



Election Management Body and the Challenges of Elections in Nigeria: An Exploratory Analyses of Elections (1999-2019)

by

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Abstract

An exploratory analysis was carried out on the responsibilities of the Election Management Body (EMB) and the challenges of elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by ineffective administration, poor organization, questionable outcomes, resulting in conflicts and litigations. This is largely due to weak institutionalization of the agency responsible for election management-the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC lacks the institutional, financial and administrative autonomy as well as lack of professionalism. This study, therefore, explore the challenges of INEC and its effects on elections conducted during the Fourth Republic in Nigeria. The study employed quantitative method in analyzing data collected through questionnaire using chi-square statistical technique. Two hundred questionnaire were issued and one hundred and eighty-five were retrieved. The paper relied on Institutional Theory as its Theoretical Framework. The study revealed, among others, that a professional, impartial, effective and independent INEC would reduce challenges confronting election organization and management in Nigeria. The study, however, recommended that the Act establishing INEC should be reviewed to enhance its autonomy and capacity to conduct free, credible, transparent and acceptable elections in Nigeria.

Key words: Autonomy; democracy; elections; election management body; political institutions.

1. Introduction

As Nigeria conducted the sixth general elections in Nigeria on February and March, 2019, it is necessary to consider the democratic contents of such electoral processes. Basically, elections are the most important indicator of the presence or absence

of democracy in any society. Elections are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the leaders through a regular consent of the people, but also provide a fertile ground for liberal democracy to thrive and be consolidated (Luqman, 2009). In other words, while elections do not automatically ensure the consolidation and sustenance of democratic system, they remain important element in the process of democratization. This means that elections remain a fundamental pillar not only for formation of democratic government, but also an important requirement for broader democratic sustenance and consolidation.

Bratton (1998) contended that elections including its organization and management signals whether the basic constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal foundations necessary for a genuine democracy is being laid or not. The implication of this, according to him, is that, there can be elections without democracy, but there cannot be democracy without elections.

Election management body, within the context of this work, refers to a body which has the sole role or task or responsibility of determining those who are eligible voters, receiving and validating the nominations of contestants from political parties, conducting elections, counting of votes and declaration of results. Election management body plays a vital role in the overall quality and efficacy of electoral processes. However, the challenges of elections in Nigeria revolve mostly around the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) - the election management body saddled with the responsibility of organizing and managing elections in Nigeria since 1999. The exploratory analyses of elections (1999-2019) undertaken in this study aided in the linking of the challenges of elections to weak political institutions in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, elections have been one of the main problems of the democratization process. The country's quest and struggle for sustainable democracy have been ridiculed by the political contenders and players in the political system through deliberate attempts at subverting the process through violence, rigging and other forms of malpractices. As a result, rather than being a political asset and a legitimate method of saddling leaders with responsibilities, elections in Nigeria have become a political liability, source of instability, democratic decay and democratic erosion. It has often been stage-managed, pre-determined, rigged, manipulated and electoral mandates stolen, which are indicative of the culture of holding regular elections without democratic culture. Within such political atmosphere, regular elections therefore may not necessarily constitute enough grounds for postulating sustained democratic process. At the centre of these electoral challenges, is the INEC (election management body) presiding over these lapses, contradictions and controversies.

In an abridged version, elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by ineffective administration, poor organization, questionable outcomes, which often results in conflicts and litigations. This is largely due to weak institutionalization of the agency responsible for election management-the INEC, as they lack institutional, financial and administrative autonomy as well as lack of professionalism.

Election Management Body (EMB)

In the context of this study, election management body is used interchangeably to mean INEC. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria mandates the INEC to organize elections into executive and legislative offices at the federal and state levels; to register, monitor and regulate political party operations, monitor party finances and campaigns; to create and maintain a register of qualified voters; to delimit constituencies for representation; to delegate its powers to Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) and to carry out other functions conferred on it by an Act of the National Assembly. The Electoral Act (2010) adds the conduct of voter education and the prosecution of electoral offenders to the INEC's responsibilities. Therefore, one of the indispensable features of democratic system in any society is the existence of election management body, herein referred to as "INEC". While the stability of democracy determines the stability of election management body, the transparency and fairness of the body determines the stability of a state as well as the legitimacy of a government.

