



Research Article

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Rebranding the Electoral Process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2019): Constraints and Prospects of the Independent National Electoral Commission

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Abstract

Nigeria continued to dominate both national and international political discourse as a model of democracy for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa immediately after the successful conduct of the 2015 general elections that saw for the first time peaceful conduct of elections and transition from one civilian administration to the other and which brought the opposition party to power without violence or bloodshed. However, following the conclusion and outcome of the 2019 general elections, the perception of Nigeria has changed from being a beacon of hope for democratic Africa to being an amazement to Political scholars and commentators who find it difficult to unravel how she failed to consolidate the gains of the 2015 general elections and to emerge stronger as a democratic nation. This study leverages the governance approach, and explores the need to rebrand the electoral process for enhanced democratic governance in Nigeria. It examines the need for a healthy synergy between the electorate, the political class, political parties and the institutions of government for inclusive nation building. It adopts both the qualitative and quantitative methods of research in its exploration between 1999 and 2019. It takes a critical look at what has become characterized as Nigeria's 'brand of politics'- which is essentially corrupt, violent, and manipulative of the wishes of the people. The work argues that except the electoral process is rebranded in line with acceptable international best practices of democratic culture where the will of the people is seen to prevail, political apathy may persist.

Keywords: Rebranding, Nigeria, Electoral process, political apathy, corruption

1. Introduction

In recent times, Nigeria continues to dominate both national and international political discourse as a model of democracy for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. This was based on the successful conduct and the outcome of the 2015 general elections that saw for the first time a peaceful conduct of elections and transition from one civilian administration to the other. The 2015 general elections was even more remarkable because, for the first time in the history of Nigeria, an opposition party was able to defeat an incumbent President, and political power was transferred from one civilian regime

to the other without any violence or bloodshed (Okeke, 2015). However, following the conclusion and outcome of the 2019 general elections, Nigeria's perception as a beacon of hope for democratic Africa has changed considerably as Political scholars and commentators are amazed how she failed to consolidate the gains of the 2015 general elections so as to emerge stronger as a democratic nation.

This study adopts the governance approach and employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis, in an attempt to interrogate some issues amongst which include: What were the major challenges to democratic governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019? To what extent did the management of the electoral process contribute to political apathy of Nigerians? What structures should be put in place in line with international standards to rebrand the electoral process for enhanced democratic governance in Nigeria? This study argues that rebranding the electoral process is more likely to bring about enhanced democratic governance in Nigeria.

2. Concept Clarification: Rebranding of the Electoral Process

Rebranding is essentially a change in the mindset or perception of a person or groups of people about the nature, structure or character of a thing (Schneider, 2004; Mensah, 2011). The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2012) uses a conventional definition that a brand is the name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. However, branding has in recent times been conceptualized beyond marketing and advertisements for products and services. Brands are used everywhere including in political analysis and not just as a way to sell a product anymore because the theory of branding has for instance, become a way for public figures to build an identity to communicate to the public (Scammell (2007; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2008; Dijke, 2013). Accordingly, brands, from products to politicians, are a major phenomenon of modern-day society and have become very important in sociological and cultural terms (Chandler & Owen, 2002; Marland, 2013).

Rebranding of the electoral process as used in this study therefore is to be understood to mean a process of effecting a change in the structure and character of the electoral process as well as the orientation and mindset of the various stakeholders in the electoral process through the adoption of internationally accepted best practices of democracy in order to enhance good governance. The major target of electoral rebranding efforts therefore is to restructure the modalities and character of elections, the mindset of the various stakeholders within the polity including the arms of government, the political parties, political class, the masses, the media, the Civil Society Organisations, the agencies of government (the military, the para-military, the police) the international donor agencies and the international community. The whole essence of rebranding the electoral process is therefore to change the negative perception of election management body and to increase the loyalty and patronage of the stakeholders especially the masses towards the process so as to contribute their quota to nation building (Worlu, 2010).

