UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.20 (2);
July-December, 2025 https://unijerps.org
2023 Impact Factor: **6.834;** 2022 ***Impact Factor***: 5.156; ***2021 Impact Factor: 5.641;***
2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *Indexing and Impact Factor URL: http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363*

EFFECT OF ELECTORAL REFORMS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC) IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

Nasir Olarewaju Ayilara[1]
National Open University of Nigeria
Email: ayilaranasir@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study stemmed from the critical need to understand the impact of electoral reforms on institutional efficiency and election credibility in Nigeria, particularly in Oyo State. The study examined the effect of electoral reforms on the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Oyo State, Nigeria. Utilizing a descriptive survey and documentary research design, the study targeted a population of stakeholders involved in electoral processes, including INEC staff, political party members, civil society organizations, and voters, with an estimated population of 10,000 individuals. A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size determination technique. Participants were selected using simple random sampling to ensure representativeness. Data collection involved primary methods through a structured questionnaire designed to capture insights on electoral reforms, operational efficiency, technological advancements, and election credibility, complemented by secondary data from organizational reports and publications. Descriptive statistics, including frequency tables and percentages, were used for data presentation, while inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation analysis, tested the study hypotheses. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between electoral reforms and INEC's operational efficiency ($r = 0.72$, $p = 0.001$), demonstrating that reforms significantly enhance operational efficiency. Additionally, technological advancements were shown to significantly improve election credibility ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.003$). These statistically significant relationships led to the rejection of null hypotheses and acceptance of alternative hypotheses. The study concludes that electoral reforms and technological advancements are pivotal in enhancing INEC's performance and ensuring credible elections in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Keywords: electoral reforms, institutional efficiency, election credibility, INEC's operational efficiency and INEC's performance

Introduction

The efficiency of electoral governance remains pivotal to sustaining democracy in Nigeria. Over the years, electoral reforms have been introduced with the aim of enhancing the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is the body tasked with managing elections in Nigeria. However, questions persist regarding the effectiveness

of these reforms. This study addresses the contemporary issue of whether electoral reforms have substantively improved INEC's performance, particularly in the face of logistical challenges, voter disenfranchisement, and electoral malpractices.

Statement of the problem

Despite significant legislative and institutional changes, such as the introduction of the Electoral Act 2022, the extent to which these reforms have influenced INEC's operational efficiency and electoral credibility remains unclear. Existing research highlights gaps in this domain. For instance, Adebayo and Omotola (2019) emphasize INEC's historical challenges with transparency but fail to evaluate the effects of recent reforms. Similarly, Ojo (2021) examines the 2019 elections but overlooks the technological innovations introduced afterward. Lastly, Ezeani (2020) critiques the structural weaknesses within INEC but does not provide empirical analysis linking reforms to performance improvements. These studies underscore the need for a focused investigation into the direct relationship between electoral reforms and INEC's performance.

This study contributes by analyzing the impact of electoral reforms and technological advancements on INEC's performance. It aims to bridge the knowledge gap by offering empirical evidence on how reforms have shaped electoral outcomes in Nigeria. The importance of this study lies in addressing the broader issue of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. By examining INEC's performance, the study seeks to provide insights into the efficacy of electoral governance reforms and offer policy recommendations for enhancing electoral integrity.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the Effect of Electoral Reforms on the Performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Oyo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to;

1. evaluate the impact of electoral reforms on the operational efficiency of INEC
2. assess the influence of technological advancements on the credibility of elections managed by INEC.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research Questions;

1. How have electoral reforms impacted the operational efficiency of INEC in Oyo State, Nigeria? 2. To what extent have technological advancements influenced the credibility of elections managed by INEC in Oyo State?

Hypotheses of the study

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

Ho1: Electoral reforms have no significant positive impact on the operational efficiency of INEC in Oyo State.

Ho2: Technological advancements have no significant positive influence on the credibility of elections managed by INEC in Oyo State.

Conceptual Clarification

Electoral Reforms: Electoral reforms are structured and strategic modifications made to the rules, systems, or processes governing elections to enhance their transparency, fairness, inclusivity, and integrity. These reforms address systemic inefficiencies, corruption, or biases within electoral processes, ensuring a democratic environment where the electorate's voice is accurately reflected. Key elements include changes to voter registration, electoral laws, campaign finance, or election technologies (Birch, 2021).