Adetula (2007) argued that there exists a direct relationship between political instability and unstable election management system and this relationship is mutually reinforcing. Nigeria has experienced several dissolutions and reconstitution of election management bodies as a result of military incessant incursion in the politics of Nigeria. The constitution of INEC in 1998 was one of those attempts at putting in place an unbiased and a fair electoral umpire to once again conduct elections to usher-in a new government after long years of military rule. Election management body not only ensure that elections are organized and managed efficiently, but also promote fairness, openness and transparency and hence contribute to the legitimacy of democracy as well as the enhancement of the rule of law. Election management body plays prominent role in the process of democratic designs and consolidation in third wave democracies (Carter and Farrell, 2009).

The basis of representative democracies is a process of elections that is fair and competitive. This is the role of electoral institutions, which relates to determining how elections are contested, how the act of voting results in the election of political representatives and the determination of which political leaders form executive leadership for the next few years (Carter and Farrell, 2009). Election management body is an organization that has the sole purpose of and is legally responsible for managing some or all elements that are essential for the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments such as referendum and recall votes. In addition to these essential elements, election management body may undertake other tasks that assist in the conduct and organization of elections which relates to voter registration, constituency delimitation, voter education and information, preliminary electoral dispute and resolution, etc. The importance of the study of election management or administration in a democratic system cannot be over-emphasized.

According to Omotola (2009), studies in comparative African democratization have focused on core institutions of democracy where elections have been identified as a central theme in competitive democratic politics. This has lent credence to why recent researches on elections and democratic practice pays much attention to election

administration, organization and management. According to Animashaun (2010), election represent the life-blood of modern democracy and the frequency, fairness and openness of elections is crucial to the political stability of the polity. The extent to which election advances democratic order largely depends on the existence of impartial and professional electoral management body, its nature and its acceptance by the electorate in the political system. The centrality of elections to the democratization process of any country has been dependent upon a number of reasons, which revolves around the roles of credible elections, unbiased electoral umpire and the accountable public officials. Dudley (1982) concluded that Nigeria has weakly institutionalized political institutions.

Elections and Democracy

The existing comparative literature on democratization process all emphasizes the importance of elections. Elections have been seen as central and foundation to competitive politics. Elections guarantee political involvement and competition, which results in smooth democratic transition and sustenance. Ojo (2007) saw elections as institutional mechanisms that implement democracy by allowing citizens choose among candidates. Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) underscored the centrality of elections to democracy, when they submitted that election is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government. Obi (2008) argued that democracy is best expressed through periodic, free and fair elections in which equal voters choose their leaders from competing elites. Lewis (2007) averred that elections serve as an affirmation of democratic rights, inclusion and transparency. Within this context, elections are central to the institutionalization of orderly transition in a democratic setting, creating legal - administrative framework and diffusing political tension in the political system.

Elections is rooted and institutionalized in the three core foundations of democracy -popular participation, competition and legitimacy. Bratton (1998) observes that for democracy to be sustained, elections needs to be administered with acceptable rules to guarantee wider participation and competition. Therefore, the relationship between elections and democracy is considered to be so strong that some scholars have argued that all democratic variables revolve around elections. For these scholars, democracy is best defined in terms of electoral politics and the institutional parameters that underpin them. Mesfin (2008) argued that the founding pillar of any democratic political system, whether considered fragile or established, remain undoubtedly elections. The relationship between elections and democratic sustenance is overlapping, thus, it is contingent upon a number of forces, particularly, the administrative aspect of the elections. Bratton (1998: 52) asserted thus:

The regularity, openness and acceptability of election signal whether basis constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule...while you can have elections without democracy, you cannot have democracy without elections. If nothing else, the convening of scheduled multi-party elections serves the minimal function of making democracy's survival.

Lewis (2003) and Okoye (2007) acknowledged that election is at the heart of democracy and the democratization process. According to him, elections are the litmus

test for a democratic political system. Election therefore, play crucial role in the sustenance of democracy, especially, democracies that are in transition. Accordingly, there exist an inter-locking relationship between elections and democratization of a polity. It is on this premise that elections act as a springboard to entrenching democratic values in a hitherto undemocratic polity. However, elections cannot be administered effectively without strong electoral and democratic institutions put in place.