2.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Electoral process

Elections across the globe perform the key function of choosing representatives or leaders based on the choice of the electorates and therefore an important element of democratic governance (Boix and Stokes, 2003). Nkwede (2016) posits that the Electoral process is the method by which elections are conducted and persons are elected into public office. Reynolds, et al (2005) note that an electoral system must translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The above therefore underscores the centrality of the electoral process in democratic governance. Elekwa (2008) argues that the electoral process relates to the entire cycle ranging from the provision of voter education to the dissolution of the National Assembly. It refers to all the pre and post-election activities without which an election is meaningless. The process includes the registration of

political parties, review of voters' register, delineation of constituencies, resolution of electoral disputes, return of elected representatives, swearing elected representatives. The electoral process also includes the rules that guide the conduct of election, and important activities that make up an electoral process (EU Election Observation Mission, 2015).

The electoral process therefore is central to democratic governance. This implies that when these processes are rebranded by making them more credible and less cumbersome to the masses and other stakeholders by the electoral management bodies, the negative perceptions of the masses about the methods or procedures adopted in conducting elections will reduce (Ayo et al, 2015). Further, acceptance of the final outcome of elections which the masses had hitherto believed is not reflective of their mandate will be on the increase. The effect of this will be improved participation in the electoral process and the restoration of the confidence of the people in the sanctity and credibility of elections thereby reducing the incidences of vote buying and political apathy (Gberevbie, 2014; Agbu, 2016).

2.1.2 Governance Theory

The governance theory is prominent in the works of Rosenau, 1992, Archer (1994), Jessop (1995), Rhodes (1996), Stoker, 1998 and Ewalt, (2001).

Governance became a prominent policy tool in the early 1990s following the demise of the Cold War in 1989. Stoker (1998) has linked Governance to a call for a new way of governing by the key actors at the International Community, especially the donor agencies as a result of their dissatisfaction with the inefficiency and illegitimacy in resource allocation and utilisation by many sovereign nations most of whom are in the developing democracies. The inefficiency and illegitimacy have been linked with lack of inclusiveness of other critical stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation. Governance is therefore opposed to the old bureaucratic way of government and recognises the importance of collaboration of all the stakeholders in the polity including the private sector, the Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, and other sectors in service delivery of government (Archer, 1994; Ikeanyibe, 2016). It blurs the boundaries within and between public and other sectors – profit and non-profit (Ikeanyibe, Ogbonna & Okoye, 2017), and reconfigures the role of the public sector through citizen participation and network governance (Wu & He, 2009).

The governance paradigm therefore envisages that the people be involved in driving the process of governance as a collective action and not just a policy emanating from the government and its agencies. For instance the theory envisages collaboration between INEC and the people in institutionalizing free and fair election and not for them to be divorced or alienated from the whole process. However, as Massuh (1998) has evidently argued, the quality of participation of the masses in governance as envisaged by the governance theorists depends on the level of political, social and economic empowerment of the citizenry as well as the information available to them. The governance theory could be effective in addressing and inspiring unhindered participation in governance in developed democracies of USA and Europe with high level of literacy and social welfare where majority of the citizenry are actively engaged in governance in terms of policy formulation and implementation. However, in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria inclusive), where the level of literacy is low with poverty ravaging the greater percentage of the populace, governance theory will have limited applicability. Modern governance has assumed a lot of complexities and rationality both in terms of decision making and implementation. Accordingly only a well informed and educated citizenry can be trusted to play the active role in governance as expected of them under the governance paradigm (Gberevbie, et al, 2014 ;Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015). However, in spite of the limitations of the Governance theory, it still remains a more benevolent theory compared to the Elites theory in so far as it considers the needs and expectations of the masses in policy formulation and implementation, even though this is accomplished through their elected representatives.

