

# Building Institutional Management Capacity Against Electoral Violence: A Case of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and 2023 Elections in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides a new perspective on the institutional management implications of intensified electoral violence in Nigeria. There has been a growing recognition of the role of institutional management in organizational performance such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria's electoral umpire. Yet little is known among scholars about specific institutional management capacity of INEC as Nigeria's 2023 general election was marred by violence. This paper explores such relationship, it seeks to understand the ways in which electoral violence has become a source of instability in Nigeria and why effective institutional management capacity is necessary. It argues that electoral violence such as chaos, arson, shooting of guns, carting away of ballot boxes etc, have made effective institutional management central to resolving such violence. The paper builds on institutional management theory and seminal qualitative data from the recent European Union Election Observer Mission (EUEOM), Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and International Crisis Group (ICG), to explore the case of Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) in relation to effective institutional management capacity in contexts characterized by electoral violence. Among others, the study demonstrates that institutional inefficiency and weak organizational capacity such as delay in uploading and transmitting electoral results into the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and poor operational capacity of INEC in timely collation of results account for electoral violence. Findings highlight a further management implication of institutional weakness, namely how it could breed 'inefficiency' in the electoral system and how such institutional weakness could shape the broader context of persistent electoral violence. Based on the findings, the paper specifically, advances two interrelated arguments. First, a new kind of electoral violence has emerged within Nigeria's electoral system as a result of institutional weakness of INEC that has (a) increased the incidence and type of electoral fraud leading to crises in Nigeria and (b) the crises have persisted within systemic and complex contexts. Second, this electoral violence has further obscured the links between political actors and institutional efficiency outcomes in ways that make the institutional management capacity of INEC particularly challenging. In the alternative, the paper proposes strategies for effective management and institutional overhaul.

**Keywords:** Institutional management, Organizational Efficiency, INEC, Election, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's electoral violence has been largely conceived as a colonial legacy (Falola, 2009; Igwe and Amadi, 2021). However, the persistence of electoral violence in post-colonial Nigeria has been widespread (Collier, 2009; Hoelscher, 2015; Igwe and Amadi, 2021). Michael Bratton, (2008) has examined dynamics of vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaign, pointing out its contradictions to democratic ideals. Indeed, the United Nations Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings has recommended documenting cases of election-related killings on an annual basis as it has become so widespread (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010).

Since Nigeria's nascent democracy in 1999, the conduct and management of election has been a major challenge to democratization. According to a number of recent studies, electoral violence has been a major constraint to

free, fair and credible election (Diamond, Jonathan, Juan and Lipset, 1999; Onimisi and Tinuola, 2019; Igwe and Amadi, 2021; ICG, 2023). Such persistent violence led Paul Collier and Pedro Vicente (2014) to posit that violence, bribery, and fraud have been central to the political economy of elections in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since the 2000s despite the recent electoral Act and the introduction of electronic voting through the use of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which transmits electoral results in real time, it appears the transmission of results in the 2023 presidential election was not in real time. For instance, a recent report by the European Union Election Observer Mission (EUEOM), found that in the presidential and National Assembly elections conducted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2023, votes for the presidential elections were not transmitted in real time across the nation (EUEOM, 2023). Such delay, which is not only unconstitutional, accounts for inefficiency and poor capacity of INEC to manage the electoral process efficiently despite the sum of 305 billion naira approved by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) for electronic voting system.

Similarly, there was evidence of electoral violence and irregularities across the nation such as carting away of ballot boxes and threats to voters by the incumbent in places like Lagos (EUEOM, 2023). With the recent electoral crisis and irregularities alongside the broader contention regarding electoral results and outcome following the ongoing cases in the electoral tribunal, it appears that INEC lacks some of the core institutional management capacity for credible polls. Such inefficiencies have led to new scholarly debates. Many of these perspectives, however, have tended to overlook the longer-term significance and role of building institutional *management capacity* of INEC in evolving a more credible electoral democracy, which is an emerging research in electoral management and administration—a gap which extends to dominant perspectives in institutional and organizational management theories, which emphasize patterns of organizational performance dimensions based on resources without adequate attention to the issues of capacity to manage. In their study, Raynard, et al. (2015) highlight that management capacity is the strategic ability to plan, control or coordinate the activities of a given organization in line with expected results

This article seeks to critique inefficiency in electoral management drawing on the case analysis of INEC by highlighting the significance of its capacity to manage the electoral process effectively as core to Nigeria's developmental democracy. In particular, it draws attention to the role of INEC as an "independent" body that could evolve and manage a distinct democratic order.

