



Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria: Assessing the Role and Performance of INEC

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Abstract

This study critically examines the relationship between election administration and sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria, with particular focus on the 2019 and 2023 presidential elections in Akwa Ibom State. The research investigated two core objectives: the role of political parties in sustaining democratic governance and the effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in administering credible elections. A descriptive survey design was adopted, utilising a structured questionnaire and relevant secondary data from scholarly publications and official reports. Data were analysed using the chi-square (χ^2) statistical method at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that political parties play a pivotal role in deepening democratic values through voter mobilisation and issue-based campaigns. However, their effectiveness is hampered by internal undemocratic practices, violent conduct, and prioritisation of personal or sectional interests over national development. The study also found that while INEC demonstrated efforts in election preparation and logistical deployment, its performance was undermined by political interference, operational inefficiencies, and the compromise of security agencies during election periods. These weaknesses negatively impacted the credibility and transparency of the electoral process, posing challenges to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. The study recommends strengthening INEC's autonomy and institutional capacity, enforcing internal democracy within political parties, and enhancing synergy among election stakeholders,



particularly security agencies, to ensure credible, free, and fair elections capable of sustaining Nigeria's democratic governance.

Keywords: Election Administration, Democratic Governance, INEC Effectiveness, Political Parties in Nigeria

1.1 Introduction

Elections remain a fundamental pillar of democracy, providing a legitimate mechanism through which the governed select their representatives and influence the political direction of their society. As Jinadu (2005) asserts, elections are more than mere procedural rituals; they constitute structured institutional and psychological processes that enable the systematic expression of public choice among competing candidates for public office. Through elections, the governed convey their preferences, which are aggregated to determine political leadership and policy direction. Despite its broader scope, democracy is inextricably linked to the conduct of credible elections, without which the legitimacy and stability of democratic governance would be compromised.

In the Nigerian context, elections are expected to fulfil vital functions, including facilitating political representation, ensuring the orderly transfer of power, and consolidating democratic norms of individual equality and freedom of choice (Afolabi, 2011). Since its transition to constitutional democracy in 1999, Nigeria has conducted seven consecutive general elections, with the most recent held in 2023. These elections ushered in new leadership at both federal and state levels, including Akwa Ibom State. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as Nigeria's constitutionally empowered Electoral Management Body (EMB), shoulders the critical responsibility of administering these elections in accordance with legal frameworks, particularly the recently enacted Electoral Act 2022. This Act enabled technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which employs biometric fingerprint and facial recognition to enhance voter authentication (Oliji, 2023).

Beyond INEC's statutory role in organising, supervising, and declaring electoral outcomes, political parties equally exert significant influence over the electoral process. Political parties are not only the primary vehicles for candidate nomination and voter mobilisation, but they also shape electoral outcomes through their strategies, alliances, and conduct before, during, and after elections. Their interactions with the EMB, campaign practices, and potential complicity in electoral malpractices can substantially affect the credibility and public trust in the electoral process. As observed by Aworinde (2023), incidents of voter suppression, intimidation, and violence often linked to partisan activities have marred elections in various Nigerian states, eroding confidence in electoral institutions.

However, in contrast to states such as Rivers and Kaduna, where the 2023 elections were reportedly disrupted by violence, vote-buying, and manipulation (Godwin, 2023; Bulus, 2023), Akwa Ibom State's recent electoral cycles, particularly in 2019 and 2023, have been widely perceived as peaceful and credibly managed. This relative calm presents an important context to examine two critical dimensions of electoral administration: the role of political parties in shaping electoral processes, and the effectiveness of INEC in delivering free, fair, and transparent elections within the state.

Accordingly, this study seeks to achieve two main objectives. First, it aims to determine how political parties affect the administration of elections in Akwa Ibom State. Second, it assesses the achievements and performance of INEC in managing the electoral process within the same context. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between party politics and electoral governance, and offers insights into the sustainability of democratic administration in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The credibility of elections in Nigeria has often been questioned due to challenges such as political interference, electoral malpractice, and perceived weaknesses in the operations of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Political parties, as major stakeholders in the electoral process, have been implicated in actions that either support or undermine electoral integrity. Similarly, INEC's capacity to conduct free, fair, and credible elections remains a subject of public and scholarly debate.