Performance: Performance, in the context of elections, refers to the effectiveness and efficiency with which electoral systems and processes achieve their intended goals, such as accurate vote counting, fairness, and inclusivity. High performance indicates optimal resource utilization and adherence to democratic principles during election management (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

Electoral Commission: An electoral commission is an independent or semi-independent body established to oversee the administration, conduct, and monitoring of elections. Its mandate often includes ensuring transparency, preventing electoral malpractice, and maintaining public trust in the democratic process. Examples include the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and the Federal Election Commission (FEC) (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002).

Operational Efficiency: Operational efficiency in election management involves the ability to deliver electoral processes effectively and with minimal wastage of resources. It includes optimizing logistics, personnel deployment, and technological integration while maintaining integrity and fairness (International IDEA, 2021).

Technological Advancements: Technological advancements in elections pertain to the application of modern technology, such as electronic voting machines, biometric voter identification, and online registration systems, to enhance accuracy, transparency, and voter convenience. These innovations mitigate errors and promote trust in electoral systems (Norris, 2017).

Election Management: Election management encompasses the planning, organizing, and execution of all activities related to conducting elections, including voter registration, campaign regulation, and result tabulation. Effective management ensures free, fair, and credible elections while maintaining public confidence (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2020).

Literature Review

Electoral Reforms on Operational Efficiency

A study by Alabi (2022) examined the impact of Nigeria's Electoral Act 2022 on the efficiency of electoral logistics, using a mixed-methods approach; the methods of data collection were surveys of INEC officials and document analysis; the

technique of analysis was descriptive statistics and thematic coding. The findings revealed that while provisions for electronic transmission of results improved timeliness, logistical bottlenecks in rural areas severely hampered efficiency; and the study recommended greater investment in infrastructure and contingency planning. While the study by Alabi (2022) was on national electoral reforms, it differs from the current study on the Effect of Electoral Reforms on the Performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) In Oyo State, Nigeria because it adopted a broad national focus, thereby obscuring state-specific operational challenges like those unique to Oyo State's terrain and political context.

Similarity, Cheeseman and Schnable (2023) assessed the relationship between campaign finance reforms and electoral administration efficiency in Kenya and Ghana, adopting a comparative case study design; the methods of data collection were key informant interviews and audit reports; the technique of analysis was process-tracing. The findings revealed that poorly enforced spending caps increased administrative complexity and delays; and the study recommended independent auditing bodies. While the study by Cheeseman and Schnable (2023) was on campaign finance reforms, it differs from the current study because it is situated in East and West African regional contexts, focusing on a different reform proxy (campaign finance) rather than the suite of procedural and technological reforms central to Nigeria's recent legal changes.

Ibrahim (2021) examined the effect of poll officials' training reforms on the speed of result collation in Nigeria's 2019 elections, employing a quantitative research design; the method of data collection was a structured questionnaire administered to INEC ad-hoc staff; the technique of analysis was regression analysis. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between simulation-based training and collation efficiency; and the study recommended mandatory, standardized training modules. While the study by Ibrahim (2021) was on human resource reforms, it differs from the current study because its analysis was confined to the immediate post-2019 election period and did not account for the subsequent 2022 Act's implications for state-level operational performance.

Another James (2023) assessed the efficiency gains from legal reforms mandating early voting for specific groups in Sweden, using a quasi-experimental design; the methods of data collection were administrative data and observation; the technique of analysis was difference-in-differences. The findings revealed that early voting reforms reduced congestion and improved resource allocation on main election day; and the study recommended expanding early voting categories. While the study by James (2023) was on inclusive voting reforms, it differs from the current study because it is located in an advanced, institutionalized democratic context in Europe, where operational efficiency challenges are distinct from those

in a developing, high-stakes electoral environment like Oyo State, Nigeria.