2.1.3 *The Nigerian Electoral Process in the Fourth Republic*

Nigeria has for long been in constant search for effective electoral processes, as an integral part of its transition to democracy (Jega, December 2015). A long history of badly or poorly conducted elections has, until recently, created profound scepticism amongst ordinary Nigerians about the utility of electoral democracy (Jega, 2015). In Nigeria since independence in 1960 the electoral process has been bedeviled by a culture of electoral malpractices and violence. Since Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the superintending EMB has been the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC has conducted six elections viz 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. The mission of INEC is to serve as an independent and effective electoral management body committed to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections for sustainable democracy in Nigeria (INEC, 2014). Its presence has been established in the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, as well as the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria. Electoral processes in the developed democracies of the United States of America (USA) and Europe are not issues that revolve just around providing polling units and boxes where people can vote in an election. It is a process that offers the majority of the electorates the platform to determine through a transparent electoral process who governs them (Reynolds et al, 2005). Branding and rebranding of the electoral process in these nations have been elevated to an art where even such issues like voter education, voter perception of the candidates at election, Logos of Political parties and those of candidates during elections and the power to recall elected officials are issues considered serious and given due attention to within the electoral process (Arnon, 2008; Ditsch, K. (2012; Marland, 2013).

In the developed democracies, the electoral process ensures that the best candidates emerge through a transparent process irrespective of state of origin, religion or gender. The political classes in these nations recognise that democracy accommodates divergent opinions and oppositions, freedom of speech, and dignity of human lives. Accordingly, the electoral processes in many developed democracies have undergone various changes including the introduction of appropriate technologies to make voting an easy civic responsibility (Reynolds et al, 2005). Several countries like USA, UK, India, Brazil, Switzerland, and Estonia among others, have fully embraced e-voting system in the conduct of their elections (McCormack, 2016). The introduction of technology in electoral management has been predicated on some key advantages, including accuracy of the voting process by increasing the accuracy of ballot counting to ensure it reflects the will of the voters, as well as preventing some of the most prevalent electoral frauds in the emerging democracies like ballot box stuffing and snatching. In many of the advanced democracies, technology has helped to enhance speedy release of election results which invariably boosts the voters' confidence in the electoral process thereby reducing incidences of civil unrest and post-election violence.

3. **Methodology**

Between May 2018 and August 2019 this study took place. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design which involved the use of well structured in-depth interviews and questionnaire to collect data from the Independent National Electoral Commission, the elected members of the National Assembly and the Civil Society Organisations in order to make inferences in relation to the objective of this study which is to evaluate the role of INEC in the Fourth Republic, from 1999-2019 (Creswell, 2014). This study also used the field survey research design to generate both quantitative and qualitative data. The adoption of the qualitative and quantitative research methods was to complement each other. While the qualitative method proved useful in undertaking the appraisal and critical evaluation of the information gathered through secondary sources, the quantitative research was adopted in the systematic and empirical investigation of the variables generated from the literature review using statistical techniques in data analysis to show the relationships of the collected data in the study (Fink, 2012; Creswell, 2014)

The descriptive and analytical methods were adopted to determine the role of Independent

National Electoral Commission in democratic governance between 1999 and 2019. The descriptive methodology adopted in this study enabled the researcher to examine the areas of focus and to present the results as they were. It also enabled the researcher to capture the attitudes, actions, moods and opinions of the respondents at the time of data collection in relation to their roles within the time frame (Calmorin, 1995; Ojo, 2003; Benjamin, 2010).

