



Research Paper

# Independent National Electoral Commission and the Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Study of the 2019 Governorship Election in Rivers State

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the relationship between Independent National Electoral Commission and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria; using the 2019 Governorship Election in Rivers State as a case in point. The study employed a quantitative method using a study sample of 400 respondents across three Local government Areas (LGAs) who were registered voters during the 2019 Gubernatorial Elections in Rivers state. Analyses were done through Pearson Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Findings proved that Independent National Electoral Commission had significant effect ( $r = 0.7900, 0.000 < 0.05$ ) on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The results of the hypotheses tested revealed that roles of INEC had positive and significant effect ( $r = 0.680, 0.001 < 0.05$ ) on democratic consolidation. INEC's contributions had strong and positive significant effect ( $r = 0.715, 0.000 < 0.05$ ) on democratic consolidation. Electoral measures adopted by INEC had moderate and significant ( $r = 0.527, 0.000 < 0.05$ ) effect on electoral credibility. Finally, there is strong and positive significant relationship  $r = (r = 0.839, 0.000 < 0.05)$  between challenges faced by INEC and democratic consolidation. The author concluded that Independent National Electoral Commission statistically affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study recommended that INEC should strengthen electoral integrity by instituting measures to enhance the integrity of the electoral process, including robust systems for voter registration, transparent ballot counting, and secure result transmission. The government should also strengthen the independence of INEC by insulating it from undue political influence.

**Key words:** Commission, Electoral Commission, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Independent.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigeria has faced recurring challenges in conducting elections that are universally acknowledged as free, fair, peaceful and credible (Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010). Since the nation's independence, Nigeria has faced extensive grievances and objections whenever conducting elections. The primary factors contributing to this are the pervasive acts of violence and corrupt practices that have pervaded the nation's political past (Gberie, 2011). Throughout Nigeria's democratic history, violence, ballot theft at gunpoint, manipulation of voter lists, fabrication of election results, and the deployment of security personnel to intimidate both voters and political adversaries have plagued the electoral processes. The aforementioned actions have engendered animosity and invectiveness, thereby eroding the elections' credibility (Omotola, 2010) and this occurrence is largely due to inadequacies in the electoral administration processes.

Election management has an important and strategic place in establishing and maintaining democracy. This becomes imperative because the centrality of elections in liberal democratic politics presupposes the existence of a fair electoral administration. In 1999, INEC came into existence during the Fourth Republic due to this reason. Since its establishment, INEC has held six general elections and established four civilian governments.

Despite these apparent attempts at consolidating democracy, there remains a widespread belief, supported by worrying evidence that the quality of Nigeria's elections will deteriorate following the consecutive elections, as was the case with the general elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections.

The 2007 general election is widely considered one of the most tainted elections in Nigeria's recent memory (IFES, 2007). However, the pivotal elections of 2011 and 2015 saw improvements in election management and the overall credibility of the electoral process. This can be attributed in part to government's commitment to electoral reform, which resulted in the 2010 electoral law.

Various deficiencies persist in election administration, including the uneven distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), defective card readers, inefficient tabulation procedures, and lack of transparent results recording and announcement processes. There was a general expectation that the electoral process would further improve after 2015. However, stakeholders were deeply disappointed by repeated failures in the 2019 general election. Most notable was INEC's last-minute decision to postpone the 2019 elections hours before voting began due to delays in distributing election materials; violence and insecurity in elections, and the prevalence of vote buying. This administrative shortcoming further eroded stakeholder confidence in INEC's electoral management capabilities.

The crisis of democratic consolidation through the electoral process in Nigeria is often as a result of the challenges of weak institutions and the Independent National Electoral Commission which is the national body charged with the responsibility of conducting elections is faced with an arduous task of organising credible elections in the face of daunting challenges confronting it. This study therefore seeks to assess the manner in which the Independent National Electoral Commission contributed to the democratic development of Nigeria by using the 2019 Gubernatorial Elections in Rivers State as a case in point.

This study is aimed at investigating the nexus between the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria with a focus on the 2019 governorship election in Rivers State. The study's specific objectives include, to:

- i. Examine the roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the impact of INEC's contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The following questions guided the paper:

- i. What are the roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria?
- ii. How do INEC's contributions impact democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

The paper also tested the following hypotheses:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between roles of INEC and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the INEC's contributions and democratic consolidation in Nigeria

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopted Structural-functionalist Theory as the theoretical framework. Several scholars, including Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Émile Durkheim (1893), Talcott Parsons (1937), and Robert Merton (1949), contributed to the development of the structural functionalist theory, which serves as the foundation for this investigation. Comte established the foundation for functionalist ideology through his analogy of society to a living organism, wherein each component plays a functional role in the whole. Whenever Durkheim aimed to comprehend "facts" of society such as suicide rates, he applied this theoretical framework. According to Durkheim's 1893 assertion, a society is defined by its interdependent institutions, relationships, roles, and norms, all of which serve to sustain it. Each of these components is essential for the effective functioning of society and the existence of all other elements. Parsons developed the AGIL model, an intricate framework designed to facilitate the study of social processes. This concept underscored the importance of social institutions and their collaborative efforts in maintaining societal stability. Society, in his opinion, is a system that must preserve its cultural patterns, adapt to its surroundings, and accomplish its objectives (AGIL).