This emphasis on the relevance of institutional capacity of INEC and the management of Nigeria's electoral system not only underscores some neglected aspects of Nigeria's electoral management but also accounts for the specific contexts INEC has been unable to conduct free, fair and credible elections by identifying the inability of INEC to deliver electoral results in real time despite its promises and the provision of BVAS, a phenomenon that most management approaches have side stepped. Thus, the assumption that provision of BVAS was essential to the conduct of credible polls will be critiqued, in the alternative, the paper posits that while BVAS added value to the electoral process, it was not enough— a key issue is the capacity of INEC to manage the electoral process and outcome transparently. It is the lack of such capacity, which resulted in electoral crises that necessitated this study.

Our study follows on the heels of a number of scholars who have emphasized the need for radical overhaul of INEC and indeed Nigeria's electoral process (ICG, 2023; EUOM, 2023; ACLED, 2023). Some of the contributions to the debate on electoral failures highlight the poor performance of INEC as a key driver of electoral anomaly, which reflect non conformity to either the electoral Act or democratic tenets by which elections could be conducted. Further, many political perspectives on Nigeria's election have been criticized for their non critical exploration of the management of electoral process in their analysis, as well as their failure to address the persistent challenges of complicity despite the claim that INEC is "independent", which have undermined and, in some cases, derail the electoral process.

This paper draws on some of these debates on the dynamics of election and, in many respects, share their perspectives on the centrality of effective management of the electoral process through institutional capacity building. However, by focusing on institutional management capacity in strengthening Nigeria's INEC and electoral processes, the paper aims to make a new contribution to this wider literature, which is important to both an understanding of the specific ways INEC has failed and the evidence of poor management capacity in

general—one that also speaks to the contemporary context of electoral violence highlighted above. In this context, this paper outlines a review of how and why credible election is essential, thereby addressing an important gap in the literature.

Specifically, we seek to go beyond “uncritical” framings of INEC as an institution, which has dominated much of the prevailing scholarship. These perspectives are less transformative as they conceptualize the activities of INEC from a non- managerial perspective nor as a strategic institution that could effectively usher in a credible electoral system. Much of the prevailing arguments have sidestepped examining the institutional capacity of INEC in terms of its non- compliance with electoral Act and inability to transmit presidential election results in ‘real time’ as required by the Act (EUOM,2023). As such, existing approaches tend to understate the non “independent “and efficiency of INEC as non- responsive, active and accountable institution that operate in contexts that are seemingly at variance with electoral Act

In contrast, this paper demonstrates the need to build institutional management capacity of INEC to fist all electoral crises. While there has been commentary on new wave democracy in the Global South (Huntington,1991), such perspectives have tended to ignore the challenges of credible polls in the developing democracies of the South particularly Africa and indeed the role INEC could play and the implications of persistent electoral violence since Nigeria’s democracy.

The paper conceptualizes electoral management capacity as constitutive element of liberal-democracy that could be essential to transform the contradictory workings of Nigeria’s INEC and which are particularly crucial to transform Nigeria’s electoral democracy.

The ongoing post-election tensions and litigations with the electoral tribunal to a significant degree, reflect the poor capacity of the workings and normative foundations of INEC (EUOM,2023), it further limits democracy deepening, thereby creating openings for electoral crises. This study therefore emphasizes the critical importance of capacity to manage the electoral system in creating a new democratic order in Nigeria.

Institutional Management Capacity is not only essential for credible polls but systemically serves as ant-electoral violence paraphernalia within Nigeria’s nascent democracy liberal —and should be particularly internalized — for a distinct social order as a necessary feature of Nigeria’s electoral democracy and legitimate element of liberal democratic politics (Singh 2017).

Essentially, while some scholars have argued that INEC has been ineffective and, in some respects, contradictory to democratic ideal (EUOM,2023; ICG,2023), some scholars have argued that it has also demonstrated a historical consistency with non-credible polls since Nigeria’s nascent democracy —a major challenging element to democracy deepening. It is this “inherent” contradictions and por capacity to manage the conduct of elections” emanating from non- institutional management capacity that makes this study timely and essential for management scholarship and institutional capacity building debate.