While elections in many Nigerian states have been marred by irregularities, the conduct of the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State was widely regarded as peaceful and credible. However, the extent to which political party activities influenced the election process, and the actual achievements of INEC in administering these elections, remain underexplored. This study therefore seeks to determine how political parties affect election administration in Akwa Ibom State and to assess INEC's performance in managing elections within the state.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

While the main aim of this study is to explore how election administration affects Nigeria's sustainable democratic governance, with a focus on the presidential and legislative elections in Akwa Ibom State in 2019 and 2023, its specific objectives are:

- i. To determine how political parties affect Akwa Ibom State's election administration.
- ii. To assess INEC's achievements when managing elections within Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

- i. How do political parties affect Akwa Ibom State's election administration?
- ii. How well does INEC manage elections within Akwa Ibom State?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

- I. Political parties are unlikely to have enormous impact on election management in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. There is no significant link between Akwa Ibom State's election management and INEC's efficiency.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds practical relevance for political parties, INEC, the Akwa Ibom State Government, and the electorate by providing insights into the need for collaboration in election administration. Its findings will guide policymakers, electoral stakeholders, and governance institutions in adopting best practices, ensuring due process, and strengthening election management strategies for credible and transparent elections.

For emerging democracies like Nigeria, the study offers lessons for improving electoral systems to foster democratic consolidation and good governance. Theoretically, it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on election administration, particularly regarding the roles of political parties and electoral bodies in sustaining credible electoral processes. The study will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and future researchers interested in electoral integrity and democratic development in Nigeria and comparable contexts.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Election

Elections are a fundamental feature of democratic governance, serving as the formal mechanism by which citizens select representatives to occupy public office. Unlike ancient forms of selection by lot (sortition), modern democracies use elections to ensure legitimacy, accountability, and participation in political decision-making (Benoit & Kornhauser, 2019). Afolabi (2020) defines elections as a process through which the electorate makes informed choices among competing candidates, while Ujo (2019) emphasises that elections are not merely events but structured procedures that require a defined population, available alternatives, and positions of authority to be filled. Elections also function as instruments of accountability, compelling political leaders to remain responsive to citizens' needs (Dahl, 2018) and allowing the electorate to either endorse or reject those who govern them (Schumpeter, 2017). Adejumbi (2020) further argues that elections constitute a social contract between the state and the people, legitimising authority and reinforcing democratic responsibility.



However, elections in Nigeria which include in Akwa Ibom State, face numerous challenges such as electoral violence, voter intimidation, and insecurity, which undermine the free exercise of electoral rights (Frank, 2020). To address these concerns, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collaborates with security agencies to safeguard the electoral process, ensuring peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections. The effectiveness of this coordination, alongside the conduct of political parties, significantly influences electoral administration outcomes. In this regard, Mozaffar (2022) highlights that competitive elections in democracies must embrace procedural certainty while allowing for outcome uncertainty to maintain legitimacy. Direct and indirect electoral methods offer different degrees of voter influence, with direct elections enhancing public participation, while indirect systems risk alienating the electorate (Kapur, 2016; 2017). Ultimately, the credibility and success of elections depend on the integrity of electoral management and the conduct of political actors within the process.

2.1.2 Election Process

Elections are best understood not as isolated events but as a continuous process comprising pre-election, election, and post-election phases. The pre-electoral phase involves critical preparatory activities such as legal reforms, voter registration, public sensitisation, recruitment and training of election officials, and party campaigns. The electoral phase covers the actual polling period, during which voters cast their ballots, culminating in the closure of polling stations. The post-electoral phase includes the collation and announcement of results, resolution of electoral disputes, and final declaration of winners. These phases are interdependent, and their boundaries may shift depending on the peculiar electoral contexts of different countries. Effective electoral administration requires seamless coordination across these stages to ensure credible outcomes.

2.1.3 Elements of Elections

Elections play a pivotal role in legitimising government authority, ensuring accountability, and enabling peaceful leadership transitions in democratic systems. They reflect the electorate's will, validate the ruling regime's legitimacy, and reinforce the social contract between citizens and the state (Schumpeter, 1947). However, for elections to fulfil these functions, essential institutional and procedural elements must be present. These include an independent electoral management body to oversee processes impartially, a fair legal framework regulating party activities and candidacy, a judiciary capable of resolving disputes objectively, and a free, unbiased media to inform the public (Jinadu, 2019; Adejumobi, 2018). Without these safeguards, electoral processes risk manipulation, undermining both public trust and democratic consolidation.