The principal areas of emphasis in structural functional analysis are "structures" and "functions." Applications involving structural functional analysis give birth to three fundamental inquiries: (a) Which are the most fundamental functions that a specific system is designed to fulfil? (b) What is the anticipated approach to accomplishing the fundamental duties? (c) The structures that, under specific conditions, are anticipated to carry out the fundamental functions are mentioned Odoziobodo, 2015 p. 173 ( as cited in Namu 2020). Structural functionalism posits that societal change transpires as an adaptive reaction to duress within social systems. A disruption to a cohesive component of a social system results in that component becoming incompatible with the remaining components. The remaining sections modify themselves to accommodate this disagreement ([www.britannica.com/topic/structural-functionalism](http://www.britannica.com/topic/structural-functionalism)). Merton initially coined the terms "functions" and "dysfunction" to refer to this function within a system. Merton (1949) provides a definition of the term "functions" as the outcomes that enable the modification or adaptation of a system. Conversely, the term "dysfunction" pertains to the consequences that impede the system's ability to adapt or undergo change.

According to Cherry (cited in Namu 2020), a system is an intricate entity composed of multiple components. Bertalanffy added it as an assemblage of components that are engaged in reciprocal communication and influence. Varma (1975) posits that an entity can be classified as a system if its components are structurally interconnected and engage in distinct processes of interaction. In essence, the outcomes of a given system may be deemed functional or dysfunctional, contingent upon the course of action implemented. The author contends that structure is equally as significant in structural functional analysis as the concept of function (p. 46). The structure of a system is what enables it to perform its functions, whereas the focus of function is on the outcomes and procedures of a sequence of operations. While scholars such as Bingham Powell and Gabriel Almond compared and contrasted national political systems using functionalism, Niklas Luhmann developed a more theoretical theory that emphasizes differentiation and communication as key functional mechanisms in social systems by building on the work of Parsons.

Structural functionalism is therefore adopted as a theoretical framework so that possible ways of survival of a system can be discovered. The analysis is primarily directed towards the functions a structure (institutions) like INEC should perform as regards strengthening Nigeria's democracy and eroding chances of reversal.

In the application of this theory as a framework for analysis of a political system like Nigeria, it is important to note that a political system comprises of many structures (institutions), functioning interdependently for the survival of the system.

Nigeria operates a democratic political system which was ushered in by the fourth republic elections in 1999. To sustain this democracy, certain institutions (structures) have to be in existence to perform certain roles or functions; an elected government comprise of the President, Governors and the Legislators. Also there has to be a structure or institution charged with the role of organizing elections for this government to emerge. This institution is the Independent National Electoral Commission and the function it performs is that of conducting elections into the various elective offices. There are also other structures or institutions of the society that INEC function in synergy with, they include; the judiciary, political parties, security agencies, civil society organizations, etc. In the course of performing their different roles, some intended or unintended, identified or unidentified consequences are apparent which either enhanced or lessened democratic practice.

### **III. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

#### **3.1 Concept of Election**

Elections are a fundamental component of democratic governments, according to the consensus of individuals around the world, because they provide citizens with a voice in domestic matters and a feeling of empowerment (Adesote and Abimbola, 2014). The establishment of a democratic nation is contingent upon the conduct of democratic and well-organized elections, which are fundamental to the process (Araba & Braimah, 2015). However, sovereignty, or the ability to rule, derives from the confidence that citizens have in their representatives through the electoral system (Abubakar, 2015). Oladiran (2013) posits that for a government to function effectively and harmoniously, it must possess the legitimacy and backing of the people; these elements are supplied by elections. Moreover, elections facilitate the enforcement of accountability. A democratic election serves as the fundamental basis for accountable governance as it affords the populace an opportunity to exercise their power in legitimizing their government through the withdrawal or confirmation of its mandate (INEC, 2011). According to Obidiyan and Afolabi (2013), elections are a cluster of exercises transiting to the assignment of individual(s) out of numerous to fill in statuses of power. They claimed that elections are an excellent method to increase administrative turnover, obtain a more representative government, and improve the functioning of democracy. A valid method by which the public can appoint a representative to a public office is through an election. Elections have historically been the principal method by which representatives are selected in modern democracies (Britannica, Encyclopedia 2009). The electoral process is utilized to appoint individuals to positions of authority at the provincial, regional, legislative, and executive levels. Citizens are able to exercise their legitimate and fundamental right to elect their leaders and communicate their political and other preferences to the state through their participation in elections. Political legitimacy can be effectively established through the electoral process, as Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) astutely note as a tangible embodiment of the people's supreme authority. However, beyond the events of Election Day, there is much more to elections, as stated by Akindele (2011). A comprehensive strategy is incorporated, which incorporates activities that take place before, during, and after the election. His statement encompasses a wide range of topics, including the constitutional and legal structure of elections, the registration and functioning of political parties, the role of offline and online media, the eligibility requirements for candidates, the management of campaign finance, the participation of law enforcement, and the governing administration.