Against this backdrop, this paper makes a new contribution to organizational management literature, it offers a new perspective on the institutional management implications of intensified electoral crises in Nigeria. The paper argues that the poor management of Nigeria’s electoral system is an attribute of weak institutional capacity. It is an institutional analysis of organizational performance which builds on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as an institution, to critically explore the nature conduct of Nigeria’s 2023 general elections. It seeks to understand the ways in which electoral crises have become a source of instability in Nigeria and why effective institutional management is necessary.

This article is one of the first to assess the institutional capacity INEC in post 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Exploring the dynamics of the general election to interrogate trends in electoral violent is important for research and policy. The rest of the discussion is organized as follows; methodology, theoretical framework, electoral violence, INEC and institutional capacity, conclusion and finally recommendations.

## METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to find answer to the central research question? Has INEC demonstrated institutional

management capacity for a credible poll in Nigeria? if it has, what interacting variables suggest such institutional capacity, if it has not, what evidence shows electoral violence and non- institutional capacity of INEC to conduct credible elections? To find answer to these questions, and to test the arguments advanced in this study, a deepened review of qualitative data from Afro Barometer, Human Rights Watch and recent report of the European Union Election Observer Mission(EUEOM) in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, seminal qualitative data from the recent, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and International Crisis Group (ICG), were reviewed to examine INEC in relation to capacity to conduct credible elections with focus on effective institutional management capacity in contexts characterized by chaos and electoral violence. The EUEOM is particularly suitable as it provides most recent and up to date data on INEC and the conduct of the election This study is specifically a case analysis of INEC and the 2023 general election in Nigeria. Our unit of analysis is Nigeria's 2023 general elections, which include the Presidential, National Assembly and Governorship elections. Also, multiple case analysis of the various evidence regarding electoral violence including arson, thuggery, carting away of ballot boxes, threats etc. were reviewed.

The study assessed the determinants of electoral violence under these conditions through a relational content analysis including earlier data drawn from the Human Rights Watch (2003) and the survey of political violence from the National Bureau of Statistics, which were further reviewed. Scholars have demonstrated the methodological relevance of content analysis in qualitative research as it provides detailed review and insights on any existing information, data or document (Holsti 1969; Krippendorff, 1980). In particular, Holsti (1969:14) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" .

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

There are various theoretical explorations and postulations on institutional management (Bratton, 2007;Raynard, Johnson, and Greenwood,2015) .Following recent discourses on democracy and electoral violence (Schwarzmantel 2010; Merklen, 2012; Albertson and Guiler,2020; Igwe and Amadi,2021), this study espouses a theoretical analysis of electoral violence in Nigeria that seeks to understand INEC as an institution as well as its management capacity or otherwise in the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 general elections-hence institutional theory.

### **Institutional Management Theory**

According to institutional theorists, institutions matter for the success of governance (Easterly &Levine,2003; Rodrik, et al. 2002; Fukuyama,2023). Douglas North and proponents of new institutional theory, posit that there are new and emerging institutional challenges, which expand the role of institutions. Similarly, Helen Milner contends that a key factor undermining institutional efficiency is interest (Milner, 1997). Thus, the particular interest any institution serves accounts for its success or failure. This study follows institutional theory with emphasis on institutional management (Raynard, et al.2015).

Our focus here is on the connections between electoral violence and the non- institutional capacity of INEC to manage the electoral processes as well as its -institutionalist effects, arguably one of the most influential explanations of the distinct political character of institutional management in relation to electoral violence is found in Ariola and Johnson(2012).Their work on the institutional management has provided the most sustained theoretical account of both the processes and outcome of institutional failure and why institutional management has accounted for persistent electoral violence. Drawing on scholarship that has shown patronage to be a destabilizing mechanism in weakly institutionalized settings (Huntington, 1968; Scott, 1969; Lemarchand, 1972; Ariola and Johnson, 2012; Igwe and Amadi,2022), this paper follows Ariola and Honson (2012) and argues that electoral violence is likely to occur in uncoordinated democracies where patronage politics continues to facilitate the exchange of political loyalties for material benefits. As Ariola and Jonson (2012) highlight, the patronage system enables political and economic elites to engage in mutually beneficial transactions, however such transactions may often not translate to a peaceful electoral process.