2.1.4 Election Administration

Election administration refers to the structures and processes involved in organising and managing elections to ensure credibility, transparency, and efficiency. As Jinadu (2019) explains, election administration encompasses both the institutional framework, typically embodied by an electoral management body (EMB) like Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and the series of procedures that guide electoral activities. This framework includes not only the EMB but also the police, security services, and civil society organisations (CSOs), whose collaborative support is essential for the smooth execution of election logistics and overall electoral integrity.

Beyond organisational structure, election administration also entails a comprehensive set of processes such as establishing electoral bodies, appointing officials, voter registration, delineating constituencies, political party registration, candidate nomination, ballot casting, vote counting, and result declaration (Jinadu, 2019; Ajayi, 2017). These processes span the entire electoral cycle, including pre-election, election, and post-election phases. While independent EMBs are widely adopted globally, some established democracies entrust election administration to trusted government agencies with a legacy of impartiality. Regardless of the model, the essence of election administration lies in its ability to coordinate complex, interdependent activities that uphold the legitimacy and credibility of electoral outcomes.

2.1.5 Election Administration Body in Nigeria: A Review

The evolution of election management bodies (EMBs) in Nigeria reflects the country's complex political history and its struggle to institutionalise democratic governance. Prior to independence, the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) conducted the 1959 elections. After independence, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) was established to oversee the 1964 and 1965 elections, but was dissolved following the 1966 military coup. Subsequent military regimes continued to alter the electoral landscape; in 1978, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was formed under General Olusegun Obasanjo to manage the transition to the Second Republic. However, the return to military rule in 1983 led to FEDECO's dissolution. General Ibrahim Babangida later introduced the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in 1987, which organised elections until the controversial annulment of the 1993 presidential election. Under General Sani Abacha, NEC was replaced by the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON).

The establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998 under General Abdulsalami Abubakar marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's electoral administration. Born out of the national crisis that followed the annulled June 12, 1993, presidential election and the death of General Sani Abacha, INEC was tasked with managing the transition to civilian rule. Decree No. 17 of August

5, 1998 (later incorporated into Nigerian law by the National Assembly) formally established INEC with the mandate to organise, conduct, and oversee elections at all levels of government. Since 1999, INEC has remained the principal body responsible for election administration in Nigeria, striving to deliver credible and transparent elections amid persistent challenges of political interference, logistical constraints, and public trust deficits.

2.1.6 Structure and Composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), established under Section 153(1)(f) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), is Nigeria's principal Electoral Management Body (EMB). The Commission comprises the Chairman and twelve National Electoral Commissioners, representing the six geopolitical zones of the country, alongside thirty-seven Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) for each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). INEC operates through a central headquarters in Abuja, thirty-six state offices, the FCT office, and 774 Local Government Area offices, supported by a workforce exceeding 9,000 personnel nationwide. The Commission's administrative structure includes specialised departments such as Operations, Logistics, Voter Education, Political Party Monitoring, ICT, and Legal Services, all functioning under the leadership of the Chairman and guided by constitutional and statutory provisions.

The Chairman and National Commissioners serve five-year terms, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, ensuring regional representation and national balance. The Resident Electoral Commissioners oversee state-level electoral activities and report directly to the Commission. INEC's independence is constitutionally guaranteed to shield it from undue political influence. Its meetings, held privately, require a quorum of three Commissioners, with decisions made by majority vote. This structure ensures that the Commission remains operationally autonomous and capable of delivering credible elections across Nigeria's diverse electoral landscape.

2.1.7 The Role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Election Administration

INEC performs a comprehensive role in Nigeria's electoral process, encompassing the recruitment, training, and deployment of ad hoc and permanent electoral officials, critical to election credibility. The Commission collaborates with agencies like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and tertiary institutions to source personnel, formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that define roles in recruitment, welfare, and discipline. Through its Electoral Institute, INEC organises cascade training programmes for Master Trainers, Middle-Level Trainers, and Polling Unit Officials to ensure uniform understanding of electoral guidelines, conflict resolution, ethical conduct, and polling procedures nationwide.



