



INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC) AND THE PROCESS OF ELECTORAL CONDUCT IN NIGERIA: THE PHENOMENON OF ELECTION POSTPONEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of election postponement on the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election, as well as practices of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Process of Electoral Conduct in Nigeria. The study adopts a case study design and utilizes a qualitative approach in which both primary and secondary data were collected/engaged. The data were analysed and interpreted, using thematic analytical process. The main findings reveal that postponement of general election in Nigeria is gradually becoming the norm and/or a re-occurrence practice. It was also found that the postponement did impact negatively on the outcome and performance of the same, arising from low voters' turnout. Crucially, it also observes that the country suffered economic loss worth billions of Naira. The study suggests a fully funded and equipped INEC with all its needs and logistics provided and three months to a year period provided, before elections are conducted could be an important panacea.

Keywords: 2019 General Election, INEC, Nigeria, Outcome, Postponement, Performance

Introduction

Election is the wire withal of democratic governance. It is the livewire and the umbilical cord that links the mother democratic governance with the governed in many ramifications. Through elections, citizens stream line their policy choice preferences and leadership based on liberty and





freedom (Dahl, 2000). In modern democracies, choice of leadership is an exercise that is carried out effectively through the medium of a periodic election which differs from one country to another, and from one democracy to another (Johari, 2012). Elections are considered genuine and democratic if the voters are freely allowed to vote for their leaders in a safe and free environment devoid of violence, rancor, intimidation, manipulation or subversion of the process. Most advanced American and European democracies are regarded in this category (Sule, Azizuddin & Mat, 2018).

Africa and other developing countries are currently facing the third wave of democratisation. Elections are now frequent and sailing in the ocean of African democratic practices for over two consecutive decades (Adejumobi, 2015). The long protracted and exacerbated military interregnum threw the African democracy into comatose and mudslinging for over three decades in the 1970s, 80s and 90s (Adejumobi, 2015). Indeed, the democratic process is being subverted for a clientele, patrimonial and prebendel arrangement (Joseph, 2000). Despite the challenges, most or almost all the African states today are operating incremental democratic systems where the system is under trial in search of a genuine institutionalisation and formalisation of democratic values (Lindberg, 2006).

Nigeria is currently bulldozing through its twentieth year of an uninterrupted democratic practices since 1999 in the Fourth Republic. The Republic witnessed an unprecedented electoral conduct six times serially more than the total elections conducted in the entire history of the country previously (Sule, Azizuddin & Mat, 2017). However, like most African democracies, Nigerian election is mired with enduring negative characteristics of rigging, violence, bribery, corruption, excessive campaign spending, manipulation of results and other related factors. Besides, the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is another different issue of its own (Sule, 2019). The INEC is found in often times, unprepared, collaborative with saboteurs, embezzlement of election materials and worrisome of all, the seemingly insurmountable phenomenon of shifting election date continuously since 2007 (Sule, Azizuddin & Mat, 2017). Going by the above





disposition, this study found it expedient and timely to examine the phenomenon of election postponement and its implications on Nigerian election performance with reference to the 2019 General Election as the case study. In doing that, the study divulged critically and analytically the following issues: the concept of election, election in Nigeria, challenges of election in Nigeria, the INEC and a theoretical framework is adopted based on the Systems Theory to review the postulations that will support the literature on election conduct in Nigeria.

The paper is arranged as follows: introduction, research problem/gap, research question/objectives, literature review, methodology, discussions and interpretations of the findings; conclusion and recommendations.

1.1 Research problem statement (the gap)

The process of election conduct in Nigeria has never been easy in the political history of the country. As with most African democracies, Nigerian election is no different, mired with enduring negative characteristics of rigging, violence, bribery, corruption, excessive campaign spending, manipulation of results and other related factors. It has also been characterised with irregularities, malpractices, challenges and issues that are always affecting its credibility and acceptability. The electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) seemed entrapped in a vicious circle of recurrent election postponement which took place in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 General Elections. It is also noted that the postponement of general election in Nigeria is gradually becoming a culture because it is recurring and it has affected the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election negatively in terms of voter turnout and economic loses worth billions of Naira (Sule, 2019). The INEC is found often times, unprepared, collaborative with saboteurs, embezzlement of election materials and worrisome of all, the seemingly insurmountable phenomenon of shifting election date continuously since 2007 (Sule, Azizuddin & Mat, 2017).





In fact, scholars have described Nigeria as increasingly becoming where politicians engage in all sorts of tricks to outsmart and outclass one another for securing power control (Smith, 2012). The electorates may support and vie for a particular party or candidate, the public key office holders may subvert and trample upon the process, thereby altering the public choice with personal choice, behaving like authoritarian democracies of African and Arabian countries (Buttorff, 2019). Public office holders boldly ignore the interest of their representatives or constituents; instead they pursue their own self-interests/agenda with impunity, without consequences (Emerson, 2012). Politicians engage gangsters from opposing parties to intimidate, harass supporters and fight for dominance (Fredrickson, 2019). Politicians would ignore democratic principles and promises to the masses, whilst they promote the interests of the ruling class (Achen & Bartels, 2016). Elections are often embedded in clientelism and party pay-offs, as politicians' bargain with the highest bidder to secure the tickets for party platform representation (Sule, Mat, Azizuddin & Ibrahim, 2019).

Candidates selected at party primaries may not be necessarily become the authentic candidates standing during election (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Wessels & Schmitt (2014). In fact, anything like accountability and transparency with respect to representation is ignored (Thomassen, 2014), and finally the phenomenon of rewarding supporter, while punishing non-supporters are the order of the day (Burlacu & Toka, 2014). In spite of all these unethical practices, not many empirical researches have been undertaken on the phenomenon of election fraud, irregularities and malpractices in relation to INEC's work. Thus, the phenomenon of election postponement in Nigerian politics has assumed a new height/problem of its own which deserves critical attention. Consequently, data on the subject is relatively scarce. So also, literature is weak. Therefore, this study examined critically and analytically the effects of election postponement on the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election.

1.2 Research Question





- i. In what ways did election postponement affected the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election, as well as practices of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Process of Electoral Conduct in Nigeria?
- ii. What was the impact of the 2019 election postponement of the 2019 General Election on its outcome and performance?
- iii. In what specific ways are practices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) considered unethical?
- iv. In what specific ways can election processes or process of electoral conduct in Nigeria be improved?