Perhaps more than any other "mainstream" institutional theory and strategic management scholar, Raynard, et al.(2015) have drawn out the structural interconnections between institutional management capacity,

organizational political relations and the people. Succinctly, they posit that institutional theory is based on an alternative set of assumptions that center on the concept of social construction – i.e. that the external and internal world of organizations is that which is subjectively understood or perceived by people in those organizations (Raynard, et al.2015). Further, Raynard et al. (2015 :1) put forward some of the assumptions institutional management as follows;

(i) Organizations are not autonomous agents seeking to maximize economic opportunities but are set within a social web of norms and expectations that constrain and shape managerial choice. These social rules – or logics – provide overarching frameworks for interpreting social situations and prescribe appropriate collective purposes and behaviors. A manager's choice of strategies is, thus, not an unfettered act but a selection constrained by social prescriptions. (ii) Social prescriptions are transmitted to organizations through such agencies as the state, professional institutes, consultants, analysts, the media, and other carriers of ideas and beliefs about appropriate managerial conduct. (iii). By conforming to social prescriptions, organizations secure approval, support and public endorsement, thus increasing their “legitimacy”. (iv) Social prescriptions may become “taken-for-granted”, i.e. institutionalized, and thus very difficult to change or resist. (v) Conformity to social prescriptions rather than attendance to the “task environment” (e.g. markets) may adversely affect efficiency and other economic measures of performance, but may improve long term chances of survival. When an organization is confronted with multiple, potentially conflicting, logics that prescribe different courses of action, it faces institutional complexity – a situation that can generate tension, conflict and organizational instability. (vi). Because similar organizations experience similar social expectations and pressures of conformity, they tend to adopt similar strategies and managerial arrangements. This is the process of “isomorphism.

Thus, analysis of institutional management is an emphasis on organizational hierarchy and how such structural relations translate to results. In their view, Raynard, et al. (2015:5) highlight that, strategic management theory has been dominated by perspectives in which organizational strategies and structures are deemed effective if deliberately aligned to the requirements and challenges of the task environment (i.e., the sources of inputs – supplies, labour and so on – and markets).

It is the specifically management capacity that drives efficiency among those involved in steering the affairs of an organization and the array of institutions and interactions that facilitate an organization's ability to achieve such unprecedented results amidst constraints. In this regard, INEC needs to be strategically repositioned.

In most developing democracies, institutional capacity for management remains an issue, particularly Nigeria, and the making and evolution of its electoral democracy, which since 1999 has never been violent free. Institutional management theorists have provided further empirical and theoretical substance to the question of efficiency in decision making and problem solving in organizational context by explicating “the underlying principles of coordination, planning, implementation, budgeting and the various processes that shape the conduct of organizational relationship as well as their outcome. Further, institutional management theorists demonstrate the ways in which the internalization of organizational norms and values strengthen overall organizational performance and results. This according to Ruggie (1982: 380) represents “a fusion of performance with legitimate social purpose”. Based on these theoretical postulations, it is worth exploring the linkages between INEC as an institution and its capacity to conduct credible election in Nigeria and its inherent contradictions. For instance, central to INEC's weak institutional capacity is non response to the laid down rules in the electoral Act exemplified in non- transmission of presidential results in real time as well as the overall poor conduct of the election. The institutionalist approach suggests that democracies with weak and fragile institutions should be more prone to electoral violence. Such institutional inefficiency and weak organizational capacity of INEC manifest in shooting, stuffing of ballot box, delay in uploading and transmitting electoral results into the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). These inefficiencies have been variously discussed in recent scholarship and underscore poor operational capacity of INEC and particularly constitute a key factor that accounts for electoral crises.

### **Electoral Violence, INEC and Institutional Capacity**

The increasing electoral violence among developing democracies has led scholars to argue that such trends are the shadow rather than the substance of democracy or what Schedler (2002) termed “elections without

democracy”, which underscores his postulation on “the menu of manipulation”, which has been a common vice in developing democracies. Much of the previous studies have identified various patterns and consequences of electoral violence (Chaturvedi, 2005; Bratton, 2008; Collier and Vicente, 2014). This is evident in Nigeria as INEC could not deliver presidential election results in real time as repeatedly promised.