An election, as defined by Chukwuemeka (2012), is a process in which a collective of individuals selects an individual to occupy a public position. In this context, any assemblage of individuals can be deemed a "population"; this includes an entire nation, a sizable conference, a subset of members within an organization, or

even an organization that has opted to establish a hierarchical structure. The procedure through which the populace of a particular area selects a representative for positions of authority is thoroughly explicated and depicted in Onyeka's 2012 work. According to Onyeka, this occurs so that individuals can attain influential positions in local, state, and federal administrations. The electorate utilizes a formal electoral process to determine the members of the legislature, chief executive positions (including but not limited to the prime minister and deputy, governor and deputy, mayor or chairman and deputy, and those with similar duties in charge), and other political and public offices (Egobueze, 2020, p. 292). Villalon 1998 (as cited in Bot, 2022) astutely noted that numerous elections in Africa merely support the existing state of affairs by impeding the path toward transformation. Quasi-democratic administrations emerge in West Africa through the utilization of elections as political instruments to advance particular objectives (p. 16). Elections have the potential to effectively establish a representative government, in accordance with liberal democratic theory. It facilitates leadership transitions, encourages civic engagement, and empowers individuals, among other advantages (Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006). The research of Maduguegwu, Agudiegwu, Onyia Odoh, and Egbo (2020) provides support for this assertion through a citation of David's (1990) work. Elections are essential for the development of a stable democracy because they enable the populace to select the leaders they desire. To assess democratic consolidation, according to Uya (2008), the following conditions must exist: regular, unbiased elections, an environment characterized by constructive competition, and significant public engagement in these procedures (Odeh, 2022). When discussing Democratic Consolidation and the Independent National Election Commission, it is crucial to emphasize that the election process is fundamental to liberal democracies and can have a significant impact on them. The election outcomes significantly influence contemporary states. Moreover, elections afford the populace the opportunity to exercise their innate authority in selecting their leaders and determining the course of action for their government with regard to non-political issues. Through the process of democratic elections, citizens have the ability to exert their sovereignty and bestow legitimacy upon their government through the ability to renew or revoke its mandate. The aforementioned assertion serves as the fundamental pillar of a transparent and accountable government INEC, 2011 (as cited in Alfa, Ahmadu, and Adah, 2012).

### **3.2 Concept of Democracy**

The origins of democracy in its current form can be traced back to the ancient Greek metropolis of Athens. The phrase is derived from the Greek terms "Demos" and "Kratos" and signifies "people's power" or "authority of the masses." Delegation of authority from the government to the people is a characteristic feature of democratic systems. In 1809–1865, Abraham Lincoln, the nineteenth president of the United States, proclaimed, "The government of those who live, by the people, and for the people" (Merkel, 1999:29–30). This notion is a more condensed form of traditional democracy. However, this notion is inadequate as it fails to obscure the constraints, personal freedoms, and opportunity for engagement within democratic establishments. Hence, Egobueze (2020) conceptualizes democracy as "a government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system" (p.145). All eligible individuals have a voice in the formulation, implementation, and interpretation of laws, regulations, and policies through their elected representatives or directly in a democratic system. Democratic independence is facilitated by a diverse array of cultural, social, and economic circumstances (Egobueze, Ogele, & Ajunwo, 2020).

A concise definition of democracy was presented by Larry Diamond (2004) in his lecture entitled "What is Democracy?" The four pillars of democracy as a system of government are delineated by him:

- i. A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections.
- ii. The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life.
- iii. Protection of the human rights of all citizens.
- iv. A rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Democracy implies manifold specialties to various people, it could be a medium for authority contestation and not the slightest dignity wrangle. Nwoye 2001 as cited in (Bolaji, 2013) points out that democracy is premised on adequate manifestation and participation, counting that while the explicitness of democracy differs cross-culturally, there are yet fundamental underlying attributes that are typical and authentic to all democratic strategies which comprise: unrestricted elections, plurality rule, participation of political parties, unimpeachable tribunal, and parliament.

Likewise, according to Bangura (2013) the term "democracy" is utilized to explain three distinct political systems. 'According to him, this method of administration has to do with the rule of multiple and also an indication of the actual appeals of the populace. These traits of democracy distinguish it from other structures of administration that are arbitrary and which do not take cognizance of the yearnings and fascinations of the populace in whatever globe be it in the preference of who depicts them in administration or in all-around decision-making.

Alani 2003 (as cited Abah and Nwokwu, 2015) contends that democracy was an electoral system that places importance on diversity and plurality. This acknowledges the influence of numerous societal factors on any given political organization. These forces are welcomed and even encouraged to collaborate and contend with one another by a democratic government.