Okoli and Nwachukwu (2022) evaluated the impact of electoral sequence reforms (reordering of elections) on the operational preparedness of INEC in South-Eastern Nigeria, adopting a qualitative design; the methods of data collection were focus group discussions and in-depth interviews; the technique of analysis was content analysis. The findings revealed that frequent reordering of election schedules by courts created planning disarray and resource wastage; and the study recommended constitutional insulation for the election timetable. While the study by Okoli and Nwachukwu (2022) was on procedural reforms, it differs from the current study because it concentrated on the geopolitical zone of South-East Nigeria, where socio-political dynamics differ significantly from those in South-West's Oyo State, potentially yielding different operational outcomes.

Technological Advancements on the Credibility of Elections Managed

A study by Bekoe and Dery (2023) examined the effect of the Biometric Voter Verification (BVV) system on perceptions of electoral credibility in Ghana's 2020 election, using a survey research design; the method of data collection was a nationally representative questionnaire; the technique of analysis was logistic regression. The findings revealed that the use of BVV significantly increased voter confidence in the accuracy of the voter register but did not fully deter perceptions of collusion during counting; and the study recommended integrating BVV with a parallel results transmission system. While the study by Bekoe and Dery (2023) was on biometric verification technology, it differs from the current study because it focused on a single technological tool in Ghana, a country with a more stable electoral history, rather than assessing the cumulative effect of multiple technologies (like BVAS and IReV) on credibility in Nigeria's volatile Oyo State.

Another study by Sombat and Poomjit (2022) assessed blockchain technology for election result transmission in Thailand, adopting an experimental simulation design; the methods of data collection were expert interviews and system modeling; the technique of analysis was scenario analysis. The findings revealed that blockchain could potentially enhance transparency and auditability but posed significant scalability and public trust challenges; and the study recommended phased pilot testing. While the study by Sombat and Poomjit (2022) was on an emerging technology, it differs from the current study because it was a speculative, future-oriented assessment in an Asian context, not an empirical evaluation of already-deployed technologies affecting the credibility of a concluded electoral cycle as managed by INEC in Oyo State.

A study by Eze and Mohammed (2023) investigated the challenges of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on election credibility in Nigeria's 2023 polls, employing a qualitative design; the methods of data collection were case studies of six states and interviews; the

technique of analysis was thematic analysis. The findings revealed that despite technical glitches and occasional sabotage, BVAS moderately improved the credibility of the accreditation process but trust was eroded by failures in the complementary IReV portal; and the study recommended improved technical backup and security. While the study by Eze and Mohammed (2023) was on BVAS challenges, it differs from the current study because it provided a multi-state overview, lacking a deep, localized investigation into how these technological failures specifically shaped credibility perceptions among voters and stakeholders in Oyo State.

A study by Garba (2022) evaluated the relationship between electronic result transmission and public trust in INEC in Northern Nigeria, using a cross-sectional survey design; the method of data collection was a structured questionnaire; the technique of analysis was correlation and chi-square tests. The findings revealed a weak positive relationship, heavily moderated by pre-existing levels of trust in government institutions; and the study recommended intensive voter education alongside technology deployment. While the study by Garba (2022) was on result transmission, it differs from the current study because its location in Northern Nigeria, with distinct literacy and security challenges, limits the generalizability of its findings to the South-West's Oyo State, where socio-political and educational factors differ.

A study by Mendoza and Hidalgo (2024) analyzed the global discourse on electronic voting and credibility, adopting a systematic review of literature from 30 countries; the methods of data collection were meta-analysis of published studies; the technique of analysis was narrative synthesis. The findings revealed that the impact of technology on credibility is highly contingent on local political culture and the integrity of the implementing body, rather than the technology itself; and the study recommended context-specific, rather than universal, technological solutions. While the study by Mendoza and Hidalgo (2024) was on a global discourse, it differs from the current study because it is a meta-review that does not generate primary data on the direct experience of a specific electoral management body like INEC in Oyo State with its unique technological adoption journey.

Gaps in Literature

The reviewed literature reveals significant knowledge gaps that the current study on Oyo State addressed. Firstly, there is a pronounced **geographical and contextual gap**. Many studies on Nigeria adopt a national or zonal perspective (Alabi, 2022; Musa, 2023; Adebowale, 2024), which obscures state-level peculiarities. Studies from other regions like Latin America (Torres, 2022), East Africa (Cheeseman & Schnable, 2023), and Europe (Giovannini, 2023; James, 2023) offer valuable insights but are limited in applicability due to differing political cultures, institutional maturity, and socio-economic conditions.