The foundation of electoral violence in Nigeria is traced to the colonial state (Falola, 2009). Discourse on political violence has a substantial body of literature (Bratton, 2008; Collier, 2009; Campbell 2010; ACLED, 2023). In his book, *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, Paul Collier discusses the various ways election has become a war in small developing countries of the world economy. Collier (2009) contends that the spread of elections and resolution of various conflicts in the world's most dangerous countries may lead to a new democratic world.

With specific reference to the 2023 general elections and, in particular, the distinct character of the political actors during the elections, a number of studies have sought to explore the various ways electoral violence marred the election (EUEOM, 2023). According to European Union Observer Mission, “the 2023 general elections did not ensure a well-run transparent, and inclusive democratic process as assured by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)” (EUEOM, 2023:6). A number of recent studies have explored electoral violence in the 2023 general election in Nigeria (ACLED, 2023; Ebuka 2023; Crisis Group, 2023; Biriowo (2023). For instance, situation summary of the Nigeria Election Violence Tracker provided by ACLED (2023) highlight that Factional infighting continued to dominate Nigeria’s political landscape over the past two weeks as the country approaches the 25 February elections.

Ebuka (2023) identified issues of electoral violence, including vote-Buying, in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria. Similarly, in their studies both Biriowo (2023) and ACLED (2023) found that despite the electoral Act the outcome of 2023 general election was not only poor but compromised. This perspective is further corroborated by EUEOM, (2023:6), which asserts that the widely welcomed Electoral Act 2022 (the 2022 Act) introduced measures aimed at building stakeholder trust. However, the Act’s first test in a general election revealed crucial gaps in terms of INEC’s accountability and transparency, proved to be insufficiently elaborated, and lacked clear provisions for a timely and efficient implementation.

Institutional management also called strategic management, according to Bliss (2023) is the process of laying out plans and organizing available production resources to run a successful organization. As a strategic management strategy, Bliss (2023) identified some of the steps in institutional management to include, identifying the current situation, identifying the desired situation and determining the steps necessary to get there. Bliss further argued that the idea behind the process is to lay out a strategic plan that outlines concrete steps to maximize a company’s success. This process can improve business by allowing an analytical view of how the business could best operate.

Did INEC adopt or take such concrete steps in the conduct of Nigeria’s 2023 general election?

INEC is a constitutionally independent body composed of a Chairman (Chief Electoral Commissioner) and twelve other commissioners with extensive responsibilities, including organizing all elections down to state level, registering and monitoring political parties, registering voters, delimiting constituencies and prosecuting of electoral offences (EUEOM, 2023). The Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) operate at the state level they perform their functions as delegated by INEC. The INEC commissioners and the RECs are directly appointed by the President, subject to confirmation by the Senate. INEC maintains permanent offices across the 36 states, the FCT and 774 LGA. The Constitution provides that all members of INEC are strictly non-partisan (EUEOM, 2023:15).

Regarding INEC and electoral management capacity, EUEOM, (2023:6) emphasized that “media raised voters’ awareness, fact-checkers stood up against disinformation and civil society demanded INEC’s accountability. The overall outcome of the polls attests to the continued underrepresentation of marginalized groups in political life “This has serious implications for electoral management such as inefficiency, poor coordination, budgeting, organizational transparency and effective implementation and compliance to the electoral Act.

Another aspect of poor management capacity encapsulated in EUEOM’s findings is poor planning on the part

of INEC. For instance, EUEOM (2023:6-7) found that “a total of 93.4 million voters were registered for the 2023 elections. Owing to civic mobilization during registration, two-thirds of the 9.5 million new registrants were youth. Yet, poor institutional planning and, again, lack of transparency negatively affected the collection of Permanent Voter Cards (PVC)”.

Has INEC demonstrated the much-expected institutional capacity to deliver free, fair and credible election? According to Sen (2005) capability has been a term used in relation to capacity. Capability denotes ability of an individual or a group to willingly engage in an activity. Thus, there are two broad classifications of capacity namely; institutional and individual capacity (Amadi,2018).