To Ayinde 2004 (as cited Abah and Nwokwu, 2015), democracy as a political practice that guarantees representation, accountability and participation under conditions of liberty provided by the rule of law.

Abbass (2008) sees democracy as “a system of government elected by persons, on periodic elections”. To the author, it is the system of government which creates room for electorates to periodically make informed choices about the numerous political contestants to be recruited to administer the generality of the people. Corroborating this position, Abah and Nwokwu (2015) opined that the most dominant principle of democracy is the unfettered freedom available for people to effectively participate in the governance of all affairs that have direct bearing on them through periodic, free, fair, credible and transparent elections.

Dahl 2002 (as cited in Bentil, 2017) argues that democracy does not only include free, fair, and competitive elections but also the freedoms that render them truly meaningful. He further explained that these freedoms include freedom of organisation and freedom of expression. Sharma 2007 as cited (Bolaji, (2013) opined that democracy means among others the involvement of the people in the running of the political, socio-economic and cultural affairs of the society. In agreement, Osaghae 1995 (as cited in Abubakar, 2015) notes that democracy in all its versions, whether liberal, capitalist, or socialist, share the fundamental objective of power belonging to the people.

Certain elements must be evident before a state can be said to be democratic. Newton and Van Deth 2008 (as cited in Odeh, 2022) stated in terms these elements of democracy as follows: citizens’ involvement in political decision making, equality among citizens, some degree of liberty granted to citizenry, and an electoral system of majority rule.

### **3.3 Concept of Democratic Consolidation**

O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986 (as cited in Odeh, 2022) submit that democratic consolidation involves "the point at which democratic procedures, actors, and behaviours become routine and widely accepted as legitimate and binding (p.90)". This definition highlights the normalization and acceptance of democratic practices and norms by both political actors and the general population. Notwithstanding the imprecise nature of the concept, intellectuals have exploited various explanations most and most accept the original understanding of the concept as being connected with the challenge of preserving and extending the life expectancy of new democracies, of building immunity against the threat of regression to authoritarianism and ‘reverse waves’.

Democratic consolidation is anchored on the assurance of all societal stakeholders that democratic government is the best form of government for their society and with no better alternative form of government (Ikpe, 2011). In agreement with this position, Yagboyaju (2013, as cited in Okeke, 2015) noted that democracy not only allows mass participation, by way of encouraging the electorate to participate in the selection of their representatives, but also that democracy is nourished by transparency and accountability in public administration. Hence, there is a need for its preservation.

Beetham 1994 (as cited in Odeh, 2022) defined democratic consolidation as the deliberate attempt “of making nascent democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian repression and of building protective walls against eventual reversal waves”. In the same perspective, Schedler 1998 (cited in Odeh, 2022) views democratic consolidation as the process of making a nascent democratic regime secure in order to achieve sustainability of such regime, and to keep them immune from real or perceived threat of authoritarian regression. It is the condition of being able to avoid the regression of democracy into a non-democratic or semi-democratic political order Schedler 2001a (as cited in KIM Hyung-Chul, 2017).

Democratic consolidation depicts the “habituation phase” (Rustow 1970, 358) that follows democratization. It is a process during which the new democratic rules of the game become progressively routinized and embraced by the relevant political actors (Filip Kostelka, 2017). Similarly, Linz and Stepan 1999, as cited in (KIM Hyung-Chul, 2017) define democratic consolidation “as the process by which democracy, as a complex framework of institutions, rules, formalized incentives and controls, emerges as the only acceptable game in political society”.

According to Diamond as cited in (Alfa, Ahmadu and Adah, 2012), democratic consolidation implies when the profoundness and genuineness of democracy in its diverse proportion have been enhanced: “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent”.

KIM Hyung-Chul (2017) describes democratic consolidation as having two core elements: political institutionalization, and the internalization of democratic values and rules as cultural values. By explanation, the

process of democratic consolidation involves the institutionalization of democratic rules and processes, and also the habitualization, regularization and internalization of democracy's values, norms, and rules in the political and socioeconomic spheres. Simply put, it means that both the political actors and the people accept democratic rules and processes as the "only game".

For Odoh and Aro 2016, (as cited in Maduguegwu, Agudiegwu, Onyia, Odoh and Egbo, 2020), democratic consolidation had over the years lured the vast curiosity of intellectuals and, it indicates the institutionalization of democratic culture and democratization of rule. Hence when democracy is consolidated, it comes to being impartial in the perception and assessment of the citizens. However, Odo and Aro's perspectives forgot to bring in detailed explicitness of what is institutionalized with respect to culture, and the characteristics of what the public bore as "legitimacy" (Maduguegwu et al, 2020). In a shot to scrutinize the importance of legitimate features in democratic consolidation, Ikpe 2011, (as cited in Maduguegwu et al, 2020) buttressed that the consolidation of democracy is apparently, the method of attaining comprehensive legitimization, such that all substantial political participants of both the elite and populace acknowledge that democratic administration is pleasing for their society other than any different practical recourse they can envision. This standpoint however has been criticized for its lack of clarity and consumed with ambiguity Maduguegwu et al, 2020). Thus emphasizing the prominence of political culture Diamond 1999 as cited in (KIM Hyung-Chul, 2017 p.40) described democratic consolidation as the "regularization, internalization and veneration of democratic processes and norms, or the existence of legitimacy and widespread, strong belief in democracy".