Impact of Electoral Institutions on Elections

The importance of election administration relates to wider set of activities that borders on institutional framework in which voting and competition take place. Election administration is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional responsibilities, involving application of electoral rules and resolving electoral disputes. It involves the interaction of constitutional and institutional rules that determine the electoral procedures and pattern of competition, campaigns, voter registration, counting of votes and declaration of results. In these processes, Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) submitted that the interplay of power structures and processes are central to the outcomes. The most important among these relates to the election management body and other institutional-political framework which include political parties, mass media, and the courts of law. This further depends on the level of interaction among them and the level of institutionalization (Pastor, 1999). These institutions are very important for effective and efficient election organization and management because the possibility of elections or electoral processes leading to transition or alternation of power is a function of an unbiased, impartial and independent election commission (Jinadu, 1997). Thus, whether administration of election will contribute to democratic stability or instability will depend on the impartiality and professionalism of the electoral institutions, particularly the election management bodies because institutional structures that enhance credibility of the electoral process will also enhance the extent to which electorate perceive their elections to be free, fair and transparent (Birch, 2008).

However, effective election organization and management alone does not guarantee good elections, but there are other dependent factors or variables which include: social, economic and political variables. These variables do intervene to play an important role in influencing the process, integrity, and outcome of elections. Notwithstanding; effective, efficient and good elections are not possible without effective election administration (Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002). It is however, for this reason that focus on recent research on electoral studies and democratization have shifted toward election administration with election management bodies as the focus. On these studies, evidence have shown that election management bodies are pivotal to overall quality of elections, perceptions of credibility and legitimacy.

In any democratic society, winners and losers of electoral contests can accept the processes and results as declared when elections are effectively and transparently administered. An effective and transparent election organization is only realistic when election management body has autonomy in terms of structure, composition, funding and capacity. The hallmarks of the strong and mature democracy are strongly associated with

professional, independent, impartial and unbiased election administration. This does not foreclose the importance and relevance of other institutions such as political parties, mass media, the security agencies, the courts of law and the civil society organizations (CSOs). They are also relevant to play effective roles including the provision of logistic support to the election management body.

In Nigeria, the sole responsibility of election administration rests with the election management body which has undergone several name changes under different regimes but not much in terms of structures. Between 1959 and 1999, the election management body have been renamed six times, that is, Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN, 1959-63); then the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC, 1963-66); Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO, 1976-79); National Electoral Commission (NEC); National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON, 1993-98) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 1998-1999) (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006). Perhaps, because of these changes, the electoral management body has not been organizing and managing elections efficiently and effectively and its autonomy and capacity over the years has been a serious source of concern (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006).

The aspect relating to independence of the electoral management body is in terms of its composition. The electoral management body is composed by the President and the officials so composed are chosen through his prerogative. The Chairman, twelve national Commissioners and thirty-seven Resident Electoral Commissioners, one each for the thirty-six states of the federation and Federal Capital Territory, are all appointed by the President. This may make INEC to be easily manipulated by the President. Though, the constitution provided for oversight role of the legislature in terms of screening of the nominees for the INEC's position, but such oversight roles might be rendered ineffective because if the President's party is majority in the legislature, he may encourage the clearing of his party sympathizers for INEC's job. Insecurity of tenure of office of electoral officers in Nigeria is also a source of concern. Though Nigerian electoral officers occupy office for five years' subject to renewable for another term, they may, however, be removed by the President on insubstantial grounds. Former Chairmen of successive electoral commissions under Babangida, Professors Eme Awa and Humphrey Nwosu, were removed from office in 1989 and 1993 respectively in controversial circumstances over their uncompromised stance in the management of the electoral commission (Nwosu, 2008). These acts may directly or indirectly affect the capacity and independence of an electoral commission to organize free, fair, transparent and credible elections. Issues of funding of INEC are also a subject of concern. In real terms, an independent election management bodies needs a consolidated account, where specific portion of federal fund is allocated within the control of INEC. This is not the current practice in Nigeria since establishment of the electoral commission. The electoral commission's financial dependent on the presidency for funding contributes to the inability if INEC to adequately prepare, plan and organize successful and acceptable elections in the country.