1.3 Research objective(s)

To critically examine ways in which election postponement affected (i) the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election, (ii) practices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and (iii) the Process of Electoral Conduct in Nigeria?

1.4 Research aim

To critically examine the effects of election postponement on the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election, as well as practices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Process of Electoral Conduct in Nigeria.

2 Literature Review

In this section, the issues of utmost importance relating to the subject matter of study are reviewed analytically by examining the ideas behind election, Nigerian election and its challenges.





2.1 Conceptualising Election

Election is one of the contemporary realms of the discourses in the discipline of Political Science and democratic studies (Bendor, Diermeier, Siegel & Ting, 2011). Election is mirrored as a game and a mathematical calculation where the players (politicians) engage in all tricks to outsmart and outclass one another for securing power (Smith, 2012). The electorates may support and vote for a particular party or candidate, the public key office holders may subvert and trample upon the process, thereby altering the public choice with personal choice. In this regard, election has occurred, but there is no choice. This situation is obtainable in authoritarian democracies of Africa and Arabian countries (Buttorff, 2019). Election is a public representation where the elected representatives are expected to represent the interests of their constituencies, forward their problems and pursue their entitlements (Emerson, 2012). Election has consequences in many ramifications. Voting and choice of leadership determine the direction and progress of a group. Support or opposition can be generated or a repercussion of the outcome of a particular pattern of election (Fredrickson, 2019). Democracy promises people absolute freedom and will in its ideal, in its reality, it promotes few interests especially the ruling class (Achen & Bartels, 2016). Election in most emerging democracies is embedded in clientelism and party pay-offs. The party officials bargain with the highest bidder to secure the tickets for party platform representation (Sule, Mat, Azizuddin & Ibrahim, 2019). In this perspective, party primaries that are not carried out directly may not provide the desired or alternative candidates for the electorates in the process (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). The same view has earlier been reiterated by Wessels & Schmitt (2014). Election irrespective of the critical view that one can attached to it is the democracy in motion. This is because it enhances accountability and representation (Thomassen, 2014). Election is related to public policy because policy-based voting is obtainable particularly in democracies that are highly socialised. Parties or leaders' performances are measured and rewarded or punished





accordingly during election period by the voters (Burlacu & Toka, 2014; Vendor et al. 2011; Smith, 2012; Fredrickson, 2019 and Buttorff, 2019).

2.2 Election in Nigeria

Election in Nigeria has taken place in three historical epochs eventually. In the colonial political settings, election started in 1922 when the British colonisers succumbed under the intensive pressure of the indigenous Africans for local representation. This political development heralded the intensified and consolidated struggles for increased representation which culminated in the final quest for political independence (Coleman, 1960). Election subsequently took place severally in Nigeria under different Republics. In the First Republic (1960-1966), two general elections occurred. The first in 1959 which ushered the independence and the sequential one that followed in 1964 before a bloody coup terminated democratisation in 1966 (Crowder, 1976). In the Second Republic (1979-1984), general elections took place twice like the First Republic. The characteristics and elements of the First Republic politics and elections resurfaced shortly after the settlement of civilian rule. In 1983, another general election was conducted full of controversy, lamentations and protests. The repercussion of the faulty democratisation process was another military coup and counter-coup that followed later from 1984 (Dudley, 1982). In the Aborted Third Republic (1990-1991), popularly named so because the transition process which was initiated by the Babangida Military Administration was abruptly terminated before its full take off when the final result of the June 12 Presidential Election led by MKO Abiola was annulled (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The interpretation of the journey of election in Nigeria so far can be perceived as problematic and challenging. The Fourth Republic (1999-2021) is the most successful and enduring election festival in Nigerian political history. Six consecutive uninterrupted elections took place in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 recently (Sule, 2019). This is an unprecedented and a remarkable achievement in the watershed of Nigerian democratic rule. It has indicated that presumably, democracy has come to stay in Nigeria. However, the fact that elections





continue in the Fourth Republic without intervention or disruption does not mean that it is smooth and satisfactory. In essence, the most challenging period of Nigerian election and democracy is never in any time pronounced than now. Election in Nigeria took a pattern, dimension and inherent characteristics that always invite sharp criticisms and rejection internally and externally as observed by Sule, Azizuddin & Mat, 2018). These challenges are analysed below.

2.3 Challenges of Election Conduct in Nigeria

One of the major challenges of election conduct in Nigeria is the INEC itself in terms of funding and preparation. Election in Nigeria is one of the most expensive in Africa (Sule et al. 2018). In the 2007 General Election, INEC spent N45.5 billion (\$124, 150, 946.80 million). The 2011 General Election gulped over N111 billion (\$306, 235, 599.477 million), 2015 General Election N125 billion; \$344, 859, 909.321 million) (Sule et al. 2017) and 2019 General Election cost N189 billion; \$521, 428, 182.893 million (Sule, 2019). This implied that Nigeria spent more than Canada in the 2007 General Election, more than UK in the 2011 General Election and more than Australia in the 2015 General Election (Abdallah, 2018). The 2019 General Election may turn out later to be more expensive than many rich European countries. The end-result is that Nigerian democracy and election are cumbersome and economically stressful for the troubling economy. The financial obstacle to election in Nigeria is the cost and the time for the release of the fund for election preparation and management. In most cases, funds were not released until late hours which scuttled the timely preparation of the electoral process. In the 2019 General Election, which is the focus of this study, an executive-legislative feud affected the process of the approval of the budget for the election. It was understood that most of the election materials, logistics and other vital sensitive documents were imported which further aggravated the situation (Sule, 2019). The repercussions of the scenario led to the postponement of election from February 16th 2019 to 23rd February 2019 for the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. This culminated in the phenomenon of postponement of election in Nigerian Fourth Republic to fourth incessant serial time unnecessarily.





Another major challenge of election conduct in Nigeria is the characterised rigging and manipulation of results. The 2003 and 2007 elections were reported by the Human Rights Watch as the ridicule of democracy and an invitation to anarchy by the Nigerian politicians due to massive rigging, violence, alteration of results, disenfranchisement, and forceful seizure of elective offices by the losers to emerge as winners through liaising with electoral officials, political militants, security personnel and the outrageous use of money (Sule et al. 2017). General election in Nigeria is also bedeviled with the voting pattern of ethno-religious voting, regionalism, patrimonialism, clientelism and prebendalism. Additionally, money politics is another dimension of the challenges that the Nigerian election faces always. Excessive spending, violation of Electoral Act in terms of spending limit, vote buying, bribery and corruption (Sule, 2019).