According to Egobueze, et al, (2020), democratic consolidation suggests a state where "democracy is institutionalized, utilized and normalized and when democratic traditions are exercised and the people see democratic dividends radiating in their environment".

Democratic consolidation has also been viewed as the general acceptance of rules to engender political participation and competition, and where election is perceived not only as instrument of democratic succession, but as a means of achieving democratic consolidation (Bratton, 1981, cited in Maduguegwu et al, 2020).

Payne and Nasser 2003, cited in (Maduguegwu et al, 2020), opined that democratic consolidation is a long term process that continued after countries have made transition to democracy. It therefore involves behavioural, attitudinal and institutional changes. Behaviourally, a democratic regime is consolidated when there is no significant effort to change the government by force. Attitudinally, democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of the population believes that democratic institutions and procedures are the most appropriate for their society. Institutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when society as a whole including the government, believes that, there are certain laws, procedure and institutions that must be used to govern the society.

The argument of the Payne and Nasser suggest democratic consolidation as an advancement of the democratization process. Logically, from their point of view it can be stated that democratization is first achieved before democratic consolidation. Also, evident in the above view is the fact that democratization may be revolutionary, but the achievement of democratic consolidation entails an evolutionary process that is systematically progressive (Odeh, 2022). Supporting this position, KIM Hyung-Chul (2017) noted, "democratic consolidation does not mark the completed state of democratic transition, rather it is the process of completion by which the democratic institutions and processes created through democratic transition are given value by participants and become stable" (p.41).

O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986 as cited in (Odeh, 2022) outlines multiple requirements that are essential for the attainment of democratic consolidation. These include: regime legitimacy, institutionalization of democratic values, absence of violent and uncivil non-state actors, subordination of military authority to civilian regime, elimination of all forms of authoritarianism in governance, existence of multi-party systems, enactment and effective enforcement of electoral rules, unhindered democratic regime successions, devolution of state powers to subnational units, eradication of poverty and sustainable economic development, independent judiciary, and existence of an unbiased and independent electoral umpire (p.91).

### **3.4 Concept of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the national electoral body in Nigeria which is responsible for the overall supervision and conduct of general elections in the country (Babayo, Mohd & Bakri, 2017).

Electoral bodies existed before Nigeria's independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. The ECN conducted all elections First Republic (1960-1966) and was dissolved immediately after the first military coup in 1966. A new electoral commission named the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was then established in 1978, by the military regime to conduct the 1979 General Elections. The FEDECO lasted as the electoral umpire in the country until after the military coup of 1983 which ended the Second Republic (1979-1983) in Nigeria and introduced another military rule for many decades (INEC, 2017)

The Military Regime of General Ibrahim Babangida established the National Electoral Commission (NEC) In 1990, which conducted the controversial June 12, 1991 Presidential Election that was annulled by the same Military Regime leading to the emergence of what was called the “Aborted Third Republic” in Nigerian political history (Babayo, et. al, 2017). As commonly done by the military dictators, NEC was disbanded by the military regime of General Sani Abacha and then established the National Electoral Commission (NECON) in an attempt to usher in another civilian rule which never came to reality as a consequence of the death of General Sani Abacha.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was set up in 1998 by General Abdulsalam Abubakar’s interim military regime after dissolving the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), established in 1995 by General Sanni Abacha. The state’s domination and control of the electoral umpire and politicization of the body made the Abubakar’s regime sought to make the Commission independent in structure and in terms of financing and also to emphasize the neutrality and impartiality of the body. The legal existence of the commission was incorporated into the 1999 Constitution which became operational on May 29, 1999 (Constitution, 1999 as Amended).

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design used for this paper is a survey research which best serves to answer the questions and the purposes of the study. According to Akujuru and Enyioku (2019) “Survey research is a method of having a systematic, intense, accurate and purposeful observation of behaviours, traits, or opinion and describing same as precisely as possible”. In survey research a group of people are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people considered being representative of the entire group. Questionnaires were to ascertain the empirical validity of this study. The study was carried out in Rivers state located in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

The study adopted probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Specifically, questionnaire respondents were drawn using random sampling. The sample for the study was drawn from the electorates/eligible voters of the three Senatorial districts of Rivers state. The sample size of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The data for this exercise was obtained using quantitative method.