In addition to staffing, INEC prioritises voter education and public enlightenment to foster an informed electorate capable of making responsible electoral choices. Voter sensitisation campaigns are delivered via print, electronic, and social media platforms, complemented by community outreach through civil society organisations, traditional institutions, and religious bodies. International partners such as the UNDP and the International Republican Institute have supported these initiatives. INEC's public engagement also includes anti-violence campaigns and the dissemination of voting procedures to enhance electoral participation and reduce apathy, particularly in rural areas. These multifaceted roles underscore INEC's centrality in promoting electoral integrity and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Empirical studies on election administration in Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, reveal varying degrees of autonomy, institutional strength, and effectiveness of Election Management Bodies (EMBs). Kambale (2011) highlights that the legitimacy of EMBs depends not only on constitutional guarantees of independence but also on sufficient resources and institutional reforms that enhance their operational capacity. Omotola (2009) presents a comparative analysis of Nigeria and Ghana, revealing that while both countries' EMBs are constitutionally established, Ghana's Electoral Commission exhibits higher institutionalisation, legitimacy, and autonomy compared to Nigeria's INEC, which suffers from political interference and weak intra-party democracy. Similarly, Hounkpe (2011) finds that Ghana's EMB enjoys broad public trust and autonomy, contributing to improved electoral credibility, unlike Nigeria, where election administration is marred by organisational weaknesses and public scepticism.

In Nigeria, Alao et al. (2013) assess INEC's performance and report progress in electoral transparency during the 2011 elections but highlight persistent challenges such as poor logistical preparation and security breaches. Adu-Gyamfi (2014) reinforces Ghana's Electoral Commission's perceived independence despite logistical shortcomings. Oromareghake (2013) argues that INEC's lack of professionalism, political interference, and disregard for the rule of law have hindered democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. These empirical findings suggest that while both nations have made democratic strides, structural deficiencies in Nigeria's election administration impede electoral credibility compared to Ghana's relatively stronger framework. However, a focused comparative study on INEC's administrative effectiveness in sub-national elections, such as those in Akwa Ibom State, remains underexplored.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts John Locke's Liberal Democratic Theory to frame the examination of election administration in Nigeria. Locke posits that political authority is derived from the consent of the governed, with governance structures designed to protect individual freedoms and promote public welfare. According to Ball (2020), liberal democracy is characterised by competitive party systems, regular free and fair elections, civil liberties, the rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances. These principles underpin electoral processes where citizens choose representatives, reinforcing government legitimacy. In Nigeria's context, these ideals necessitate an independent, competent EMB, such as INEC, to conduct transparent and credible elections that reflect the electorate's will.

The relevance of this theory lies in its emphasis on electoral integrity as foundational to sustainable democracy. Liberal democratic theory argues that credible elections are central to the social contract between the state and citizens, where the electorate holds political actors accountable through the ballot. This study applies this framework to assess INEC's capacity to administer elections autonomously and the extent to which political party actions affect electoral outcomes in Akwa Ibom State. The theory underscores that the consolidation of democracy requires adherence to transparent electoral procedures, impartial EMB operations, and minimal political interference.

The empirical literature reviewed indicates that election administration in Nigeria is fraught with structural, operational, and political challenges that undermine electoral credibility. INEC's performance is constrained by political interference, weak institutional capacity, and public distrust, unlike Ghana's relatively autonomous and trusted EMB. While there have been improvements in electoral transparency, as evidenced in the 2011 and 2015 general elections, substantial gaps remain in electoral management, party discipline, and collaboration with security agencies. The reviewed studies reveal limited focus on sub-national electoral dynamics, particularly regarding INEC's operational effectiveness and political party influence at the state level, such as Akwa Ibom State.

The application of Liberal Democratic Theory provides a suitable lens to explore these challenges by linking electoral integrity with democratic sustainability. The theory highlights the importance of institutional autonomy, rule-based electoral procedures, and the electorate's capacity to hold political actors accountable. This theoretical framework supports the study's objectives by emphasising the need for INEC's operational independence and effective regulation of political parties to ensure credible elections. Strengthening these aspects is essential for deepening democratic governance and fostering public confidence in Nigeria's electoral process.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design to collect data from a representative subset of the population. The study employed both primary and secondary data sources to ensure the reliability of information. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a 4-point Likert scale with 15 items, offering response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), while secondary data were sourced from textbooks, journals, newspapers, government publications, and credible internet sources. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts, including the project supervisor, whose feedback guided its final refinement for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot test involving 25 respondents who were not part of the main study, and their responses confirmed the consistency and dependability of the questionnaire.

