reinforce one another. Sustaining these conditions is essential for transforming elections from periodic contests for political power into trusted mechanisms of democratic governance. Electoral integrity should therefore be understood not as a single electoral outcome but as an ongoing institutional process through which democratic legitimacy and resilience are continuously maintained.

Recommendations

Nigeria should strengthen the institutional independence, professional capacity and operational effectiveness of electoral institutions. The findings indicate that the credibility of elections depends not only on administrative procedures but also on the ability of electoral institutions to operate independently, transparently and consistently under political pressure. Adequate and predictable funding should therefore be provided, while procurement, voter registration, accreditation, voting, counting and result management should be subject to clear and transparent procedures. The use of electoral technology should be supported by adequate infrastructure, staff capacity, public education and institutional safeguards to ensure that technological interventions enhance rather than undermine electoral transparency and public confidence.

Political parties and candidates should strengthen their commitment to responsible and rule-based political competition. The findings suggest that political pressure, electoral malpractice and weak compliance with electoral rules can undermine both electoral integrity and democratic resilience. Parties and candidates should therefore reject electoral violence, vote-buying, intimidation, manipulation and deliberate misinformation. Internal party democracy should also be strengthened to improve candidate selection, political accountability and representation. Electoral laws should be applied consistently, with credible and timely sanctions for violations irrespective of the status or political affiliation of offenders.

Nigeria should strengthen mechanisms for the prevention, investigation and resolution of electoral disputes and offences. Electoral justice institutions should be sufficiently independent, accessible and timely to provide credible remedies for electoral grievances. Effective dispute resolution is particularly important for democratic resilience because unresolved electoral disputes can intensify political tensions, weaken institutional legitimacy and reduce public confidence. Strengthening coordination among electoral institutions, law-enforcement agencies, judicial bodies, civil society organizations and other relevant actors would improve the capacity of the democratic system to manage electoral disagreements within established constitutional and legal procedures.

Civil society organizations and the media should be supported to contribute more effectively to voter education, electoral observation, public accountability and the dissemination of accurate electoral information. Independent monitoring and fact-based reporting can improve transparency and help counter misinformation, particularly where public understanding of electoral procedures and results management is limited. Such interventions should remain non-partisan and focused on strengthening citizens' capacity to participate meaningfully in the electoral process.

Academically, the study contributes by bringing electoral integrity and democratic resilience into a single analytical framework for examining the Nigerian electoral experience. The Electoral Integrity Perspective explains the quality of electoral

administration, procedural fairness, transparency, credibility and compliance, while the Democratic Resilience Perspective explains how institutions and political actors respond to electoral pressures, disputes and declining confidence. The study therefore extends the discussion beyond whether elections are conducted properly to how the quality and legitimacy of electoral processes affect the capacity of democratic institutions to withstand political stress. The framework may also provide a basis for comparative research on electoral governance and democratic resilience in other African contexts.

Finally, electoral institutions should institutionalize sustained engagement with citizens before, during and after elections. Clear and timely communication on voter registration, accreditation, voting procedures, results management and complaint mechanisms can reduce uncertainty, misinformation and distrust. Public confidence should therefore be treated as an important outcome of electoral governance rather than merely as a consequence of election results. Building electoral integrity in Nigeria requires continuous institutional improvement, political accountability and citizen engagement beyond election periods. These measures would strengthen the capacity of democratic institutions to manage electoral pressures, resolve disputes peacefully and sustain public confidence in democratic processes.

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