Validity and reliability are two important factors considered in a research whether quantitative or qualitative. To ensure validity of the research instruments, the items of drafted questions for the questionnaire were sent to two experts in the field of study for measurement and evaluation, which ensured that questions were clearly appropriate and covered the aim and objective of the study. While test re-test reliability method were used to test the reliability of the study instruments in this study. A reliability index of 0.73 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

#### **V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

##### **5.1 Data Presentation**

Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents as indicated in the sample size. The results of the questionnaire (survey) distributed and retrieved are shown in Table 4.1 below:

**Table 1: Number and Percentages of Questionnaires Distributed and Retrieved**

<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
No. Distributed	400	100
No. Returned	390	97.5%
No. Not Returned	10	2.5%
Not Properly Filled	26	6.7%
Properly filled	364	91%

**Source:** Research Survey (2023)

Table 1 above showed the distribution and collection of questionnaire sent to the respondents. It was shown that 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents representing 100%. 390 copies of questionnaire representing 97.5% were retrieved from the respondents; however, 10 copies of questionnaire representing 2.5% were not returned. 364 (91%) of the returned questionnaire were properly filled while 26 (6.7%) were not properly filled. Hence, 364 (91%) of the properly filled were declared valid and fit for analysis.

##### **5.2 Analysis of Data**

###### ***Data on Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria***

In the questionnaire, five items were stated on the roles of INEC during the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Rivers State and the responses are presented as follows:

**Table 2: Item one Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	23.68	23.68	23.68
Great Extent	35.96	35.96	59.64
Low Extent	10.96	10.96	70.60
Very Low Extent	25.02	25.02	95.62
Not at all	4.38	4.38	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

From the result, item one sought to evaluate whether INEC still remain as significant anchors of democracy providing the citizenry with the opportunity to electioneering processes. The result showed that 23.68% chose very great extent (VGE), 35.96% opted for great extent (GE), 10.96% chose low extent (LE), 25% opted for very low extent (VLE) and 4.38% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 3: Item two on Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	31.14	31.14	31.14
Great Extent	40.78	40.78	71.92
Low Extent	9.21	9.21	81.13
Very Low Extent	11.84	11.84	92.99
Not at all	7.03	7.03	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

The second item sought to determine whether the inability of a major political party (APC) to feature a governorship candidate on the INEC register for the 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State in the ballot box undermine the role of INEC in the electioneering process. The result showed that 31.14% chose very great extent (VGE), 40.78% chose great extent (GE), 9.21% chose low extent (LE), 11.84% chose very low extent (VLE) and 7.03% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 4: Item three on Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	44.73	44.73	44.73
Great Extent	31.14	31.14	75.87
Low Extent	9.64	9.64	85.51
Very Low Extent	7.04	7.04	92.55
Not at all	7.45	7.45	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

The third item sought to determine whether INEC is a reliable vehicles for restoring confidence in political participation amongst the electorates. The result showed that 44.73% opted for very great extent (VGE), 31.14% chose great extent (GE), 9.64% opted for low extent (LE), 7.01% chose very low extent (VLE) and 17 7.45% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 5: Item four on Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	43.42	43.42	43.42
Great Extent	41.22	41.22	84.64
Low Extent	9.21	9.21	93.85
Very Low Extent	3.94	3.94	97.79
Not at all	2.19	2.19	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

The fourth item sought to determine whether INEC should be held responsible for some hitches during the 2019 gubernatorial election which was somewhat submerged with spiraling malpractices and violence in the electioneering process. The result showed that 43.42% chose very great extent (VGE), 41.22% opted for great extent (GE), 9.21% chose low extent (LE), 3.94% chose very low extent (VLE) and 2.19% chose not at all (NA).



**Table 6: Item five on Roles of INEC in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	46.05	46.05	46.05
Great Extent	42.13	42.13	88.15
Low Extent	6.57	6.57	94.72
Very Low Extent	4.38	4.38	99.13
Not at all	0.87	0.87	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

The last item (Item 5) sought to determine whether respondents believe that the role of INEC officials during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State showcased the interest of the voters. The result showed that 46.05% opted for very great extent (VGE), 42.10% chose great extent (GE), 6.57% chose low extent (LE), 4.38% chose very low extent (VLE) and 0.87% chose not at all (NA).

**Data on the impact of INEC’s contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.**

In the questionnaire, four items were stated on the contributions of INEC and the responses are presented as follows:

**Table 7: Item one on the impact of INEC’s contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	30.70	30.70	30.70
Great Extent	38.15	38.15	68.85
Low Extent	20.17	20.17	89.02
Very Low Extent	4.82	4.82	93.86
Not at all	6.14	6.14	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

From the result, item one sought to evaluate whether the respondents believe that INEC still lag behind in conducting a free, fair, and credible democratic elections. The result showed that 30.70% opted for very great extent (VGE), 38.15% chose great extent (GE), 20.17% chose low extent (LE), 4.82% chose very low extent (VLE) and 6.14% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 8: Item two on the impact of INEC’s contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	46.05	46.05	46.05
Great Extent	41.22	41.22	87.27
Low Extent	8.33	8.33	95.60
Very Low Extent	3.94	3.94	99.57
Not at all	0.43	0.43	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

Also, the second item sought to determine whether the respondents believe that majority of INEC staff were not well remunerated and not provided with adequate security during the election. The result showed that 46.05% chose very great extent (VGE), 41.22% chose great extent (GE), 8.33% chose low extent (LE), 3.94% chose very low extent (VLE) and 0.43% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 9: Item three on the impact of INEC’s contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	8.77	8.77	8.77
Great Extent	14.03	14.03	22.80
Low Extent	38.59	38.59	61.39
Very Low Extent	20.61	20.61	82.02
Not at all	17.98	17.98	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Survey Research (2023).