The population of this research is 2,146 and comprised of all the currently 474 elected and serving members of the National Assembly (Senate, 109; and House of Representatives 365) and all the current staff of INEC National Headquarters in Abuja put at 1,672 staff (Top Management 35, Senior staff 618 and Junior staff 1,019) as at the time of this study. This population consists of the managers of democratic governance within the scope of this study. The justification for selecting this population was because they are constitutionally recognised to put in place laws to manage democratic governance which also includes the conduct of elections in Nigeria as contained in Chapter 2 Part II Section 4 (1-5) of the 1999 constitution (As Amended), Section 153 (f) 14 & 15 Third Schedule of the 1999 constitution and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended). The purpose was to find out how well they have performed their roles in managing the electoral processes, the major challenges they confront in doing this and what acceptable mechanisms can be put in place to rebrand the electoral process in order to enhance democratic governance. In addition, the population also included members of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Journalists, who were selected and interviewed on the same subject areas as the members of National Assembly and officials of INEC to benchmark their responses and offer dispassionate assessment of the role of INEC. This study aligns with the World Bank's definition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as not-for-profit, non-governmental institutions, covering a wide range of organisations from development NGOs and think tanks to trade unions, foundations, faith-based organisations, disabled persons organisations, community-based organisations, media (independent and non-profit), and business associations (World Bank, 2005, p.3).

In cases where primary data could not be got directly from the elected members of the National Assembly, some of their aides were consulted, with their permission. The Researcher also made use of some Research Assistants including the National Assembly staff members and Journalists assigned to the National Assembly who were better known to the members of the National Assembly to reach many of them. The Ethical approval certificate from the Covenant University was also very useful as this was presented on demand to convince the respondents that requested for same in order to further convince them that the questionnaire and interviews were purely for academic purposes. A questionnaire in five-Point Likert-style rating scale was employed in this study to collect the views of respondents from sections numbered A to D. The questionnaire aimed at articulating the insiders' point of view of members of National Assembly and officials of INEC as key participants and not as spectators in the democratic governance. Section A is the Demographics Section, which asks the participants for such information as their age, gender, religion, highest educational qualification, state of origin and of residence. Section B dwells on the role of Independent National Electoral Commission in enhancing democratic governance in Nigeria; Section C focused on the Constraints faced by the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission in advancing democratic governance; and Section D focused on the effects of the constraints faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission in their role of advancing democratic governance in Nigeria. The respondents were asked to tick any of the options on a 5 point Likert -style rating scale (0-4) they thought was appropriate to each question. In addition to the questionnaire, structured and unstructured interviews with members of the National Assembly (Senators and members of the House of Representatives), officials of INEC headquarters Abuja and the CSOs were conducted. The structured and unstructured interview involved a one-on-one interview aimed at getting meaningful information from the members of the National Assembly and top officials of INEC headquarters (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The interviews sought to get firsthand information on the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission in enhancing democratic governance, the challenges they face in achieving this objective and the effect of these constraints on governance in Nigeria. On

the other hand, the CSOs were interviewed because they represent the masses who are the direct beneficiaries or otherwise of the policies, programmes and laws of the National Assembly and INEC. They also presented alternative viewpoints that critically examined the positions and claims of the National Assembly and the Independent National Electoral Commission officials. This study adopted both content and faces validity to test the validity and reliability of the instrument.

The methods of data analyses for this study were adopted on the basis of the research instruments used: Structured questionnaire and Interview. For the structured questionnaire collected data was subjected to statistical analysis including descriptive and inferential statistics expressed in percentages, frequencies, tables, and graphs (where necessary) as well as simple Linear Regression analysis. The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22) was also used to analyse the data derived from the completed questionnaire administered to the respondents.

4. Findings

Result of the test of homogeneity of population variances using Levene’s test is presented in Table 1 below. The result reveals that in most cases the equality of variances assumption is satisfied with p-values greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) with the exception of age ($p = 0.021$, $p < 0.05$) and educational qualification for INEC score which do not satisfy this assumption.