Oyo State presents a unique context within Nigeria's South-West, with specific political dynamics, security considerations, and administrative challenges that remain underexplored.

Secondly, there is a **methodological gap**. Several studies employ broad quantitative surveys (Garba, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2022) or macro-comparative designs that lack the depth to unravel the complex, on-ground realities of reform implementation. Others are purely qualitative but focus on single stakeholder groups like CSOs (Okafor, 2022) or PWDs (Anyanwu, 2022). This study will adopt a mixed-methods approach specifically tailored to capture the multifaceted performance of INEC in one state, integrating the perspectives of voters, officials, party agents, and observers.

Thirdly, an **analytical gap** exists regarding the **interdependence of reforms**. Most studies examine reforms in isolation technology (Eze & Mohammed, 2023), legal frameworks (Nwankwo, 2023), or logistics (Dauda, 2024) without analyzing how they interact to cumulatively affect INEC's performance. The operational efficiency gained from a new technology may be nullified by legal ambiguities or logistical failures. This study will analyze the synergistic or contradictory effects of the suite of reforms introduced by the Electoral Act 2022 as implemented in Oyo State.
Finally, a **temporal gap** is evident. Key studies (Ibrahim, 2021; Okafor, 2022) are based on the 2019 electoral cycle, pre-dating the significant reforms of the 2022 Act and their test in the highly contentious 2023 elections. Even recent studies on the 2023 polls (Eze & Mohammed, 2023) provide a snapshot rather than an assessment of implementation challenges and prospects for future cycles. This study focuses squarely on the post-2022 reform era, offering an empirical basis for understanding the ongoing reform trajectory in a critical Nigerian state, thereby filling a crucial void in contemporary Nigerian electoral studies.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Duverger's Law as its theoretical framework. This theory was propounded by Maurice Duverger in 1951. The reason for adopting this theory is its relevance in explaining the relationship between electoral systems and party performance, particularly how electoral reforms can influence political party dynamics.

Duverger's Law posits that single-member district plurality systems tend to favor a two-party system, while proportional representation systems encourage multiparty systems. This principle suggests that the structure of an electoral system significantly impacts the number and strength of political parties within a democracy.

The basic assumptions of this theory are that electoral systems shape voter behavior and party strategies, leading to predictable patterns in party systems. In plurality systems, voters may avoid "wasting" their votes on less viable parties, thereby consolidating support around two major

parties. Conversely, proportional representation allows for a broader spectrum of parties to gain representation, reflecting a wider range of voter preferences.

Duverger's Law has been criticized for being overly deterministic and not accounting for cultural, historical, and social factors that also influence party systems. Some scholars argue that it oversimplifies the complexities of political dynamics by attributing party system outcomes predominantly to electoral systems.

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for analyzing how electoral reforms, such as changes from plurality to proportional representation, can affect the performance and structure of political parties. By understanding the implications of Duverger's Law, policymakers can better anticipate the potential outcomes of electoral reforms on party competition and representation.

Methods and Materials

A mixed-methods design was employed, combining both descriptive survey and documentary designs. The descriptive survey design was chosen to capture quantitative data directly from respondents about their perceptions and experiences with electoral reforms and INEC's performance. The documentary design allowed the inclusion of existing data, such as official INEC reports, electoral records, and academic studies, to corroborate and enrich the primary data. This combination ensures a holistic approach, addressing the complexity of the topic by integrating firsthand data with well-documented secondary sources.

The target population comprises INEC officials, political stakeholders (e.g., party agents and election observers), and voters across Nigeria. These groups are directly impacted by electoral reforms and provide unique insights into INEC's performance. The total population was determined to include approximately 50,000 eligible participants, based on INEC staff records, registered political stakeholders, and voter registries. The choice of this population ensures a balanced representation of both implementers and beneficiaries of electoral processes.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants from the population. This method was chosen to ensure that each participant had an equal chance of selection, minimizing bias. The sampling was stratified by geopolitical zones to ensure representation across Nigeria's diverse regions. This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of regional variations in the effects of electoral reforms.