The population for this study included INEC staff in Akwa Ibom State, State Executive members of the two major political parties (APC and PDP) as well as personnel from key security agencies (Police, NSCDC, and DSS) at their state headquarters in Uyo. Also, eligible voters and indigenous residents from three Local Government Areas (Mbo, Essien Udim, and Uruan) representing the three Senatorial Districts of Eket, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo respectively, were included. The 2022 populations for these LGAs were: Mbo (142,557), Essien Udim (205,361), and Uruan (173,077), while the institutional populations were: INEC staff (487), Police (624), NSCDC (318), DSS (232), APC (36), and PDP (39), totalling **522,722**.

The selection of these LGAs was based on their involvement in electoral disturbances during the 2019 and 2023 general elections, as well as their representation of the state's three major ethnic groups of Oron, Anang, and Ibibio. The inclusion of the security agencies was due to their statutory role in election security and administration, while APC and PDP represented the principal political actors in the state's electoral process.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were employed in this study. The quantitative approach was used to establish the relationship between two or more variables measurable numerically, with the Chi-square (χ^2) statistical technique applied to test each hypothesis at a 0.05 significance level. This method determined the significance of the interaction between the independent variable (election administration) and the dependent variable (democratic governance). The qualitative analysis also involved analytical, theoretical, and logical reasoning drawn from relevant literature, including journals, magazines, textbooks, and credible internet sources.

The Chi-square test formula goes as follows: $\chi^2 = \sum (fo - fe)^2 / Fe$ Where:

- χ^2 = Chi-square
- Fo = Observed frequencies
- Fe = Expected frequencies

Rule of Decision

The idea of a null is rejected if the estimated chi-square value exceeds the table value, and vice versa. The null expectation is accepted when the computed value is lower than the value in the table.

Data Analyses and Results

4.1 Data Analysis

Table 4.1: Respondents' opinion on the impact of political parties on election administration in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	In Akwa Ibom State, political parties	202	98	34	46	380
2.	are vital to the administration of elections.	(53.15)	(25.78)	(8.94)	(12.10)	380
3.	The efficiency for the political parties		(29.4)	(25.52)	(17.10)	
4.	can help Nigeria sustain its democratic	(27.89))		380
5.	system of government.	214				
	Political parties seem unwilling to accept Nigeria's efficient election organization.	(56.31)	103	23	40	380
	In any society, political parties are essential to the survival of democracy.	152(40)	(27.10)	(6.05)		380
	By securing a legitimate, open, free, and equitable electoral process and administration, political parties are supposed to strengthen democracy.	96	210	6	12	
		(25.26)	(55.26)	(1.57)	(3.15)	
			214	26	44	
			(56.31)	(6.84)	(11.57)	

Field Work (2024) is the source.

According to Table 4.1, the majority of respondents affirmed the importance of political parties in the administration of elections in Akwa Ibom State, with 53.15% strongly agreeing, 25.78% agreeing, 8.94% disagreeing, and 12.10% strongly disagreeing. On the sustainability of Nigerian democratic governance through the effectiveness of political parties, 27.89% strongly agreed, 29.4% agreed, 25.52% disagreed, and 17.10% strongly disagreed. Regarding political parties' unwillingness to

comply with electoral administration guidelines, 56.31% strongly agreed, 27.10% agreed, 6.05% disagreed, and 10.53% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, the view that political parties are essential to democratic survival was supported by 40% who strongly agreed, 55.26% who agreed, 1.57% who disagreed, and 3.15% who strongly disagreed. On the issue of political parties enhancing democracy by ensuring credible, transparent, free, and fair elections, 25.26% strongly agreed, 56.31% agreed, 6.84% disagreed, and 11.57% strongly disagreed.