Table 1: Levene’s test for the homogeneity of population variance between categories of the demographic variables of the respondents

Demographic variables	n	INEC	
		Test Statistic	P-value
Gender	360	2.29	0.131
Religion	360	0.812	0.369
Age	360	2.554	0.079
Educational qualification	360	2.693	0.069
Marital status	360	1.203	0.309
State of residence	360	NA	NA
Length of service	360	0.317	0.813

*significant at 5% ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2 below shows the result that there is no significant difference in rating of the role of the INEC in democratic process based on gender ($p = 0.780$, $p > 0.05$), age ($p = 0.336$, $p > 0.05$), religion ($p = 0.331$, $p > 0.05$), educational qualification ($p = 0.687$, $p > 0.05$), marital status ($p = 0.661$, $p > 0.05$), age ($p =$ state of residence ($p = 0.140$, $p > 0.05$) and length of service ($p = 0.290$, $p > 0.05$). Results also indicate that there is a significant difference in rating of the role of the INEC in democratic process between INEC and National Assembly staff ($p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$) with INEC staff having significant higher rating than National Assembly staff ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal- Wallis statistic showing differences in rating of the level of performance of the role of INEC in democratic process across the demographics of the respondents

Demographics Variables	Mann-Whitney U		Kruskall- Wallis test X^2	
	Mean Rank	Test Statistic P-value	Test statistics	p-value
Gender				
Male	181.71	15328.000 0.780	NA	NA
Female	178.71			
Age (years)				
18-34 years	172.28	NA NA 2.179	0.336	
35-49 years	178.98			
50 and above	199.04			

Demographics Variables	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U		Kruskall- Wallis test χ^2	
		Test Statistic	P-value	Test statistics	p-value
Religion					
Christianity	175.46	15273.00	0.331	NA	NA
Islam	185.71				
Educational qualification					
Secondary	198.00				
Tertiary	183.28	NA	NA	0.750	0.687
Postgraduate	176.48				
Marital status					
Single	143.63				
Married	185.55	NA	NA	0.661	0.084
Divorced	181.70				
Widowed	190.40				
State of residence					
Abuja	179.75				
Gombe	184.75	NA	NA	8.314	0.140
Lagos	55.00				
Nassarawa	235.06				
Niger	243.50				
Plateau	243.50				
Name of the organization					
INEC	193.16	10584.000	0.000	NA	NA
National Assembly	151.72				
Length of service with the organization					
1-4 years	178.64				
5-10 years	167.18	NA	NA	3.750	0.290
10-15 years	191.84				
Above 15 years	180.97				

*significant at 5% ($p < 0.05$)

The result of Binomial test displayed in Table 3 below shows that the proportion of respondents that do not support the statement that INEC has not satisfactorily performed its role of Election Management to improve the electoral process and democratic governance in Nigeria between 1999-2019 was significantly less than those that supported the statement ($p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$). This therefore means that INEC has contributed significantly to democratic governance in Nigeria.

Table 3: Binomial test result testing the significant role of INEC in Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Items	Affirmative (SA+A)		Not Affirmative (D+SD+UN)		p-value	Remarks
	f	P	F	P		
INEC has not satisfactorily performed its role of Election Management to improve the political process and good governance in Nigeria between 1999-2018.	148	0.41	212	0.59	0.001**	Significant

**significant at 1% ($p < 0.01$), f = frequency, P = proportion.

Table 4: Constraints of INEC in Rebranding the Electoral Process in Nigeria

	Statement (n = 360)	Support	Oppose	p-value
1.	Lack of trust in INEC as a neutral Umpire is a constraint of INEC in its role of improving Democratic governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019.	202 (56.00)	158 (44.0)	0.0001*
2.	INEC does not embark on adequate Voter education	225 (62.40)	135 (37.60)	0.0001*
3.	The role of INEC in controlling Political parties and their finances between 1999 and 2019 is weak	122 (34.00)	238 (66.00)	0.0001*