2.4 The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the electoral body that is saddled with the responsibility of election conduct in Nigeria according to Nigerian 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act 2010. It was established shortly before the final transition to civilian rule in 1998 to replace the previous electoral bodies that were scrapped by the military during their sojourn into power. The Nigerian Military on 5th August 1998 established the INEC under Decree No.17 (Sule et al.2017).The INEC is empowered by Section 225 Sub-Sections 1-6 and Section 226 Sub-Sections 1-3 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution to monitor and supervise all electoral processes and activities in Nigeria. Besides, the Electoral Act 2010 provides in Section 88-92 that INEC has the powers to register political parties, deregister them, monitor their activities including financial such as sources of income, expenditure, maximum campaign spending limit, audit their financial books and sanction violators of regulations accordingly. The INEC is headed by the chief executive who is the Chairman of the organisation, appointed by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as approved by the National Assembly. He is subordinated by twelve (12) National Commissioners with two (2) each drawn from the six geo-political zones of the Northeast,





Northcentral, Northwest, Southeast, Southsouth and Southwest. The organisation is divided into seven Departments as follows: Personnel Department, Finance and Audit Department, Political Party Monitoring Department, Works and Housing Department, Information and Publicity Department, Legal Unit Department and Operations and Logistics Department. The body is supervised by the members of Governing Board appointed directly by the President (Sule et al. 2017).

3. Theoretical Framework: Systems Theory

The work adopted the Systems Theory to explain the context of the literature, project into the methodology and support the discussions and findings. The term Systems Theory is a theory that is used to explain or interpret as well as support political process, especially in terms of decision making and action process that involve the operation of a given political system.

The Systems Theory originated from the field of Biological Sciences by the famous dispositions and postulations of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1978), who studied the body system of mankind as a whole system that is functioning as a whole but interdependently within it due to the independent but coordinated actions of the different body systems. Sociologists, Talcott Parson (1951) and Robert Merton (1968), adopted this framework to study the society as a whole system that is functioning with sub-systems. For instance, social system, political system, economic system and cultural system exist independently in the society but function in coordination because malfunctioning of one will affect the entire society. In the Political Science arena, David Easton (1965) is the famous scholar that can claim credit in hypothesising Systems Theory in Politics precisely in the 1950s after the Second World War with the Behavioural revolution in Political Science by the Chicago American School of Behavioural Political Scientist.

The basic assumptions of the Systems Theory are that there are some elements and reactions that are operating within a given political system to arrive at decision-making. The type of system





matters. Here, two (2) types of systems were recognized, open and closed system. The open system interacts with the environment and receives inputs from external environment as in democratic rule while the closed system does not receive inputs from any external environment and the level of interaction within the environment is restricted such as authoritarian political system. Interests are articulated by different actors and interest groups which are aggregated by a pressure group or a body that has a constitutional or societal role in sifting the interests and choosing the most pressing need for forwarding into the conversion process or the process of making decision. The aggregated interest is forwarded as inputs/demands/supports through the conversion process. In the conversion process, the executive, legislature and judiciary consult one another and consider the critical needs and situation before making a final decision which will come out from the conversion process as outcomes/decisions. The outcomes can be either positive or negative and it is always follow-up with reactions such as support or protests or rejection. All these activities are carried out and supported in an environment. This process according to this Theory is the nature and way in which decision is carried out in a given political system that is democratic or liberal. This process is presented or illustrated in a diagram below as originated from Easton (1965) himself.



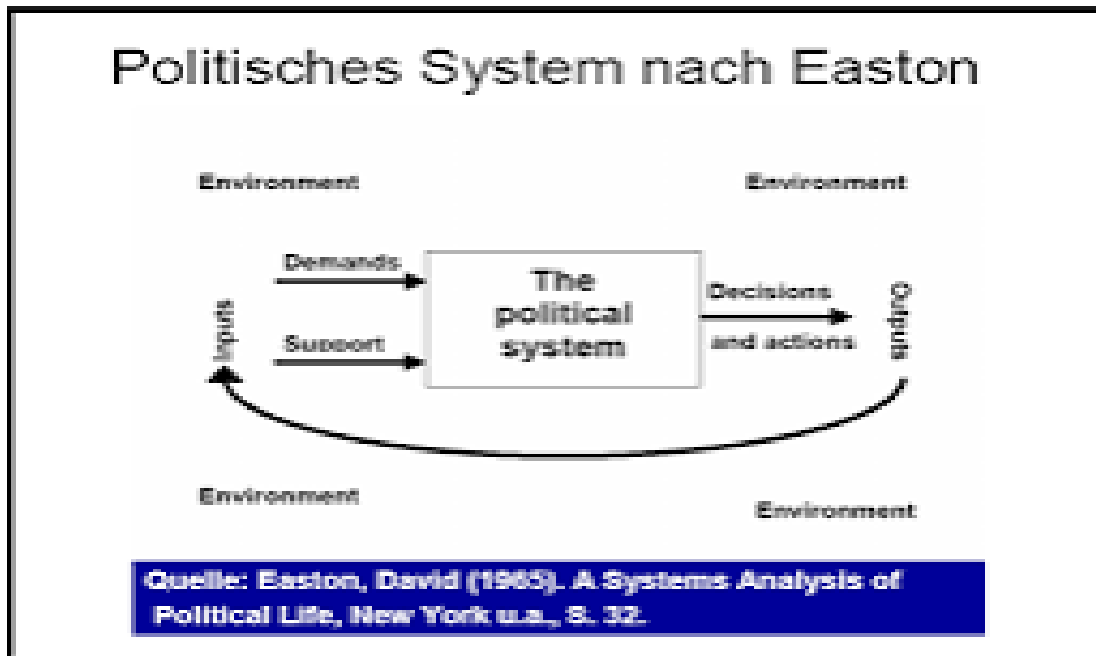


Figure 1: Diagram of the Working of Easton’s Systems Theory

Source: adopted from Google Map 2019.