Table 4.2: Thoughts of respondents on INEC's substantial contribution to Akwa Ibom State's preserving democratic governance

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
11.	INEC has always done their best to sustain democracy in Nigeria.	95 (25)	76 (20)	88 (23.15)	121 (31.84)	380
12.	INEC has been conducting credible election in Nigeria.	197 (51.84)	174 (45.78)	2 (0.52)	7 (1.84)	380
13.	BIVAS introduced by INEC has added to sustainable democratic governance.	108 (28.42)	72 (18.94)	96 (25.26)	104 (27.36)	380
14.	The actions of INEC as an institution has dashed the hope of democratic governance in Nigeria.	48 (12.63)	26 (6.84)	98 (25.78)	108 (28.42)	380
15.	The present-day INEC does not seems to add value to the sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria.	63 (16.57)	32 (8.42)	174 (45.78)	233 (61.31)	380

Source: Field Work (2024)

According to Table 4.2, 25% of respondents strongly agreed that INEC has consistently worked to uphold Nigerian democracy, while 20% agreed, 23.15% disagreed, and 31.84% strongly disagreed. On the credibility of elections conducted by INEC, 51.84% strongly agreed and 45.78% agreed, while only 0.52% and 1.84% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Regarding the contribution of BIVAS to sustainable democratic governance, 28.42% strongly agreed, 18.94% agreed, 25.26% disagreed, and 28.42% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 12.63% strongly agreed that INEC's actions have dashed hopes of democratic governance in Nigeria, 6.84% agreed, 25.78% disagreed, and 28.42% strongly disagreed. Lastly, 16.57% strongly agreed that the present-day INEC does not add value to sustainable democratic governance, 8.42% agreed, while 45.78% disagreed and 61.31% strongly disagreed.

4.2 Findings

Hypothesis One: Political parties are unlikely to have enormous impact on election management in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4.3: Observed frequencies for hypothesis 1

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Akwa Ibom State's election administration will likely to be significantly impacted by political parties.	202 (53.15)	98 (25.78)	34 (8.94)	46 (12.10)	380
2.	Sustenance of Nigeria can achieve democratic governance through its effectiveness of the political parties.	106 (27.89)	112 (29.4)	97 (25.52)	65 (17.10)	380
3.	Political parties do not want to adhere to the effectiveness of election administration in Nigeria.	214 (56.31)	103 (27.10)	23 (6.05)	40 (10.53)	380
Total		522	313	154	151	1,140

Source: Field Work (2024)

Result:

Fo	=	1140
Fe	=	1140.96
Calculated χ^2	=	159.31
d/f	=	9
P	=	0.05
Critical Value	=	16.9

Decision

Table 4.3 above indicates that, at the 0.05 level of significance, the calculated χ^2 amount of 159.31 is higher than the statistical table's critical value of 16.919. This suggests that the null hypothesis (Ho), which states that political parties are likely to have a major influence on Akwa Ibom State's election administration, is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant link between Akwa Ibom State's election management and INEC's efficiency.

Table 4.6: Observed frequencies for hypothesis II

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total
6.	INEC is consistently successful in the course of action of election administration in Akwa Ibom State.	198 (52.10)	171 (42.63)	4 (2.10)	7 (1.84)	380
7.	Lack of adequate planning impede effective administration if election in Nigeria.	195 (51.31)	162 (42.63)	8 (2.10)	15 (3.94)	380
8.	Voter registration is the basic process of election administration in Nigeria.	194 (51.05)	173 (45.52)	5 (1.31)	8 (2.10)	380
Total		587	506	17	30	1,140

Source: Field Work (2024)

Result:

Fo = 1140
Fe = 1139.94
Calculated χ^2 = 5.94
d/f = 9
P = 0.05
Critical Value = 16.9

Decision

Table 4.8 above demonstrates that at the 0.05 level of significance, the calculated χ^2 number of 5.94 is smaller than the crucial figure of 16.919. This suggests that the alternative hypothesis, according to which there is a significant correlation between the efficiency in INEC and the conduct of elections in Akwa Ibom State, is rejected in favour of the null hypothesis (Ho).

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The study, which examined the relationship between election administration and sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria using the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State as a case study, tested two hypotheses. Analysis of the first hypothesis led to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative, indicating a significant relationship between election administration and democratic governance. Conversely, for the second hypothesis, the null hypothesis was accepted, suggesting no significant relationship in that instance, while the alternative hypothesis was rejected based on the chi-square analysis.