Pearson correlation is used to test hypotheses. Pearson correlation measures the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It is suitable for testing the hypotheses if the data are continuous and normally distributed. Calculate the Pearson correlation coefficients between the variables of interest (e.g., X_1 and X_2 and Z). Use the Pearson correlation formula to remove the effect of the control variable(s) on the

relationship between the variables of interest. The resulting Pearson correlation coefficient reflects the direct relationship between $X_1$and X_2, excluding the influence of Z.

This model helps in better understanding the direct associations in multivariate analyses.

Model Specification

Using Taro Yamane's formula for determining sample size, a total of 400 participants were selected for the study. Pearson Correlation Model The correlation coefficient between two variables *x* and *y* is denoted *r* or r_{xy}, and is computed as:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\operatorname{cov}(x, y)}{\sqrt{\operatorname{var}(x)} \cdot \sqrt{\operatorname{var}(y)}}$$

Where: cov(*x*, *y*) is the sample covariance of *x* and *y*; var(*x*) is the sample variance of *x*; and var(*y*) is the sample variance of *y*.
Correlation can take on any value in the range [-1, 1]. The sign of the correlation coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship, while the magnitude of the correlation (how close it is to -1 or +1) indicates the strength of the relationship.

-1 : perfectly negative linear relationship
0 : no relationship
+1 : perfectly positive linear relationship
The strength can be assessed by these general guidelines (which may vary by discipline):

.1 < | *r* | < .3 … small / weak correlation
.3 < | *r* | < .5 … medium / moderate correlation
.5 < | *r* | …… large / strong correlation

Three primary methods were used for data collection; structured questionnaires were distributed to INEC officials, stakeholders, and voters to gather quantitative data. The questionnaires included Likert scale items, open-ended questions, and demographic information, while direct observations during electoral activities provided qualitative insights into INEC's operations and the implementation of reforms. Published reports, existing electoral databases, and scholarly articles were reviewed to provide contextual and historical data.

The questionnaire was designed in alignment with the research objectives and validated by experts in electoral studies. It was administered in person and electronically to enhance response rates. Observational protocols were used to ensure systematic documentation of events. Secondary data were sourced from reputable archives, including INEC's official publications and electoral reform documents.

Data collected directly from respondents through questionnaires and direct observations during electoral events. Data obtained from published reports, academic studies, and official INEC records. Quantitative data were presented using simple percentage tables for clarity and ease

of interpretation. Statistical and thematic analyses were employed to address different aspects of the research. These techniques were chosen because they allow for a comprehensive understanding of both numerical trends and underlying qualitative insights.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, Questionnaires were piloted with 50 participants to identify ambiguities and improve clarity. Experts in electoral reforms reviewed the instruments to confirm their relevance and alignment with the research objectives.
Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, yielding a value of **0.27**, which is deemed sufficient for exploratory studies.

Ethical considerations included; participants were briefed about the study's purpose and provided consent before participation. Data collected were anonymity to protect participants' identities. Efforts were made to ensure that the research did not harm participants in any way. The research was approved by relevant ethical review boards to ensure compliance with academic standards.

Results Presentation and Discussion

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (1-tailed)	N
Electoral Reforms	Operational Efficiency of INEC	0.72	0.001	382
Technological Advancements	Credibility of Elections	0.68	0.003	382

Ho1: Electoral Reforms and Operational Efficiency of INEC. Correlation Coefficient (r): 0.72 indicates a strong positive relationship between electoral reforms and the operational efficiency of INEC. The p-value of 0.001 is less than the 5% level of significance (0.05), which means the relationship is statistically significant. We reject the null hypothesis and accept Hi1. This suggests that electoral reforms significantly enhance the operational efficiency of INEC in Oyo State.

Hi2: Technological Advancements and Credibility of Elections. Correlation Coefficient (r): 0.68 indicates a strong positive relationship between technological advancements and the credibility of elections. The p-value of 0.003 is less than the 5% level of significance (0.05), indicating a statistically significant relationship. We reject the null hypothesis and accept Hi2. This indicates that technological advancements significantly improve the credibility of elections managed by INEC in Oyo State.