	Statement (n = 360)	Support	Oppose	p-value
4.	The role of INEC in institutionalizing internal party democracy in Political Parties between 1999 and 2019 is weak.	107 (29.60)	253 (70.40)	0.0001*
5.	Interference by the National Assembly in election matters like delays in the approval of the budget of INEC and fixing of election timetables have contributed to the poor performances of INEC	203 (56.40)	157 (43.60)	0.0497*
6.	INEC lacks well trained manpower to conduct free and fair elections	68 (18.80)	292 (81.20)	0.9696**
7.	There is Executive and Legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations	187 (52.00)	173 (48.00)	0.0001*
8.	There is Executive and Legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations	219 (60.80)	141 (39.20)	0.7415**
9.	INEC underperforms due to insecurity and violence during elections	261 (72.40)	99 (27.60)	0.0001*

*Difference is statistically significant (p < 0.05)

**Difference is not statistically significant (p > 0.05)

From table 4 above it could be seen that lack of trust in INEC as a neutral Umpire is one of the constraints of INEC in its role of improving democratic governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019. While 56% were in support, 44% opposed. 62.40% were in support that INEC does not embark on adequate Voter education, while 37.60% were opposed to this assertion. On the role of INEC in controlling Political parties and their finances between 1999 and 2019 is weak, 34% were in support while 66% were opposed to this. The role of INEC in institutionalizing internal party democracy in Political Parties between 1999 and 2019 was also tested. While 29.60% of the respondents considered this to be weak, 70.40% were opposed to the fact that it was weak. 56.40% supported the assertion that the interference by the National Assembly in election matters like delays in the approval of the budget of INEC and fixing of election timetables have contributed to the poor performances of INEC, 43.60 were opposed to this. The issue of qualified manpower was also tested in this study. While 18.80% were in support that INEC lacks well trained manpower to conduct free and fair elections, 81.20% were opposed to this. 60.80% of the respondents were of the opinion that constant Executive and Legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations was a major constraint of INEC while 39.20% were opposed to this. In relation to the issue of insecurity, 72.40% of the respondents supported the assertion that INEC underperforms due to insecurity and violence during elections, while 29.60% were opposed to this assumption.

5. Discussion of Findings

The Nigerian political process is perceived by many stakeholders as corrupt, violent, and manipulative of the desires of the masses to achieve selfish interests of the ruling class (Ayo, et al, 2015). In the survey carried out for this study, a total of 148 or 41.1% of the respondents agrees that INEC has not satisfactorily performed its role of Election Management to improve the electoral process and democratic governance in Nigeria from 1999-2019 while 212 or 59% are in disagreement. The reasons adduced by the respondents included:

5.1 Lack of trust in INEC as a neutral umpire

The study shows that lack of trust in INEC as a neutral electoral umpire is a constraint as 56% of the respondents showed that they lacked trust in INEC as a neutral umpire. Although 44% disagreed with this, however, given the increase in number of registered voters that never turned out to vote during elections, shows that part of the reason was their lack of trust that their votes would count. It can therefore be argued that this negative notion about INEC has been a major cause of violence during elections in Nigeria since 1999 to date. This study therefore agrees with earlier studies on electoral

violence as carried at by Asia (2001); Osaghae (2002); Gberevbie (2015); Edet (2015); Duruji et al (2015); and Agbu (2016) are united that the general account of Nigeria's post-independence electoral processes have always been characterized by violence.

This study shows that with both institutional support of the National Assembly and the resilience of Nigerians in embracing democracy much still needs to be done by INEC to convince both the Nigerian electorate and the international community that it was an impartial or neutral umpire with credibility and integrity to conduct future elections freely and fairly. This position was supported by the suspicious activities of INEC during the Ekiti and Osun governorship elections in July and September 2018, where the integrity and impartiality of INEC was brought to serious question in conducting credible elections in the run up to the February and March Presidential/National Assembly and Governorship/State Assembly elections. This position is further supported by the wave of corruption in INEC is a reflection of the unmitigated level of corruption in Nigeria among the ruling class where the desperation to win an election at all costs has been the key driver of this monumental corruption in INEC. INEC as an electoral body has acknowledged the rot in its rank and file, and has continued to intensify the issuance of threat of sack and criminal prosecution of those involved. However, in a chat the Researcher had with some officials of INEC, it could be seen that the reward system of INEC especially for the Adhoc staff and the operations staff who work round the clock during the election period is poor. The crisis-ridden and violent nature of the electoral process in Nigeria where many innocent lives including those observing the mandatory one year service under the National Youth Service Corps have died in the course of performing this civic duty and yet no meaningful compensation or reward was given to them for the supreme price paid makes the issue of insecurity very prominent, and compromise during elections attractive.