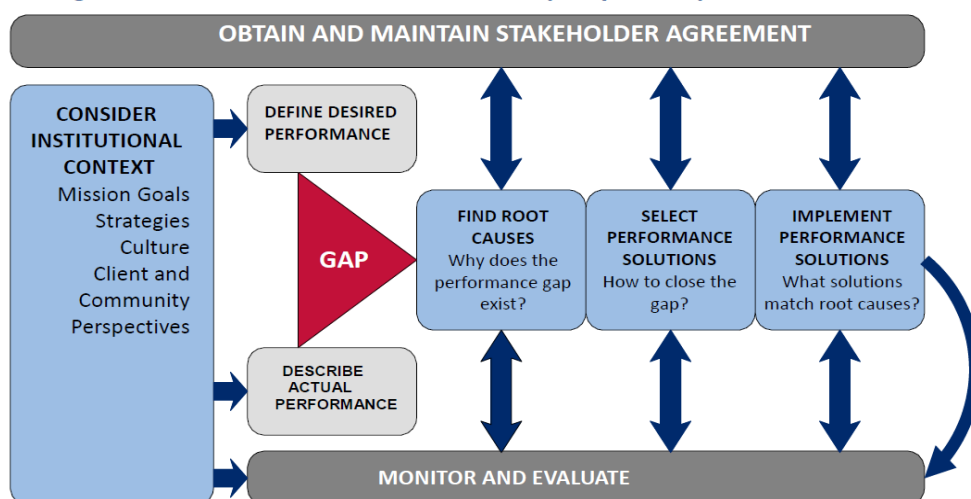
Institutional capacity as a term has different meanings depending on the context and the purpose of inquiry. It can refer to the ability of a group or organization to formulate and implement required organizational tasks. The ability of an institution to set and achieve, political, social and economic goals, constitutes its capacity. The essential skills or ability of INEC to create a credible electoral environment, make votes count, use the BVAS efficiently and deliver results in real time and in line with electoral laws including the electoral Act, constitutes its capability. Thus, as an institutional term -capability focuses on the process of strengthening, creating, and maintaining organization capacity over time, or the quality of leadership, incentives, systems, resources, and personnel that produce results based on the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution.

Institutional capacity is defined as the quality of leadership, incentives, systems, resources, and personnel that produce results based on the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution. It refers to both the organizational capacity as reflected by the institution’s public mandate, legitimacy, resources, and systems and the human capacity reflected by the motivation, status, technical, and managerial skills of its leaders and staff (USAID,2009).

Institutional capacity can be influenced by various factors, such as knowledge, skills, systems, institutions, incentives, accountability, resources, and financing. Institutional capacity can be assessed by using different indicators and tools, depending on the type and level of capacity being measured. In our context, this study examines the capacity of INEC in the context of conducting violent free, fair and credible elections. Some scholars posit that capability requires a complementary theory of obligations and duties (Gasper, 2004:178); relatedly, some perspectives contend that there is need to delineate between the place of basic equality and the overall objective of capability expansion (Alkire, 2002:177-8). There are similar viewpoints that democratic processes alone might be insufficient to bring about the necessary changes for instance despite Nigeria’s democracy since 1999, INEC capability to conduct free, fair and credible lection has been contestable.

To this effect, Stewart and Deeulin (2002:69-70) have called for collective action to influence public policy, such as civil society and collective action to make votes count in Nigeria’s elections. More work is required to bring out the policy implications of INEC/capability nexus.

**Figure 1: USAID Human and Institutional Capacity Development Framework**



**Source:** USAID (2011).HICD Handbook. p.7

## CONCLUSION

The point this paper has been emphasizing is that effective management of Nigeria's electoral democracy is essential for democracy deepening and overall economic development. This study among others has demonstrated that institutional inefficiency and weak organizational capacity such as delay in uploading and transmitting electoral results into the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and poor operational capacity of INEC in timely collation of results, increasingly vitiate the capacity of INEC and accounts for electoral crises. Igwe and Amadi (2021) reinforce the critical implication of such outcome as they highlight the arguments of Robert Dahl that 'democracy can be independently invented and reinvented whenever the appropriate

conditions exist' (Dahl 1998:9–10; Igwe and Amadi, 2021:107). This debate demonstrates the theoretical and practical lacuna in Nigeria's democracy, where 'the appropriate conditions do not exist'. Findings further highlight a further management implication of institutional weakness, namely how it could breed 'inefficiency' in the political system and how such institutional weakness could shape the broader context of persistent electoral crises as well as resolution challenges. Based on the findings, the paper specifically, advanced two interrelated arguments. First, a new kind of electoral violence has emerged within Nigeria's electoral system as a result of institutional weakness of INEC that has (a) increased the incidence and type of electoral fraud leading to crises in Nigeria's electoral system and (b) the crises have persisted within systemic and complex contexts. Second, this electoral crisis has further obscured the links between political actors and institutional efficiency outcomes in ways that make the institutional management context for crisis free electoral system particularly challenging. In the alternative, the paper proposes strategies for effective management and institutional overhaul.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

What then are the policy and management implications of institutional weakness of INEC to conduct a credible election and how could such weakness be remedied? While management entails control, planning, coordination, organizing, budgeting etc, how it could foster institutional 'efficiency' in Nigeria's electoral system to overcome institutional weakness that could shape the broader context of persistent electoral violence as well as possible resolution strategies have been challenges.