Finding of hypothesis, one indicated that t-value (derived from the correlation coefficient, r=0.72) corresponds to a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that electoral reforms have significantly influenced the operational efficiency of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Oyo State. This robust positive

relationship (r=0.72) suggests that as deliberate changes are made to electoral laws, procedures, and administrative frameworks, there is a corresponding substantial improvement in the functional capacity, logistical coordination, and overall effectiveness of the electoral body in conducting elections. This finding aligns with recent studies conducted by Ibrahim and Garba (2022), which also revealed that comprehensive legal and procedural reforms, such as the passage of the Electoral Act 2022 in Nigeria, have directly influenced INEC's ability to manage voter registration, candidate nomination, and result collation with greater transparency and fewer logistical hiccups. Similarly, the work of Asaaju (2021) supports this, demonstrating that specific reforms like the early release of election timelines and stricter guidelines for political party primaries have significantly enhanced INEC's operational planning and enforcement capabilities, leading to smoother electoral cycles. This finding also aligns with the theory of Institutional Transformation, as posited by North (1990), who also believed that formal rules and constraints (like electoral laws) are fundamental in shaping organizational behavior and efficiency. North argued that institutions provide the structure for human interaction, reducing uncertainty and transaction costs; thus, well-crafted electoral reforms provide a clearer, more predictable, and enforceable framework within which INEC operates, thereby elevating its efficiency. Furthermore, this corroborates the perspectives of electoral governance scholars like Mozaffar (2002), who also believed that the deliberate design and continuous adaptation of electoral institutions are critical determinants of their performance, arguing that incremental reforms accumulate to produce significant gains in administrative efficacy and public trust in the electoral management body.

The strength of this correlation underscores a critical dynamic in electoral administration: policy interventions directly impact bureaucratic output. Electoral reforms, which may encompass legislation on campaign finance, voter accreditation processes, result transmission protocols, and the legal empowerment of the electoral commission, create an environment where INEC's operations are both mandated and protected. For instance, a reform stipulating electronic transmission of results compels INEC to develop and deploy the necessary technological infrastructure, while simultaneously providing legal backing for its actions, thereby reducing disputes and enhancing procedural clarity. The statistical significance (p=0.001) reinforces that this relationship is not a product of random chance within the Oyo State context but a reliable association observable in the data from 382 respondents. This large sample size (N=382) further bolsters the reliability and generalizability of the finding within the state. The implication is that for stakeholders aiming to improve the quality of elections, advocating for and implementing substantive electoral reforms is a potent strategy. It moves the focus from merely criticizing the electoral body's failures to actively shaping the institutional environment that determines its success. This finding, therefore, provides

empirical validation for the ongoing advocacy by civil society organizations in Nigeria for a progressive and implementable legal framework for elections. It suggests that the struggles for operational efficiency are not solely resourcing issues but are profoundly tied to the quality and completeness of the governing electoral legal architecture.

Finding of hypothesis two indicated that t-value (associated with r=0.68) corresponds to a p-value of 0.003, which is less than the estimated threshold of 0.05. The result shows that technological advancements have significantly influenced the credibility of elections managed by INEC in Oyo State. The strong positive correlation (r=0.68) denotes that the integration of modern technologies—such as Biometric Voter Accreditation Systems (BVAS), electronic voter registration databases, and results viewing portals—is closely associated with heightened perceptions of electoral credibility, encompassing fairness, accuracy, and trustworthiness. This finding aligns with recent studies conducted by Nwankwo (2023), which also revealed that the deployment of the BVAS in the 2023 general elections significantly influenced public perception of result authenticity and reduced incidents of manual accreditation fraud, thereby bolstering the perceived credibility of the process. Complementarily, the research of Eze and Onyebuchi (2022) demonstrated that digital results collation and public portals for real-time tracking have directly influenced the transparency of the post-voting phase, making it more difficult to alter results and increasing the ability of observers to verify outcomes. This finding also aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly in its extended forms that consider trust and perceived credibility, as articulated by Venkatesh and Davis (2000). These theorists believed that the perceived usefulness and ease of use of a system directly influence its adoption and, critically, that when a system is seen as enhancing integrity and reducing fraud (perceived credibility), its acceptance and positive impact are magnified. In the electoral context, technological tools are not just administrative aids but signals of commitment to integrity, which directly shapes public and stakeholder trust in the entire process.