The Theory can be practically applied in explaining the context of this study because the issue or the phenomenon of election postponement and electoral conduct in general is an issue that involves stakeholders in the country. The major stakeholders in electoral conduct in Nigeria include the INEC, security personnel, voters, civil societies, traditional/royal fathers, political parties, politicians, religious clerics, academicians and international observers. Decision about funding of election and setting of date is a matter that can receive inputs from all the stakeholders which are articulated differently and it is the INEC that gathered all the various articulated interests and aggregated them. Final decision on election conduct and postponement rest on the outcome of the conversion process, the environment and other elements related to it.



4. Methodology

The research utilised the qualitative approach. The topic of discussion is a case study research because the study hinges on the particular case of the phenomenon of election postponement with reference to the 2019 General Election as the premise of analysis. This is what made the research design a case study qualitative research method (Creswell 2014 and Lune & Berg, 2017).

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The research adopted two major methods of data collection: primary and secondary.

4.1.1 Primary data sources

These included two categories:(i) An in-depth interview with the selected respondents from the stakeholders in Nigerian election is one of the sources; a total of 34 were selected from six different categories and interviewed and (ii) Direct participants' observation by the researcher during the process of electoral conduct in the 2019 General Election

4.1.2 Secondary data sources

The main secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, newspapers and reports from organizations, agencies and the internet.

4.1.3 Sample selection

The respondents were selected based on two major criteria; accessibility and relevance in terms of the possession of vital information required for the research.

4.1.3 Population

The population for the study is the territory of Nigeria which has an approximate population of 200, million people based on the projection of the 2006 Population Census. And the population





that is specifically studied in this research is the total number of registered voters which is 84,004,084. Since such a big population is difficult to consult or practically impossible, the study relied on respondents interview based on qualitative strategy in which Creswell (2014) emphasises that a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 30 should be enough for conducting an interview in data collection, using a qualitative method. Hence, sampling was made based on specialization and possession of quality data.

4.1.4 Sample size

The sample size for the study was 34. This number is arrived at based on the identification of respondents with possession of high quality information on the subject of study. Also, the sampling relied on the criteria for maximum number of respondents required for an interview in a qualitative case study as suggested by Creswell (2014). Below in Table1, the details relating to respondents' sample are presented.

Table 1: List of Respondents, Category and frequency

S/No.	Informants	Sample Selected	Population
1.	INEC officials	3	3
2.	Party Executives	4	7
3.	Politicians (candidates)	6	13
4.	Academics	3	16
5.	Electorates (civil societies)	12	28
6.	Civil Societies	6	34
7.	Total	34	34

Source: The Researchers' Field Survey 2019.





4.1.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the field were analysed and interpreted using thematic analytical interpretations. As indicated below, discussions as well as interpretations involved the use of some statistical techniques including tables, charts and bars and the formation of a model for research findings. The theoretical postulations were merged with the findings from the field to help explain the research outcome.

5. Discussions and Interpretations of the Findings

The data obtained from the field study were presented, analysed, discussed and interpreted in this segment of the study. In fact, for ease of comprehension and more meaningful presentation, this section was arranged under themes as shown below: (i) preparations for the 2019 general election, (ii) *challenges encountered in the conduct of the 2019 general election*, (iii) *the 2019 general election, analysis of the outcome and* (iv) *the effects of the postponement on the 2019 general election*. Through these data analysis, discussions and interpretations, the findings were unfolded.

5.1 The Preparations for the 2019 General Election

In the preparation for the 2019 General Election, some vital data and statistics were stumbled upon which are of immense relevance to be projected and understood here. In the 2019 General Election, a total number of 84, 004, 084 (eighty-four million and four thousand and eighty-four) registered voters were recorded across the country (Budgit, 2019). The total registered voters were less than half of the entire population of the country. This perhaps is related to the reports that Nigeria's population is one of the youngest in the world with those below the age of 25 higher than any age category (UNICEF, 2019). The voters' registration by gender indicated that 44.4 (53%) million is male while 39.6 (47%) million is female. The age category of the voters presented that those within the age bracket 18-30 constituted 51% of the total voters, 36-50 years 30%, 51-70 15% and 70+ 4% of the total voters. A youth dominant voting age is ensued in this categorisation. The

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distribution of voters by occupation revealed that 22.3 million are students, 13.6 million engaged in farming and fishing, 11.8 million housewives, 10.8 million business, 7.6 million trading, 5.0 million civil servants, 4.5 million artisans and 6.0 million others. The geographical distribution of voters revealed that Northeast had 11.3 million, Northcentral 13.4 million, Northwest had 20.2 million, Southeast 10.1 million, Southsouth 12.8 million and Southwest 16.3 million. The total number of registered political parties were ninety-one (91) (Budgit, 2019).

In addition, the summary of the biodata of the contestants showed that a total number of 23, 000 candidates contested for various elective offices from Presidency to the level of State House of Assembly. With 91 total registered political parties, 73 candidates vied for the post of the President, 73 contested for the office of Vice President, 1,064 battled for Gubernatorial election, 1,064 sought for the post of Deputy Governorship, 1, 903 contested for Senate, 4703 contested for House of Representatives , 14, 643 sought for State Houses of Assembly, 105 candidates struggled for the Chairperson of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja and 701 contested for FCTA Councillorship (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019).

Additionally, INEC came up with a criterion for determining the winner which had not been in the existing laws but as a guideline for its electoral conduct in the 2019 General Election. The criterion is the declaration of the winner based on some considerations. The phenomenon of inconclusive election (another subject of investigation) emerged. The process provided that a winner may not be declared returned elected if the total votes cancelled in his constituency are more than the difference or gap between him and the runner-up. In this situation, election should be declared inconclusive and supplementary election should hold (INEC, 2019). The second major guideline was that election must be conducted using smart card readers for both accreditation and election process proper. Where the card or the mini-computers failed to recognise the thumbprint of a voter, he should be instructed politely by the presiding officer supervising the election to leave the polling





unit (INEC, 2019, Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room 2019, European Union 2019, National Democratic Institute 2019 and International Republican Institute 2019).