However, there are a number of strategies for effective management and institutional overhaul of Nigeria's electoral system that could strengthen the building of INEC's institutional management capacity against electoral Violence. The following could be considered;

- (i) **Adopting a democracy that empowers the people:** Accordingly, Igwe and Amadi (2021) followed Ake (1996) who argued on the necessities for a transformation of Nigeria's electoral system as Ake (1996) called for the transformation of the state as a necessity for democratization in Africa, pointing out the need for a democratization that is based on the popular empowerment of the masses. The "democracy of empowerment" which addresses the social and economic spheres as well as the political and offers concrete rights. Because it is driven by the interests of ordinary people, it is more conducive to the democratic transformation of the state and also to the social and economic upliftment of the masses, including their incorporation into decision making. This is quite different from the 'electoral democracy' which the African elites and the international community are advocating.
- (ii) **Building New Institutional capacity:** According to USAID (2013), institutional capacity development is necessary for the effective function of any organization particularly INEC in our context. This is important for effective electoral system as there is need to build human and institutional capacities of INEC. Further, USAID (2013) observed that over the past thirty years, the term 'capacity development' generally has meant provision of short technical or long-term degree-earning academic participant training for mid- to high-level professionals. But this training does not necessarily have an impact on improving institutional performance. Staff training can be an effective, institutional capacity-building strategy when staff knowledge and skill gaps are the major explanatory factor in weak institutional performance and when that training is directly linked to working with existing institutional management systems. For instance, EUOM (2023) observed that, there is no legal requirement that the selection of INEC staff be undertaken according to merit and qualification to ensure the independence and efficiency of the institution. Thus, to build institutional capacity of INEC staff there is need to re-examine the

appointment procedure of the members of staff including the chairman to endure the alleged independence of the institution to be able to function effectively.

- (iii) **Fighting corruption and electoral fraud:** Corruption and electoral fraud have been on the increase and have been major factors fueling electoral violence in Nigeria. A total sum of 305 billion naira was provided to INEC for the procurement of BVA, unfortunately INEC could neither account for the money nor use the BVAS to conduct a credible election.
- (iv) **Remoralizing Nigeria Political elite:** Proponents of elite remoralization such as Igwe and Amadi (2021:116), point out that, to re-moralize the political elite who deploy pretexts such as political power acquisition, youth empowerment, money politics, patronage system, marginalization, minority (in the case of the Niger Delta) to ferment political crisis and violence, which undermine democracy is essential. This could be achieved through a radical elite transformation programme where all state holders such as the CSOs could be involved for a new political culture and political behavior where the leaders could be held accountable.
- (v) **Institutional reform:** It is suggested that institutional reform and a new discourse of politics should be important elements of a new electoral order and a response for a sustainable democracy (Schwarzman 2010; Amadi and Alapiki 2012). Thus while electronic voting is useful, institutional reform where credible polls could be conducted with integrity is needed. For instance, EUEOM (2023) highlights that while confidence in collection rates per polling unit by INEC was undermined due to their belated publication. EUEOM (2023:7) recommends that overall, an external independent audit could have helped to assure accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter register.
- (vi) **Effective Management of inter- ethnic relationship:** Nigeria is a multi -ethnic and multi -linguistic society with over 250 ethnic and linguistic groups (Otiye, 1990). Scholars have advocated for a harmonized inter- ethnic relation as a modality for institutional overhaul including the conduct of credible elections. Igwe and Amadi (2021:116) made similar observation when they recommended that “proper management of inter and intra ethnic relationship is important”. The essence is to overcome increasing ethnic fractionalization within the Nigerian State, which they termed “a potential time bomb” for political violence and a strong challenge to democratic practice in Nigeria (Igwe and Amadi, 2021:116).

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