The study's first hypothesis confirmed that political parties play a pivotal role in sustaining Nigeria's democracy, including in Akwa Ibom State. Political parties are responsible for mobilising, educating, organising, and inspiring citizens to participate in

the electoral process. However, the study revealed that political parties and their leaders often prioritise personal interests over national development, thereby weakening interparty competition and undermining democratic consolidation. Instead of issue-based campaigns, political actors engage in smear tactics, political violence, and, in extreme cases, assassination plots against opponents. This "do-or-die" mentality fosters election malpractice and political thuggery, damaging Nigeria's democratic environment. The winner-takes-all approach further marginalises opposition-supporting groups from resource allocation, breeding division and instability.

These findings are consistent with Yakubu (2020), who observed that politicians often view elections as a zero-sum game where holding office serves personal enrichment rather than public service. Consequently, unethical strategies, including violence and electoral fraud, are adopted regardless of human or legal costs, thus equating election preparation with war preparation.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the study found that INEC demonstrated reasonable capacity and compliance with electoral laws in the 2019 and 2023 elections, including pre-election planning, logistics deployment, and material distribution. Nonetheless, the Commission's performance was undermined by political interference, compromised security agencies, and biased electoral officials. While INEC ensured voter mobilisation and basic election day logistics, its failures in result collation, announcement, and the declaration of winners, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, exposed its institutional weaknesses.

These observations align with Inokoba and Kukumor (2019), who argued that INEC faces serious challenges such as electoral monetisation, insufficient security deployment, compromised electoral officers, and partisan misconduct by security agents and party representatives. Without reforms that ensure fairness, transparency, and equal participation, elections will continue to hinder rather than enhance Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

5 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2019 and 2023 presidential elections in Akwa Ibom State formed the basis of this study, which examined the role of political parties and the efficiency of INEC in sustaining democratic governance in Nigeria. The credibility of elections remains a central concern in Nigeria's democracy due to persistent challenges such as ballot box snatching, attacks on electoral officials, delays and disorder in the distribution of election materials, logistics failures, and compromised election results management. These recurring issues have raised concerns over INEC's capacity to conduct credible and transparent elections, particularly in the 2019 and 2023 general elections.

This study specifically addressed two objectives: first, to assess the role of political parties in election administration, and second, to evaluate INEC's efficiency in conducting presidential elections to promote sustainable democracy. Findings revealed

that political parties in Akwa Ibom State contributed to undermining credible electoral processes by prioritising personal and party interests over national democratic ideals, often resorting to violence and electoral malpractice rather than issue-based campaigns. INEC's role was also constrained by inadequate logistics, poor staff training and welfare, insufficient security provisions, weak coordination with stakeholders, and susceptibility to political interference. These limitations hindered its effectiveness in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections.

Guided by the liberal democratic theory, which emphasises transparency, fairness, and citizen participation as the foundation of democracy, the study highlighted the need for reforms in election administration. Such reforms include improving INEC's operational independence, enhancing staff capacity and welfare, securing electoral materials and officials, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and enforcing electoral laws to penalise violators. Addressing these gaps is essential for building trust in Nigeria's electoral process and sustaining democratic governance.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of political parties and the efficiency of INEC in ensuring sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria, focusing on the 2019 and 2023 presidential elections in Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that political parties in the state have not effectively supported the growth of democracy, as they continue to prioritise personal and partisan interests over national development. Rather than promoting issue-based campaigns, these parties often resort to electoral malpractice, incitement of violence, and the marginalisation of political opponents, thereby undermining the credibility of the electoral process and sustainable democracy.

Also, the study found that INEC's efforts at delivering credible elections have been constrained by logistical inadequacies, poorly trained staff, limited resources, weak coordination with security agencies, and political interference. While INEC has made attempts to secure electoral processes and improve election administration, these efforts have been repeatedly compromised by corruption among officials, collusion with politicians, and weak enforcement of electoral laws. The outcome is persistent voter distrust, flawed election outcomes, and a governance system that struggles to reflect the electorate's will.

For Nigeria to achieve sustainable democratic governance, political parties must adopt democratic practices that prioritise national interest and competitive but peaceful political rivalry. INEC must also be strengthened through improved staff welfare, comprehensive training, better security planning, and the strict enforcement of electoral laws. Adequate funding, transparency, and accountability in election management are essential to restoring public confidence and ensuring that elections are truly free, fair, and credible.



The active and sincere commitment of political parties to democratic principles and the institutional strengthening of INEC are critical to sustaining democracy in Nigeria. Without these, the electoral process will continue to be a source of instability rather than a pillar of governance and national development.

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