Many of the respondents consulted in this work confessed that the level of INEC's preparation towards the 2019 General Election is average, neither satisfactory nor poor. The various dispositions of the informants were transcribed and grouped into coded themes for extraction of relevant points. In their summarised views, the researcher came up with a table to present their divergent opinions on the level and trend of the INEC preparation in the 2019 General Election. They are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Informants' Views on the Level of INEC's Preparation in the 2019 General Election

S/No.	Views on the Level of INEC Preparation for 2019 General Election	Agreed	Disagreed
1.	Highly Satisfactory	11 (32.35%)	23 (67.65%)
2.	Satisfactory	19 (55.88%)	15 (44.12%)
3.	Average	26 (76.47%)	8 (23.53%)
4.	Dissatisfactory	17 (50%)	17 (50%)
5.	Highly Dissatisfactory	9 (26.47%)	25 (73.53%)

Source: The Researchers' Field Survey 2019.

Apart from the above respondents' views, in one of the interviews, a respondent narrated that: "We were pessimistic of the INEC's level of preparation. We questioned it severally and insisted that the date must be shifted forward but the electoral body reiterated that it was prepared ahead so, no cause for alarm. At the end of the day, our fear was corroborated when we heard about the postponement" (Personal in-depth interview with an informant in category D on 17th July, 2019). The Systems Theory is applicable in this theme because preparation for electoral conduct is an





activity that is taking place presumably in an opened democratic system like the Nigerian state. It further involves various consultations with stakeholders, interest articulation, aggregation and reception of inputs from external environment for processing into the conversion process.

5.2 Challenges Encountered in the Conduct of the 2019 General Election

The electoral body the INEC, encountered several obstacles and challenges in the conduct of the 2019 General Election. Some of these challenges were surmountable while some stiffly resisted all counter-measures to overcome like the specific case of postponement. The first major challenge encountered in the conduct of the election as severally espoused previously was the issue of funding. The political inter-play between the Presidency and the National Assembly led to the delay in the submission and approval of the budget for the conduct of the election. This process made the INEC to prepare late, leading to postponement (Sule, 2019). Another biggest challenge met by the INEC was the issue of party primaries. The game of politics in determining who would represent which party at various levels led to several litigations and decamping which confused the INEC itself on who should appear or who was the genuine representatives of parties at some certain point (Page & Tayo, 2018). In essence, some parties were included or restored in the race less than a week before the election after the court declared them qualified to participate in the electoral process (INEC, 2019). This situation made the process stressful and cumbersome for the INEC in its preparation and the conduct of the election. One of the informants revealed that: “At a certain level, the INEC had to re-order for the production of new ballot papers and election materials three days or less before the election date as a result of the confusing court orders that kept on disqualifying and re-qualifying candidates and parties” (Personal in-depth interview with an informant in category A on 12th August, 2019). In addition, the INEC faced a serious challenge of the multiplicity of political parties which increased the cost of election, made the election materials lengthy and bizarre and affected their transportation because they became heavier and exposed despite their sensitivity. One other area that the INEC encountered difficulty in the



conduct of the 2019 General Election was the money politics or party primaries. Regulations of party finance were openly violated by both the ruling and opposition parties. Party primaries were shrouded in an open vote buying, bribery, corruption, subversion of democratic process and manipulation (NCSSR, 2019). The different views of the informants on the challenges encountered by the INEC were summarised and presented in the pie chart below.

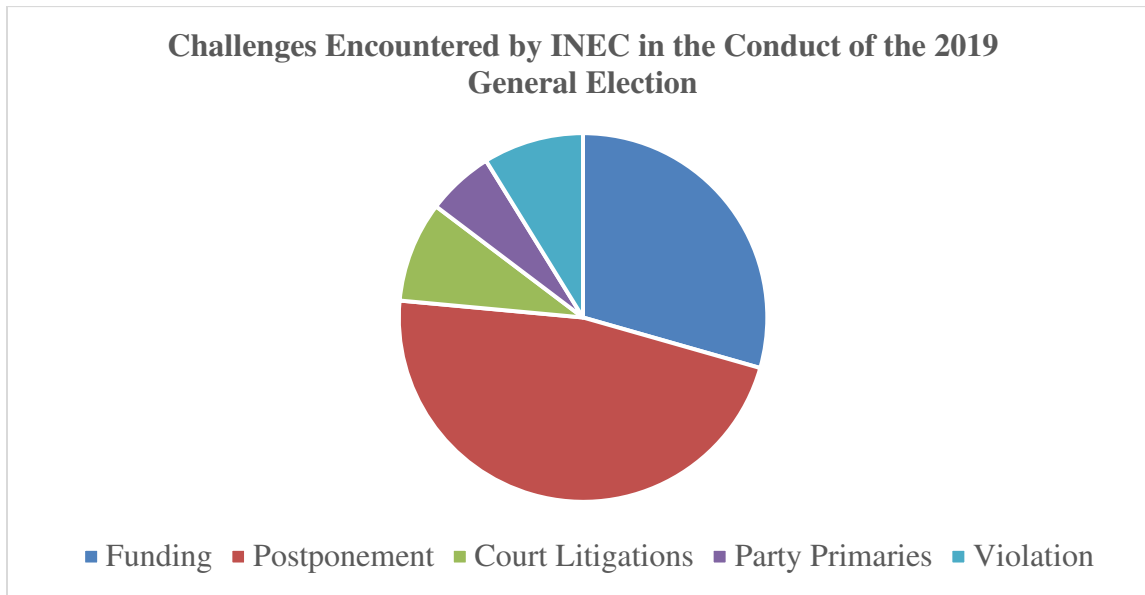


Figure 2: Informants' Views on the Challenges Encountered by the INEC during the Conduct of the 2019 General Election.

Source: The Researchers' Field Survey 2019.

In addition to the above, the United State Institute for Peace Research (2019) reported that potential risk of violence and insecurity was expected in the 2019 General Election prior to the election date. It occurred as predicted by the Institute in many States but the election was relatively peaceful since the majority of the places were tranquil during the election. Also, failure of card readers was observed in several places according to CDD Report (2019). From the theoretical perspective, the



Systems Theory is applicable in this section of the challenges faced by the INEC because interactions with the environment and decision making in a society involve several inter-plays and it is these influential factors that affected the INEC in the process of electoral conduct. For instance, parties that were not registered rushed to court and they were qualified to be registered by law. The INEC had no alternative but to register them.