Moreover, the capacity of INEC has been negatively influenced in some ways. In most cases, people without sufficient, professional and intellectual competence are

appointed as INEC officials. For instance, Maurice Iwu, former Chairman of the commission had no professional background in electoral management but in health sciences. Another aspect of INEC's capacity relates to its use of ad-hoc staff, who are usually briefed for one or two days of their duties before their involvement in elections. These temporary staff having been so ignorant of the rules, regulations and guidelines of INEC in relation to election organization and management tend to commit series of electoral blunders.

It is also imperative to mention that the over-centralization of power in INEC is a serious source of concern. This could be seen in INEC's task of administering all federal and state elections including that of the National and State Assemblies across thirty- six states including the Federal Capital Territory. This further aggravates INEC's capacity to deliver successful and credible elections in Nigeria.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- i Ascertain whether weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria.
- ii Examine whether electoral institutions in Nigeria are administratively autonomous.

4. Materials and Methods

This study employed quantitative method in analyzing data collected through questionnaire, using chi-square statistical analysis. Two hundred questionnaire (200) were administered and one hundred and eighty-five were retrieved. The respondents comprised civil servants, students, businessmen, among others. Three local government areas in Akwa Ibom State were chosen for the questionnaire administration. That is, one local government randomly chosen from each senatorial district, namely; Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket senatorial district. The researcher chooses seventy (70) from Uyo senatorial district, seventy (70) from Ikot senatorial district and sixty (60) from Eket senatorial district, totaling two hundred (200).

Hypotheses

- i. Weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria.
- ii. Electoral institutions in Nigeria are not administratively autonomous.

Table I: Responses to selected questions from the questionnaire

S/N	Questions	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
1	Do weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria?	100	65	20	185
4	Are electoral institutions in Nigeria independent and democratic?	45	130	10	185
6	Does the lack of independence of INEC affects its mandate in delivering credible elections?	105	70	10	185

8	Does the challenges of elections in Nigeria relates to weak institutionalization of core institutions of elections?	120	40	25	185
10	Does INEC presently has the capacity to conduct transparent elections in Nigeria?	35	120	30	185

Source: Field work (2021).

Table 2: Weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections on Nigeria

Questions	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
1	100	65	20	185
4	45	130	10	185
6	105	70	10	185
8	120	40	25	185
10	35	120	30	185
Total	405	425	95	925

Source: Field work (2021).

The statistical test (χ^2) is significant.

$\chi^2 = 158.67$; $df = 6$, significance @ 0.05 = 12.59.

This shows that weak political institutions have considerably constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria. This may be attributed to weak institutionalization of core institutions of democracy such as political parties, mass media, courts of law, and civil rights groups in Nigeria.

Table 3: Electoral institutions in Nigeria are not administratively autonomous

Questions	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
1	100	65	20	185
4	45	130	10	185
6	105	70	10	185
8	120	40	25	185
10	35	120	30	185
Total	405	425	95	925

The test is also significant @ 0.05 = 12.59.

This shows that electoral institutions in Nigeria are not administratively autonomous. These institutions are extremely weak and incapable of absorbing political pressure. This supports the position of Dudley (1982) who declared that Nigeria have weakly institutionalized political institutions.

5. Results and Discussion

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed six general elections that were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. The major problem of democratic process in Nigeria revolves elections and other electoral processes. However,

this sub-section analyses elections in terms of organization, effects and its impacts on the democratization process.

The first election under the current Fourth Republic took place in 1999. As usual, elections in Africa always exhibit common features which narrows down to the intent of political elites to obstructing genuine democratic processes through willfully subverting the peoples' electoral choices. These features include unimaginable landslide victories, rejection of election results by losers, violence, inflation of votes, and most importantly, poor organization and management of elections (Bratton, 1998; Lindberg, 2004; 2006). The 1999 Nigeria's general elections had all these common features. The presidential elections contested by Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples' Party (APP)/Alliance for Democracy (AD) alliance had Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Chief Olu Falae respectively as the party candidates. At the end, Obasanjo of PDP was declared winner with 18,738, 154 votes (62.78 percent) over Falae, who had 11,110,287 (37.22 percent). The PDP also had dominance in both houses of the National Assembly, states and local governments (Akinboye, 2000). The elections were not credible, as attested to by the reports of local and international observers including the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republic Institute (IRI) and the European Union (EU). All reported widespread irregularities, ballot box snatching, inflation of votes, alteration of results, voter disenfranchisement and inconsistency in the application of INEC procedures relating to elections (Omotola, 2010).