5.2 Lack of adequate voter education

The study shows that INEC does not embark on adequate voter education. 62.40% were in support that INEC does not embark on adequate Voter education, while 37.60% were opposed to this assertion. The issue of adequate voter education is key to any thriving electoral process. In many developed democracies, departments of Voter education and enlightenment are established to bridge the gap in the knowledge of electoral laws and civic responsibilities. However, in Nigeria since the advent of the 4th republic in 1999, voter education has not received the required boost in order to enlist active participation of the electorate including the youth and illiterate voters in active participation in elections, thereby reducing the incidence of voided or illegal votes. This is even more compelling in view of the various transformations and innovations of INEC including the introduction of technology like electronic card readers, permanent voter's card and other technology driven tools for the conduct and management of elections. However, a critical review of these voter education initiatives could evidently show that although the initiatives are well intentioned, however, not much result could be achieved by INEC since it decided to outsource the role of voter education to celebrities and donor agencies. Further, the concentration of the initiatives primarily towards those living in the urban areas and among the educated populace to the utter exclusion of those living in rural areas, has continued to undermine the benefits and overall effectiveness of the voter education projects as the incidence of voided or rejected votes especially among the rural electorates has continued to be on the rise, with the effect of disenfranchising several thousands of eligible voters. For instance during the 2015 Presidential elections in Kano state a total of 43,626 votes were voided or rejected (Vanguard Newspaper, March 30, 2015). In the 2014 governorship election in Ekiti state, about 10,118 votes were rejected. During the controversial Osun governorship elections held on September 22, 2018, over one million voters registered for the election with 48 political parties contesting for the election. The total votes recorded were 767,955, while rejected votes recorded were 47,843 and 720,112 were counted as legal votes (Dada, 2018). Accordingly, majority of the rejected votes during elections in Nigeria are from the rural areas where the means of communication is poor and the level of literacy is low (Dada, 2018). However, in order to address the issue of poor voter

education and to devise more creative strategies to encourage better voter turnout in future elections, some state governments in Nigeria have resorted to making registration to vote and possession of the Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) as a precondition to enjoy social benefits from the government.

From the above, it could be deduced that adequate and consistent voter education is a key requirement for successful political process and this cannot be outsourced by any election management body if effectiveness in the discharge of this responsibility is anticipated.

5.3 *Executive and Legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations*

Another challenge being faced by INEC as the study showed was the extent of executive and legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations. A total of 219 or 60.80% of the respondents agreed that there is executive and legislative meddlesomeness in INEC operations, while 141 (39.20%) were opposed to this. The issue of meddlesomeness in INEC operations must be understood within two basic contexts. In the first instance, by virtue of Third Schedule, Part 1F Section 153 (14) of the 1999 constitution (As Amended) the appointment of key officials of INEC comprising of the Chairman, and National Commissioners is by the Executive. On the other hand, the Legislature or National Assembly sets out the legal framework establishing the INEC and exercises oversight functions on the activities and operations of INEC. While the Executive appropriates and determines the funding needs of INEC, the legislature approves the appropriation and funding of INEC. Accordingly, by virtue of constitutional provisions, both the Executive and the Legislature wield enormous influence on the operations of INEC, and at various times have resorted to using the power of either appointment or appropriation to checkmate and control the operations of INEC. This has invariably heightened the call for the independence of INEC not just in name but also in terms of appointment of its key officers and in terms of funding.