The third item sought to determine whether Logistics support for INEC were not adequately sufficient for the 2019 governorship election in Rivers State. The result showed that 8.77% chose very great extent (VGE),

14.03% chose great extent (GE), 38.59% chose low extent (LE), 20.61% chose very low extent (VLE) and 17.98% chose not at all (NA).

**Table 10: Item four on the impact of INEC’s contributions on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.**

5-point Likert scale	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Great Extent	53.50	53.50	53.50
Great Extent	39.91	39.91	93.41
Low Extent	0.43	4.38	97.79
Very Low Extent	1.75	1.75	99.57
Not at all	0.43	0.43	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Source:** Survey Research (2023).

The fourth item above sought to determine whether the respondents believe that INEC is faced with weak institutional framework and organizational arrangement. The result showed that 53.50% chose very great extent (VGE), 39.91% chose great extent (GE), 0.43% opted for low extent (LE), 1.75% chose very low extent (VLE) and 0.43% chose not at all (NA).

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Test of Hypothesis 1**

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation.

**Table 11: Correlation Analysis on the Extent and Direction of the Relationship between Roles of INEC and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

		Elections	Democratic consolidation
Roles of INEC	Pearson Correlation	2	.680**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	364	364
Democratic Consolidation	Pearson Correlation	.680**	2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	364	364

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Survey Research (2023).

Table 4.10 shows the correlation analysis on the extent and direction of the relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The table showed a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.680^{**}$  with a correspondent significant/probability value of 0.001, from the classification of r value in table 4.10, the value is strong. Since the Significant/Probability Value (PV)  $0.001 < 0.05$  (critical value), the study therefore accepts reject the null hypothesis and concludes significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation. The implication of this is that if INEC intensifies her electoral roles in Nigeria, there would be a corresponding increase in democratic consolidation since the correlation coefficient is positive. Thus, the analysis concluded that there is a strong and positive significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation.

**Test of Hypothesis 2**

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the INEC’s contributions and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

**Table 12: Correlation Analysis on the Extent and Direction of the Relationship between INEC’s contributions and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria.**

		Roles of INEC	Democratic Consolidation
Roles of INEC	Pearson Correlation	2	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	364	364
Democratic Consolidation	Pearson Correlation	.715**	2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

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\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Survey Research (2023).

Table 4.11 shows the correlation analysis on the extent and direction of the relationship between INEC's contributions and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The table showed a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.715^{**}$  with a correspondent significant/probability value of 0.000, from the classification of  $r$  value in table 4.11, the value is strong. Since the Significant/Probability Value (PV)  $0.000 < 0.05$  (critical value), the researcher therefore reject the null hypothesis and concluded significant relationship between INEC's contributions and democratic consolidation. The implication of this is that if INEC intensifies her contributions in the conduct of elections, there would be a corresponding increase in democratic consolidation since the correlation coefficient is positive. Thus the analysis showed that there is a strong and positive significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation.

## 5.2 Discussion of Findings

### *Independent National Electoral Commission and Democratic Consolidation*

Table 4.10 was concerned with the analysis on the extent and direction of the relationship between Independent National Electoral Commission and Democratic Consolidation. It was found that there is a positive and strong relationship between Independent National Electoral Commission and Democratic Consolidation; thus INEC statistically affects Democratic Consolidation. The analysis in table 4.9 showed the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.790^{**}$  significant at  $pv = 0.000 < 0.05$ . Also table 4.14 showed the Pearson's correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.000$  and coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.844$  which indicate that 84.4% variation on Democratic consolidation is explained by the changes in the electoral activities of INEC. Also, INEC had a calculated t-value of  $|61.329| > t\text{-tab}(0.05, 211) = 1.25$  and a corresponding significant/probability of  $0.00 < 0.05$  level of significance, hence the result indicated that there is a significant relationship between INEC and Democratic Consolidation. The finding of this study is in line with the structural functionalist theory adopted for this study and traceable to the works of scholars such as: Émile Durkheim (1893); Talcott Parsons (1937); Robert Merton (1949) among others. The Structural functionalism was adopted as a theoretical framework so that possible ways of survival of a system can be discovered through public institutions. The analysis is primarily directed towards the functions a structure (institutions) like INEC should perform as regards strengthening Nigeria's democracy and eroding chances of reversal. The application of this theory as a framework for analysis of a political system like Nigeria, it is important to note that a political system comprises of many institutions, functioning interdependently for the survival of the system. Therefore, to sustain this democracy, certain institutions (structures) have to be in existence to perform certain roles or functions. Also, there has to be a structure or institution charged with the role of organizing elections for this government to emerge. That institution in the case of Nigeria is the Independent National Electoral Commission and the function it performs is that of conducting elections into the various elective offices.