The second general elections in 2003 was regarded as a test of democratic stability. This is because democratization processes are seen to be on course, when elections are held regularly. With the lessons of 1999, INEC was expected to be prepared in terms of conducting credible and transparent elections. It was therefore not surprising that the 2003 general elections generated massive interest domestically and internationally (Omotola, 2010). Despite their initial criticisms about INEC's preparation for the elections, all the thirty political parties participated in the elections. According to Omotola (2004), INEC's organizational weakness and lack of independence all negate its effectiveness, thus, the election organization was relatively poor. Some of the basic problems were unnecessary deployment of military, whose role in elections is not known to law, possibly to undermine voter turn-out and cover the electoral umpire to rig and manipulate the process in favour of the government in power (Ajayi, 2006). The result showed that Olusegun Obasanjo of PDP emerged winner with very wide margin. He polled 24,109,157 (61.80 percent) of the total votes cast, while his closest rival polled 12,495,325 (32.30 percent). The PDP also won majority in the national and state assemblies' elections (Omotola, 2010). According to Awopeju (2011), the 2003 general elections was total failure and difficult to believe that Nigeria could conduct such elections which were totally against peoples' wishes. The elections were widely condemned by the opposition parties, local and international observers.

The 2007 general elections were the third in the series of elections in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule. It was another opportunity for the INEC to correct its mistakes from the past elections and for the citizens to evaluate the overall election

quality and outcomes. But these expectations were squandered and dashed as the common features of the electoral processes in Nigeria continued even more deeply. Prior to the elections, the political atmosphere was so tensed coupled with statement credited to the President Obasanjo, who declared that the elections were “a do or die affairs” (Obasanjo, 2007). The electoral commission, INEC, rather than focus on adequate preparations for the elections, engaged in unimportant issues like litigations against opposition candidates in an attempt to disqualify them. The tension got to a climax when INEC insisted on excluding the then Vice President, Atiku Abubakar of Action Congress (AC), even when they do not have such powers. The actions and reactions of INEC were very obvious that they were working for the ruling PDP (Unger, 2007). This further cast doubt as to capacity, independence and impartiality of the electoral body. In the election results, INEC awarded unimaginable number of votes to PDP at all levels, even when the unemployment, inflation, poverty, insecurity and violence were on the rise (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007). According to Adebayo and Omotola (2007) the manner at which PDP garnered votes were questionable, with unprecedented rigging, ballot box stuffing, inflation of votes, intimidation of voters, assault on the people and violence. The massive rigging and malpractice that characterized the elections generated one thousand two hundred and fifty (1,250) petitions. In recognition and acceptance of these lapses in the electoral process, the product of the 2007 general elections, President Yar’Adua set up Electoral Reform Committee headed by Justice Uwais to reform the electoral process.

The 2011 general elections were held in April, 2011. The PDP still retained the presidency and majority seats at the national and state assemblies. There were cases of irregularities, despite INEC’s tough stance on electoral fraud. Although, the 2011 general elections were adjudged to be better than 2003 and 2007, however, the violence that accompanied the election results announcement was quite unprecedented. Over 800 people were estimated to have been killed in the mayhem that followed the release of the 2011 general elections results (Ploch, 2012). This further undermines and ridicules Nigeria’s quest for democratic sustenance and stability.

The 2015 general elections witnessed great improvement in the organization of the elections, in the sense that card readers were introduced to be used in authenticating the validity of permanent voters’ card (PVC) and ensure that prospective voter who originally registered, has his or her name in the INEC data base. The elections were originally scheduled for February, 2015, but were shifted for six weeks as a result of security challenges. The presidential elections were contested by fourteen parties, and among these, the two major parties, were, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) registered as merged party in 2014. The PDP had Jonathan Goodluck while APC had Muhammadu Buhari as their candidates respectively. At the end of the elections, PDP got 12,853,162 (44.96 percent), while APC got 15,424,921 (53.96 percent). The APC was declared winner. The partial success of the 2015 general elections was attributed to the innovations of the INEC, through the introduction of permanent voters’ card (PVC) and card reader machine (CRM) to checkmate frauds such as impersonation, underage voting, rigging, over-voting, etc. Though, the card reader machines had a lot of challenges during the elections but it was partially successful.