5.4 *Insecurity and violence during elections*

The study also shows that insecurity and violence have negative effects on the performances of INEC during elections. 261 or 72.40% of the respondents agreed that INEC underperforms due to insecurity and violence during elections as opposed to 99 or 27.60% of the respondents. Insecurity and electoral violence have remained permanent features of Nigeria's democratic process, except the 2015 general elections where the international observers noted that there was a significant improvement over the previous elections in terms of insecurity and electoral violence related cases (EUOM, 2015).

6. Recommendations

1. The introduction of technology in the management of Nigeria elections is a step in the right direction. However, there must be concerted collaborative efforts with the National Assembly, the Executive/Presidency and other local and international stakeholders to amend the legal framework thereby giving appropriate legal backing to enable INEC fully implement e-voting.
2. Adequate voter education should be embarked upon by INEC in order to educate the masses and the electorate on how to use technology in casting their votes. This role should not be outsourced to NGOs and CSO's or even the political parties with INEC being fully involved in the monitoring and implementation of the project.
3. The unfettered independence of INEC must be ensured by amending the relevant sections of the Nigeria constitution especially the Third Schedule, Part 1F Section 153 (14) of the 1999 constitution (As Amended) in order to reduce or completely eliminate the issue of meddlesomeness in INEC operations by both the Executive and Legislative arms of government. The enormous influence exercised by both the Executive and the Legislature on the operations of INEC, through the power of either appointment or appropriation

- should be done away with as these have continued to be part of the problems militating against the satisfactory performances of INEC in the past. This measure will help INEC maintain focus and be truly independent not just in name but in its operations.
4. The welfare system of the officials of INEC especially as they relate to the Adhoc staff should be revisited. Since these members of staff are on crucial national assignment it is suggested that a national insurance scheme of a reasonable amount that can sustain them and their families in case of death or permanent disability in the course of their jobs be set up. This will help dissuade some of them who may want to compromise the sanctity of elections conducted by INEC for personal gains.
 5. INEC should be relentless in pushing for the establishment of the Electoral Offences Commission and Tribunal. This would enable INEC to concentrate solely on electoral administration and management, while the Electoral Offences Tribunal would be saddled with the responsibilities of prosecuting electoral offenders, thereby saving INEC from unnecessary distractions.

7. Conclusion

As earlier noted, rebranding is essentially a change in the mindset or perception of a person or groups of people about the nature, structure or character of a thing. It is the position of this study that the Nigerian electoral process has lost its brand loyalty among the various stakeholders especially the masses and therefore there is the need to infuse more democratic features into the electoral process in order to reassure and empower the people to participate meaningfully in the political process so as to enhance democratic governance. Accordingly, this study reveals that the overall intention of rebranding the electoral process in Nigeria is to elicit positive actions with the aim of increasing and sustaining loyalty and patronage of all stakeholders in the electoral process. This study therefore reinforces the need for the people to buy into the idea of building a great nation that every Nigerian can call their own by participating meaningfully in the electoral process. However, this cannot be achieved if the electoral process as it is presently is not fundamentally repackaged and repositioned so as to make this revered process of elite recruitment credible.

This study therefore concludes that if the necessary structures are put in place, a rebranded electoral process would enhance mass participation in the political process and reengineer the growth of democracy and democratic governance. Rebranding the electoral process therefore is imperative and entails infusing more features like technology, e-voting, e-transmission of election results, independent candidacy and other modern election management mechanisms that will help in changing this negative perception of the people as well as that of the international community through the adoption of international best practices in the conduct and management of the political process. Rebranding of the Nigerian electoral process will involve the complete overhauling of the activities of the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, Political parties, political actors, the Electoral management bodies, the electorate as well as the security agencies within a democratic culture that will lead to good governance. It is therefore the contention of this study that if properly implemented, democratic rebranding of the Nigerian electoral process will likely improve the political and electoral processes to ensure that the best candidates emerged victorious in future elections.

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