The significant findings of this study is consistent with the opinion of Ita and Atai (2018), in their 'Comparative Assessment of Electoral Management Bodies and Administration of Elections in Nigeria and Ghana'. The guiding objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of electoral management bodies in the administration and conduct of elections in West Africa using Nigeria and Ghana as case studies. Relying on descriptive analysis, the paper noted that whereas Ghana has made impressive progress in the democratization process in terms of effective administration and the overall quality of elections, Nigeria is yet to record such impressive progress. The outcome of the current study is also in line with Larry (2015), while examining the powers and responsibilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in the conducts of elections in Nigeria; particularly, that of the 2015 general election. The study adopted the Content analytical approach in analysing data gathered. The study argued that in spite of the general acceptance of the 2015 presidential election as free, fair and transparent, there were observed flaws that plagued the election. However, it was indeed, an improvement on past elections in Nigeria. The study recommends amongst others; that INEC needs to be truly independent in all ramifications to discharge its duties impartially so as to ensure credible elections and enthrone sustainable democracy in the country; the new government should tackle the issues of corruption, security, unemployment and poverty frontally.

### *Roles of INEC and Democratic Consolidation*

There is a strong and positive significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation on the test of  $H_{01}$  as shown in table 4.10 with the correlation coefficient value of  $r = 0.680^{**}$  and  $pv = 0.001 < 0.05$ . The finding of this hypotheses is consistent with structural functionalist theory adopted for this study which is traced to the works of scholars such as:Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Émile Durkheim (1893); Talcott Parsons (1937); Robert Merton (1949) among others. Durkheim (1893) in particular adopted

this framework when he analyzed social "facts" like suicide rates to reveal underlying social functions. The thought of Durkheim (1893) was based on the argument that the society is characterised by certain institutions, relationships, roles, and norms that together serves a common purpose; which is the sustenance of the society, and each is indispensable for the continued existence of the others and of society as a whole.

This finding is also in agreement with a study conducted by Udeuhele (2019) while investigating Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Inconclusive Elections and Democratic Consolidation: A Study of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. Findings as regards INEC inconclusive elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria revealed that the bane of inconclusive elections in Nigeria is due largely to the intensified antagonistic measures deployed by politicians to consolidate political power as well as the role of electoral management body lacking credibility with inherent administrative lacunas which also fan the ambers of inconclusive election in Nigeria. This is detrimental to democratic consolidation and as such needs to be fortified against vices that undermine its independence, organizational efficiency and productivity.

Specifically, results of analysis proved that Independent National Electoral Commission statistically affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Based on the hypotheses tested, the following findings were also noted:

- i. There is a strong and positive (0.680, 003) significant relationship between roles of INEC and democratic consolidation on the test of  $H_{01}$ .
- ii. There is a strong and positive (0.715, 0.000) significant relationship between contributions of INEC and democratic consolidation on the test of  $H_{02}$ .

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed in general that roles of INEC, contributions made by INEC, electoral measures and challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission statistically affect democratic consolidation and electoral credibility in Nigeria. Therefore, Independent National Electoral Commission has significant impact on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

These findings can confirm that the journey towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria is intricately linked with the performance and effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general. While INEC has made significant strides in organizing elections and implementing reforms, several controversial issues persist. Challenges related to electoral transparency, voter registration, technology adoption, violence prevention, political independence, and resource allocation continue to shape the discourse around the credibility of the electoral process.

Addressing these challenges is imperative for sustaining public trust and confidence in the democratic system. INEC's commitment to continuous improvement, transparency, and responsiveness to public concerns will be pivotal in overcoming these controversies. As Nigeria strives for a stable and consolidated democracy, it is essential that all stakeholders, including INEC, to engage in constructive dialogue and collaborative efforts to enhance the integrity of the electoral process and uphold the principles of democracy. Ultimately, the success of democratic consolidation in Nigeria hinges on the ability to navigate and resolve these contentious issues, fostering an environment where citizens can actively participate and trust in the democratic institutions that shape the nation's political landscape.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proffers the following recommendations:

- i. INEC should improve its capacity in electoral management by implementing steps to bolster the integrity of the electoral process, such as implementing robust systems for voter registration, ensuring transparent ballot counting, and establishing secure result transmission mechanisms.
- ii. INEC contributes significantly to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Hence, government should strengthen the independence of INEC by insulating it from undue political influence and political stakeholders should always cooperate with INEC in carrying its roles.

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