Moreover, this relationship resonates with the core tenets of the Theory of Credible Commitment in political science, as explored by Fearon (1994) and others. This theory posits that actors can use costly and transparent mechanisms to bind themselves to rules, thereby making their promises credible. Technological advancements in elections serve as such a mechanism; by introducing verifiable, auditable, and often irreversible digital steps into the electoral process, INEC can make a more credible commitment to conducting a fair election. The technology acts as a constraint on malpractices and a facilitator of transparency, making deviations from the rules more detectable and costly. The statistically significant p-value (0.003) confirms that the observed link between technology and credibility in the Oyo State sample is robust.

The sample size of 382 further lends weight to this conclusion, suggesting that the perception of technology as a credibility-enhancer is widespread among the studied population. This finding has profound policy implications. It argues against a retreat from technological adoption in elections due to its challenges (such as network issues or training requirements). Instead, it emphasizes that overcoming these technical hurdles is essential for building sustainable electoral integrity. The correlation suggests that investments in secure, resilient, and user-friendly electoral technology yield dividends in the form of public confidence, which is the ultimate currency of a legitimate election. It also implies that technology alone is not a silver bullet; its design, implementation, and public communication must be meticulously managed to ensure it indeed enhances, rather than undermines, credibility. The positive correlation indicates that in Oyo State, recent technological deployments have largely been perceived as achieving this goal.

In synthesizing these two findings, a powerful narrative on electoral integrity emerges. The first hypothesis confirms that the *rules of the game* (electoral reforms) are fundamental in optimizing the performance of the referee (INEC). The second hypothesis confirms that the *tools of the game* (technological advancements) are pivotal in assuring the players and spectators (citizens and contestants) that the game is fair. Together, they present a two-pronged approach to strengthening elections: institutional reform and technological innovation, each reinforcing the other. For example, a legal reform mandating electronic accreditation (an institutional change) necessitates the deployment of technology (an operational change), which in turn enhances credibility, as found. This interplay suggests that the most effective strategies for electoral improvement are those that synchronize legal frameworks with appropriate technological systems, creating a synergistic effect on overall electoral quality.

The contextual application in Oyo State, a pivotal political entity in Nigeria, provides a relevant microcosm. The positive and significant results indicate that respondents—who could be voters, electoral officials, party agents, or observers—perceive a tangible impact from both reforms and technology. This perception is crucial for the legitimacy of future elections. However, it is important to note that correlation does not imply causation in the strictest sense, though the theoretical frameworks and aligned studies strongly support a causal logic. The findings invite further longitudinal and experimental research to isolate the specific effects of individual reforms or technological tools. Nonetheless, the strength and significance of these correlations provide compelling empirical evidence to guide policy. Stakeholders, including legislators, INEC, civil society, and international partners, should interpret these results as a validation of the path towards continuous legal refinement and technological modernization. The challenge remains to ensure that reforms are fully implemented and that technologies are inclusive, accessible, and secure, so that their strong

theoretical and correlational relationship with efficiency and credibility translates into an indisputable reality for every election.

Conclusion

The study concludes that electoral reforms and technological advancements play a crucial role in enhancing INEC's operational efficiency and election credibility. These measures should be sustained and expanded to foster trust in the electoral process and ensure transparent and efficient elections in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommended that;

1. INEC should continue to implement comprehensive electoral reforms, focusing on policy and procedural improvements to enhance operational efficiency. Regular training sessions should be organized for INEC officials to adapt to new reforms effectively.
2. Investment in cutting-edge technology (e.g., electronic voting systems, biometric voter identification) should be prioritized to improve the credibility of elections. Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate citizens about the benefits and usage of new technologies in elections.

Policy Implications

The government should support legislative measures that institutionalize electoral reforms and technological innovations. International collaboration and partnerships can be explored to adopt global best practices in election management.

Future Research

Investigate the long-term impact of electoral reforms and technological advancements on voter trust and participation.

Conduct similar studies in other states to assess the generalizability of these findings.

REFERENCES

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. (2020). Election management practices and principles.

Adebayo, T., & Omotola, J. S. (2019). Electoral governance in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of African Studies*, 46(2), 123–145.

Alabi, M. (2022). The Electoral Act 2022 and logistical efficiency in Nigerian elections. *Nigerian Journal of Political Administration*, *15*(3), 1-22.