5.3 The 2019 General Election, Analysis of the Outcome

The 2019 General Election recorded the lowest voter turnout in the history of general elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The voter turnout was 34.75% lower than any previous election from 1999. For instance, in 1999, the voter turnout was 52.3%, in 2003 it was 69.1%, in 2011 it was 57.3%, in 2011 55.4%, 42.4% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019 (INEC, 2019). Like the 2015 General Election, the 2019 General Election used the smart card readers for accreditation and voting. Reports of failure of the card readers emerged from all parts of the country. For instance, one of the informants narrated that: "The card readers failed in several polling units. Despite the supply of backup, the backup could not augment the affected areas. In this regard, elections were delayed, postponed or shifted to the evening hours or the following day in many constituencies. The INEC assured the public that the card readers were in good shape but we realised that the assurance was either fake or the INEC was not sure of its gadgets accordingly" (Interview with informant category E on 11th June, 2019). In another interview, an informant narrated his experience on the low voter turnout in 2019 as follows: "The electorates seemed to be tired of fake promises, non-performance and deception of Nigerian politicians. They decided to express their policy dissatisfaction through ballot abstinence, although the postponement might be a major factor in the low turnout also" (Interview with an informant in category F on 13th June 2019). The overall outcome of the 2019 General Election indicated that only two major parties, APC and PDP performed well even though an unprecedented number of 91 parties were registered. The results are summarily presented below.





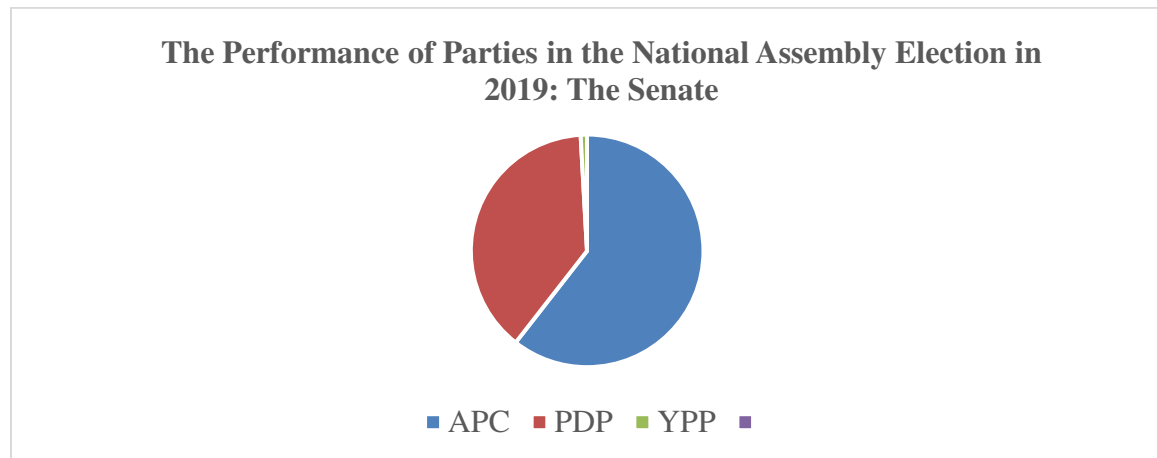
Table 3: Showing the Performance of Parties in the 2019 Presidential Election

S/No.	Parties	Votes Won	Percentage
1.	APC	15, 191, 847	55.69%
2.	PDP	11, 262, 978	41.28%
3.	Others	826, 419	3.03%
4.	Total	27, 281, 244	100%

Source: Sule (2019).

The Presidential Election results revealed that only the APC and PDP were serious contenders among the retinue of the 73 parties that contested for the Presidential post. In the National Assembly Elections, the performance of parties is presented below.

Figure 3: Performance of Political Parties in the National Assembly Election 2019: The Senate



Source: adopted from INEC (2019).





Table 4: The Performance of Parties in the House of Representatives in 2019

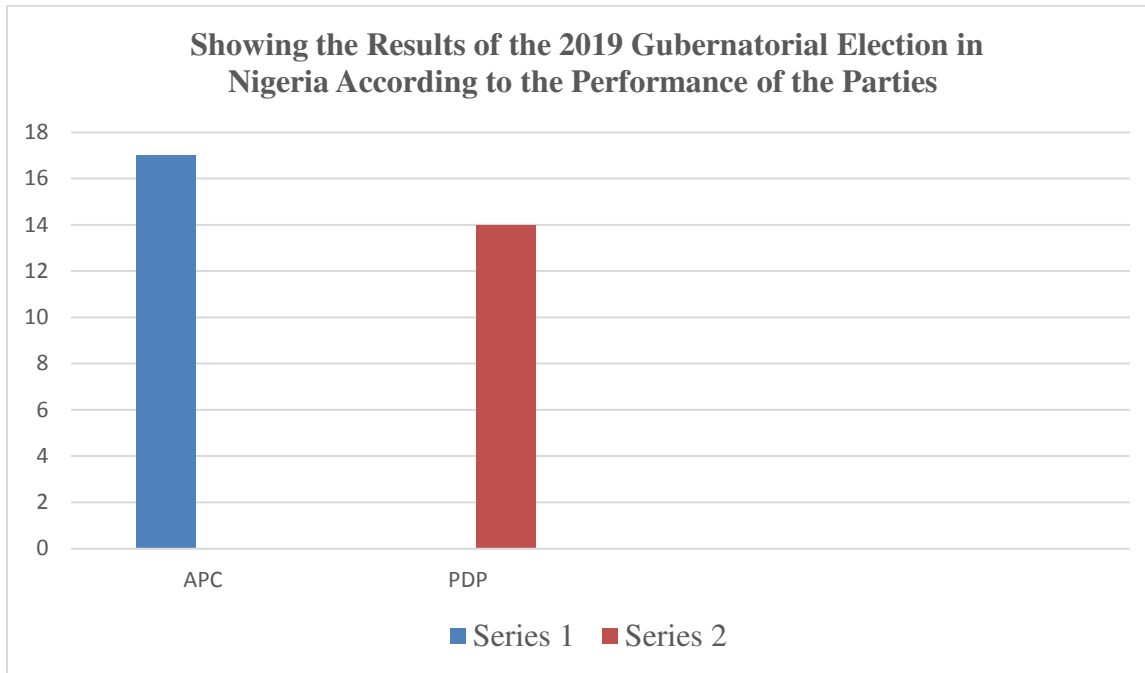
S/NO	Parties	Seat Won	Percentage
1.	APC	223	61.94%
2.	PDP	117	32.50%
3.	APGA	9	2.50%
4.	ADC	3	0.83%
5.	AA	2	0.56%
6.	PRP	2	0.56%
7.	SDP	1	0.28%
8.	LP	1	0.28%
9.	ADP	1	0.28%
10.	APM	1	0.28%
Total	10	360	100%

Source: Adopted from INEC (2019) (Computation into percentage made by the researcher).