However, in an article titled, Zaggi (2015) criticized the electoral process by noting that late arrival of election materials, malfunctioning of card readers, insufficient and in some cases, no availability of electoral materials, over-crowding of polling units and voting's throughout the nights as basic challenges that characterized the elections. These flaws ended up disenfranchising a lot of people in many parts of the country.

The 2019 general elections held on February and March, 2019 was the sixth in the series of elections in the country. The performance of card readers although not wholly unsatisfactory, raised concerns and provided sufficient basis for anxiety among the electorate. There were also reports of electoral violence, rigging, malpractices, vote's inflation as well as hoodlums invading voting centres to intimidate, harass and molest voters. In some instances, political thugs were accompanied by security agencies such as police and army to carry out their plans. Votes were openly bought in the presence of INEC officials, security operatives and observers (Election Working Group Report, 2019). At the end of the elections, the APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari was declared winner after polling 15,191,847 (55.60 percent) and the PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar polled 11,262,978 (41.20 percent). The APC also had a slight majority in the both houses of the National Assembly.

This study was on election management body and the challenges of elections in Nigeria, with the exploratory analyses of elections in Nigeria (1999-2019). From the data analyzed, it has been ascertained that weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria. These challenges centres on areas of lack of autonomy or independence, its composition and funding of the main election management body, which the literature earlier situated. Between 1999 and 2019, six general elections were conducted and all have been characterized by ineffective administration and poor organization. Even with the introduction of Permanent Voters Card and Continuous Voters Registration, the challenges still persist because the challenges confronting elections in Nigeria, are not necessary innovations but the structures and institutions of election management. Under this peculiar circumstance, elections cannot entrench sustainable democracy or at best democratization.

Also, the study has shown that electoral institutions in Nigeria are not independent and democratic. This has been established through how INEC and other related institutions are composed, funded and administered. The manner at which these institutions are composed may make its officials susceptible to executive manipulations. This is evidently possible especially when the President's party has majority in the national assembly. INEC cannot be said to be independent and democratic when its openly witnessed vote buying during elections and still went on to declare results of the affected units. In most areas observed during elections, suspected political thugs accompanied by persons in the uniforms of officers and men of the Nigerian army and police, hijacked and destroyed electoral materials, interfered with the voting processes, chased away party agents, particularly opposition parties from observing the elections at the poling units and collation centres (EWGR, 2019). Under this circumstances, electoral institutions cannot be said to be administratively autonomous.

Omotola (2010) averred that election administration involves constitutional interaction including institutional rules and organizational practices that ascertain the basis for electoral processes and competition. According to Agbaje and Adejumo (2006), that the electoral commissions are a strategic part of an institutional set that jointly ascertain the probity of the electoral processes, particularly, elections. It was on the above premises that Birch (2008) submitted that the democratic status of election management bodies is crucial to citizens' perceptions of election quality because they depend on institutional structures that promote the freeness and fairness of electoral and democratic processes. This notion was obvious when Dahl (1963) concluded that an election is a good election when the outcome is unpredictable.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The foregoing exploratory analyses on elections suggest that the prospect of strengthening democracy through strong, viable, unbiased, impartial, independent and professional election management body remains a tall dream, though not impossible to achieve. Strengthening or sustaining democracy or promoting democratization through elections depends largely on the institutional frameworks of the electoral process, especially, the INEC. A professional, impartial and independent INEC would reduce the avoidable challenges confronting election organization and management in Nigeria.

From the analyses, it is shown that weak political institutions constitute a challenge to elections in Nigeria. The high level of political instability in Nigeria since 1960 also contributed to the weak institutionalization of political institutions. Due to frequent change of governments, the electoral body has been undergoing repeated changes in name and structures.

Also, the analyses have provided basis that the electoral institutions in Nigeria are not independent and democratic. This could be attributed to high level of instability which has not allowed for the evolution and development of electoral administration predicated on strong institutions and administrative efficiency.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. There is an urgent need to reform political institutions, particularly, the Act establishing INEC should be reviewed to enhance its autonomy and capacity to conduct free, fair, credible and transparent elections in Nigeria.
- ii. INEC represents the most important of all the institutional foundations of elections in Nigeria. Such institutions ought to be independent, impartial and professional in the discharge of its responsibilities. For INEC to be independent and democratic, it should be completely detached from the presidency and made entirely independent.

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