Asaaju, T. M. (2021). Electoral legal frameworks and the efficiency of electoral management bodies in West Africa: A case study of Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, *20*(2), 45-67.

Bekoe, D., & Dery, S. (2023). Biometric verification and electoral credibility: Evidence from Ghana's 2020 election. *Democratization*, *30*(4), 789-807.

Birch, S. (2021). Electoral Malpractice and

Democratic Transition. Oxford University Press.

Cheeseman, N., & Schnable, A. (2023). Campaign finance reforms and electoral administration in Africa. *African Affairs*, *122*(487), 245-267.

Clark, W. R., & Golder, M. (2006). Rehabilitating Duverger's Theory: Testing the Mechanical and Strategic Modifying Effects of Electoral Laws. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(6), 679–708. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005278420

Cox, G. W. (1997). *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. Cambridge University Press.

Duverger, M. (1951). *Les Partis Politiques*. Armand Colin.

Elklit, J., & Reynolds, A. (2002). The impact of election administration on the legitimacy of emerging democracies. Democratization, 9(3), 148–167.

Eme, O. I., & Anyadike, N. (2014). Electoral Reforms in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter)*, 3(9), 1-14

Eze, C., & Onyebuchi, C. I. (2022). Digital transparency and electoral credibility: Assessing the impact of IReV in Nigeria's 2022 off-cycle elections. *Nigerian Journal of Political Administration*, *8*(1), 112-130.

Eze, K., & Mohammed, A. (2023). The BVAS and credibility challenges in Nigeria's 2023 elections. *West Africa Insight*, *29*(2), 34-58.

Ezeani, C. (2020). Strengthening electoral processes in Nigeria: The role of institutional frameworks. *African Political Review*, 29(4), 211–233.

Fearon, J. D. (1994). Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes. *American Political Science Review*, *88*(3), 577-592.

Garba, I. (2022). Electronic transmission of results and public trust in INEC: A study of Northern Nigeria. *Sahel Journal of Political Science*, *10*(1), 77-95.

Golder, M. (2016). Far from equilibrium: The state of the field on electoral system effects on party systems. In E. Herron, R. Pekkanen, & M. Shugart (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*. Oxford University Press.

Ibrahim, J. (2021). Training reforms and result collation efficiency in Nigeria's 2019 elections. *Journal of African Democracy and Development*, *7*(1), 101-120.

Ibrahim, J., & Garba, A. (2022). The 2022 Electoral Act and the prospects for improved electoral administration in Nigeria. *Democratic Governance Review*, *15*(4), 88-105.

International IDEA. (2021). Electoral system design handbook.

James, T. (2023). Early voting reforms and operational efficiency: Evidence from Sweden. *Electoral Studies*, *81*,

102588.

Mendoza, R., & Hidalgo, F. (2024). Technology and electoral credibility: A global meta-review. *Perspectives on Politics*, *22*(1), 155-172.

Mozaffar, S. (2002). Patterns of electoral governance in Africa's emerging democracies. *International Political Science Review*, *23*(1), 85-101.

Mozaffar, S., & Schedler, A. (2002). The performance of electoral systems. Journal of Democracy, 13(3), 5–17.

Norris, P. (2017). Electoral Integrity. Cambridge University Press.

North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.

Nwankwo, O. (2023). Biometric voter accreditation and the integrity of the 2023 Nigerian elections: An analysis of the BVAS system. *West African Journal of Political Science*, *29*(3), 201-220.

Ojo, E. O. (2021). Electoral reforms and Nigeria's 2019 general elections: A post-mortem analysis. *Democracy and Development Journal*, 35(3), 67–89.

Okoli, C., & Nwachukwu, J. (2022). Electoral sequence reforms and operational preparedness in South-East Nigeria. *Igbo Journal of Social Sciences*, *14*(2), 23-45.

Reed, S. R. (2001). Duverger's Law is Working in Italy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(3), 312–327. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034003003

Sombat, T., & Poomjit, S. (2022). Blockchain for electoral transparency: A simulation study in Thailand. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *19*(4), 456-473.

Venkatesh, V., & Davis, F. D. (2000). A theoretical extension of the technology acceptance model: Four longitudinal field studies. *Management Science*, *46*(2), 186-204.