The above results indicate that only three parties registered their presence in the Senate which is the upper chamber in the country. In the House of Representatives, the APC and PDP dominated the affairs of seats won except some few parties that made little efforts in securing some seats. This cannot prevent the majority ruling party from forming a House leadership and in terms of decision making. In the Governorship election, the following result was obtained.

Figure 4: 2019 Governorship Election Result According to the Performance of Political Parties





Source: Adopted from INEC (2019) Computation into Chart made by the Researcher.

The informants shared their diverse views on their expectations of the 2019 General Election. For instance, one of them narrated that: “We were optimistic that the process will improve upon the success of the 2015, we worked hard towards that. There is no election in the world that is totally free, fair and credible. It is simply a nomenclature. As far as we are concerned, elections were conducted, voters participated, stakeholders were involved, results were announced and accepted, it was successful” (Interview with an informant in category A on 17th July 2019). In another view, an informant stated that: “The 2019 General Election met our expectations as it was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, people expressed their will freely politically by choosing their party and candidates and the process was successful” (Interview with an informant in category B on 8th August, 2019). However, another informant presented a different view from the above where he said: “The 2019 General Election was a setback from the acclaimed success of the 2015. Massive rigging, manipulation, violence, intimidation, corruption and hijacking of electoral process

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occurred. It was a shame that after 20 years of democratic experimentation, we failed to institute a genuine process of election in an acceptable and credible manner” (Interview with an informant in category C on 16th August 2019). In another view, an informant revealed that: “The 2019 General Election was averagely conducted with its own challenges and successes. It was relatively peaceful in most places particularly the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. But the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly Elections were far from being peaceful, credible or even legitimate in some places. In essence, the overall grading of the election is fair but not free” (Interview with an informant in category D on 13th July 2019). Additionally, several studies (NCSSR 2019, EU 2019, NDI 2019, Sule 2019, IRI 2019 AND USIPR 2019) reported that the conduct of the 2019 General Election was satisfactory to a lesser level. They further identified several issues that affected the integrity of the Election such as vote buying, bribery and corruption, excessive campaign spending and the use of public treasury for party financing, violence, rigging, manipulation of results and postponement which disenfranchised many voters that crossed over from one part of the country to another but could not vote due to the postponement, forcing them to forgo the election.

The Systems Theory is applied here practically because it was assumed earlier that the whole process was a decision making involving the interest articulation, aggregation, inputs/demands and policy making in the conversion process with final outputs and feedback. Conduct of election is one of the critical governmental decisions and activities that occurred through the conversion process of the Systems Theory.

5.4 Effects of the Postponement on the 2019 General Election

The postponement of the Election as earlier observed from 16th February to 23rd February 2019 for the Presidential and National Assembly Elections and from 28th February to March 9, 2019 for the Governorship and State House of Assembly affected the election process. The information was

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welcomed with mixed reactions and angry lamentations from voters and immediately, the opposition PDP rejected the postponement, citing alleged plan of manipulation as the reason (Mbah, 2019). Politically, the implication of the postponement was a low voter turnout and a deepening voter apathy with just 34.76% of the total voters who came out to vote despite having the largest number of voters more than previous elections. Most of the informants narrated that they refused to partake in the 2019 General Election because the postponement shook their confidence, forcing them to return to their places of economic activities to avoid further losses. In one of the interviews with informants, he disclosed that: “Many voters could not participate in the process of the 2019 General Election because their enthusiasm for exercising their civil obligation was dampened by the postponement. They paid thousands of Naira to travel from far away North back to South or vice versa with their families, when the shock news of the postponement was heard, they were afraid the postponement may extend beyond one week which will affect their livelihoods and source of daily bread, they decided to go back. The implication was lowest voter turnout since 1999 (Interview with an informant in category D on 18th July 2019). Another informant revealed that: “The postponement of the 2019 General Election infuriated many voters who traveled from away to abscond from voting and even those at home in their large number decided to boycott the election. They rest their case that it happened in 2007, in 2011, 2015 and now till when will this unfortunate phenomenon stop” (Interview with an informant in category F on 21st July 2019).

Economically, the cost of postponement could not be imagined. Onuba (2019) reported that the cost of election must go higher from the approved N189 to at least N240 billion due to the postponement because some of the logistics must be re-strategise and the cost implications would go higher. Furthermore, he reported that economists in Nigeria calculated that at least N140 billion (\$ 386, 206, 884.00 million) was lost due to the postponement from the closure of businesses and other financial activities in the country which is a huge lost. Many informants supported this assertion where one of them mentioned that: “The economic implication of election postponement

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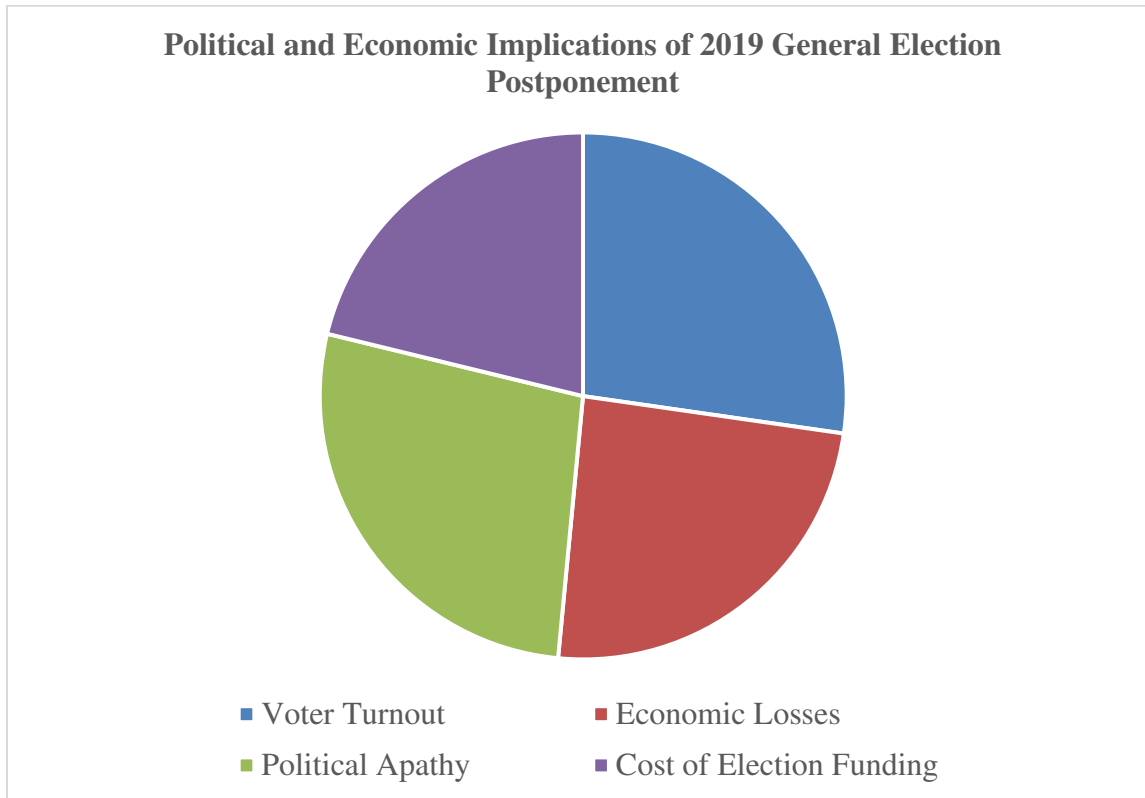




in 2019 was a huge economic fracture and losses everywhere from informal to established businesses and financial sectors” (Interview with an informant in category D on 19th August 2019). Many studies (NCSSR 2019, EU 2019, NDI 2019, Sule 2019, IRI 2019, USIPR 2019, Mbah 2019 and Onuba 2019), supported that the postponement had unbearable and overburdened political and economic implications on the outcome and performance of the 2019 General Election. The various implications of the election postponement are presented summarily from the informants’ views in the chart below.

Figure 5: Political and Economic Implications of the Postponement of the 2019 General Election





Source: Researchers' Field Work 2019.

The Systems Theory is also practically workable and applicable here. This is because the process of postponement of election and setting up a new date requires consultation, decision and policy making with all actors in both the external environment and the conversion process. The outcome of the decision might not be favourable for the voters as output that is why they sent their feedback through boycott and low voter turnout.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In the final note, the research investigated the phenomenon of election postponement which is becoming part of the Nigerian political culture recently since it occurred in 2007, 2011, 2015 and in 2019. Based on the study, research question and/or objectives data collection was made .. The

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same was analysed, discussed and interpreted. And based on those findings the research objectives were achieved. Below we summarise/outline how the research question/objectives were achieved;

With respect to research question or objective 1: What was the impact of the 2019 election postponement of the 2019 general election on its outcome and performance? The study found that traditionally, the process of conducting election has never been easy: it has always had challenges, as well as being with enduring negative characteristics of rigging, violence, bribery, corruption, excessive campaign spending, manipulation of results and other related factors. It has also been characterised by irregularities, malpractices, challenges and issues that are always affecting its credibility and acceptability. The electoral body; Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been entrapped in a vicious circle of recurrent election postponement which took place in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 General Elections. Crucially, the work discovered that the postponement of general election in Nigeria is gradually becoming a negative culture, which is detrimental to its economy. It has become a norm due to its inevitable re-occurrence pattern.

With regards to research question/objective 2: What was the impact of the 2019 election postponement on its outcome and performance? Politically, it was discovered from the study that the lowest voter turnout never recorded since the resurgence of the civilian rule from 1999 was as a result of the postponement. Similarly, the cost of election became higher with an already expensive election in the country more than many rich European countries. Economically, the implication of the postponement includes losses worth an estimated N140 billion, stagnation of financial market and transaction for many days and other issues. As already stated, this impacted negatively in terms of voter turnout and economic losses worth billions of Naira.

In relation to research question/objective 3; In what specific ways can election processes or process of electoral conduct in Nigeria be improved? The challenge emerged because of logistic problem involving delays in the provision of funding, procurement of election materials which were





imported from abroad, and alleged discovery of disruption of the electoral process by some hoodlums. The phenomenon has a serious implication politically and economically.

The study suggests that one of the panaceas to the incident is to ensure that the INEC is fully funded and equipped with all its needs a year before the election and the INEC must provide all the logistics at least three months before the general election.

The study therefore concludes that such phenomenon which occurred four times consecutively should not be allowed to continue as it has been eroding people's confidence and leading to political apathy which will affect the electoral process and democratisation in the country.

Recommendations

Thus, the study suggests the following:

1. The INEC should prepare its budget for general election at least a year before the election. For instance, the budget for the 2023 General Election should be prepared, forwarded to the Presidency for presentation to the National Assembly for approval in the 2022 budget so that the approved funds could be ready a year in advance;
2. All party primaries should be concluded at least six (6) months before the final election to ensure early and timely procurement of election materials;
3. Litigations concerning party primaries and other issues of disqualification or entitlements to candidacy should be round-up four months before the general election for the production of election materials without damages or losses;
4. The INEC should procure all election materials both sensitive and insensitive at least three months before the election. The materials should be supplied in coded boxes or containers with the secret codes known only to the INEC Chairman and any three senior officials closer to him for safety, compliance and eventualities so as to prevent future occurrence of postponement;





5. All election materials should reach the constituencies three days before the final election date and should reach polling units 48 hours before the final election;
6. Anybody found tempering with the election materials that were supplied in advance in order to scuttle the timely and scheduled election date or to rig or manipulate the election should be banned from politics be it a politician or his party permanently with life imprisonment sanction. If he is a citizen, he should undergo life imprisonment with severe punishment in order to ensure compliance, transparency and guarantee confidence in the process and
7. Massive public enlightenment campaign to restore public confidence and eschew political apathy should be embark by the INEC, civil societies, international donors, academicians and the mass media both printed and electronic.

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