

**THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA: A
CASE STUDY OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN EDO STATE**

A PROJECT SUBMITTED

BY

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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God for His love, care and provisions and grace throughout my academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my gratitude to the Almighty God for granting me the strength and mercy to successfully complete this project and my Bachelor of Science program in the esteemed Political Science department at the University of Benin. Without His support, I would not have been able to achieve this milestone.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Since the reestablishment of civilian administration in 1999, Nigeria has conducted seven successive presidential elections, each demonstrating both institutional gains and ongoing challenges regarding electoral integrity. The 2023 poll used biometric accreditation and the IREV platform to boost transparency; nonetheless, logistical obstacles, security issues, and suspicions of electoral fraud continued, casting doubt on the results statewide (Shamsudeen, 2025; Atoi, Dillali, and Zakari, 2024). Systemic tensions underline the significance of knowing how political players exploit both formal and informal power to create outcomes, particularly at the sub-national level.

The 2023 presidential election in Edo State depicts this dynamic remarkably. Local party elites exploited incumbency resources and patron-client networks to galvanize voters, but opposition factions employed ethnic and religious rhetoric to offset the ruling party's advantage (Ebomoyi, 2024; Atoi et al., 2024). Simultaneously, party finances crossed hidden paths, altering campaign outreach and the efficacy of messaging. These exchanges illustrate the difference between procedural enhancements and the actualities of electoral fighting. Despite the expanding corpus of literature on national-level election administration, there is a deficiency of detailed evaluations analyzing the extent of political influence at every point of the process, from polling unit logistics to collation protocols in Edo State. Current research generally regards administrative errors and political intervention as independent issues, forgetting their reciprocal reinforcement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite a succession of institutional advancements like the implementation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing (IREV) portal, Nigeria's election integrity remains afflicted with issues (Gabriel and Owa, 2024; Emordi et al., 2024). In Edo State's 2023 presidential election, these hurdles appeared in multiple key ways. First, ruling-party actors leveraged incumbency resources and state machinery to influence the campaign climate in their favour, suppressing competition (Ebomoyi, 2024). Second, local power brokers placed overt and covert pressure on polling-unit workers and collation centre officials, jeopardizing the neutrality of electoral administrators (Gabriel and Owa, 2024). Third, informal patron-client networks and identity-based mobilization techniques grounded in religious and ethnic cleavages, funneled material inducements to sway voters, hence altering true voting choices (Atoi et al., 2024). Finally, procedural processes designed to promote transparency and accountability were inconsistently applied, since logistical challenges and security concerns presented openings for manipulation of results and intimidation of electoral actors (Emordi et al., 2024).

These efforts degrade public faith in democratic institutions, aggravate regional disparities in electoral fairness, and threaten Nigeria's ultimate aim of democratic consolidation (Emordi et al., 2024). While current study has documented examples of wrongdoing at the national level, few studies give a thorough, state-level analysis of how political influence influences every stage of the electoral process in a battleground jurisdiction like Edo State (Atoi et al., 2024; Ebomoyi, 2024). This vacuum in the literature impedes the creation of context-specific remedies aimed at safeguarding election administration authorities from undue political intervention. Accordingly, this study addresses the problem of pervasive political intrusion in Edo State's 2023 presidential election by mapping the mechanisms through which party strategies, incumbency advantages, and informal networks shaped the conduct, credibility,

and outcomes of the poll. nature (Ebomoyi, 2024). This thesis addresses that lacuna by precisely mapping the mechanisms via which party strategy, incumbency power, and informal alliances intersect to affect election conduct and legitimacy.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this study is to critically analyze the mechanisms by which political actors influence the conduct, credibility, and outcomes of the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. By focusing on one battleground jurisdiction, the research tries to explain how party resource deployment, incumbency advantages, and informal networks impact electoral competition at every stage from voter mobilization to result collation. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Analyze how party money and campaign techniques affected candidate visibility and voter persuasion in Edo State
2. Assess the extent to which the incumbent governor's use of state resources and patronage networks influences the neutrality of electoral
3. Explore the significance of informal patron-client relationships and identity-based mobilization in determining voter participation and ballot security
4. Develop context-specific recommendations for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and civil society organisations to reinforce procedural protections and minimize undue political influence in future elections.

By fulfilling these aims, the study will provide empirical depth to debates on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's federal system and offer actionable recommendations for boosting the integrity of sub-national electoral processes.

1.3 Research Questions

1. In what ways did party financing and campaign methods influence electoral competition and voter persuasion in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election
2. To what extent did the incumbent governor's use of state resources and patronage networks affect the impartiality and decision-making autonomy of electoral officials?
3. How did informal patron-client networks and identity-based mobilization impact voter turnout, ballot security, and perceptions of election legitimacy
4. What influence did procedural innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing portal (IREV), have on minimizing or intensifying political meddling in Edo State's 2023 presidential election?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis one: Party money and campaign techniques positively influenced candidate visibility and voter persuasion in Edo State's 2023 presidential election.

Hypothesis Two: The incumbent governor's deployment of state resources and patronage networks significantly impacted the neutrality and decision-making autonomy of election authorities during the 2023 presidential contest in Edo State.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research addresses a crucial gap in the literature by offering a systematic, state-level analysis of how political players penetrate electoral administration in Nigeria. While most studies focus on national-level outcomes or treat administrative failures and political interference as discrete occurrences, this thesis presents an integrated study of party strategies, incumbency advantages, and informal networks at work in Edo State's 2023 presidential election. By deconstructing these mechanisms, the study increases scholarly

understanding of the micro-dynamics of electoral manipulation in federal situations and offers empirical depth to debates on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's sub-national units. Practically, the findings will equip the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society organizations, and electoral observation groups with context-specific insights into the vulnerabilities of election processes at the state level. Detailed mapping of interpersonal pressures on polling-unit staff, resource-flow channels, and technological bottlenecks will inform targeted reforms such as enhanced training protocols for electoral officials, stricter controls on campaign finance, and refinements to the BVAS and IREV systems to bolster administrative neutrality and transparency.

Furthermore, by highlighting the relationship between formal institutional improvements and established patron-client networks, this study presents a nuanced framework for policymakers and practitioners attempting to deepen democratic integrity. Insights into how identity-based mobilization and material inducements alter voter behavior can assist build civic-education programs and legislative measures that reduce undue political influence on future polls. Ultimately, the research intends to increase public trust in Nigeria's electoral system by revealing pathways for more resilient and responsible election management at both state and national levels.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This research is dedicated to the investigation of political influence on the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, Nigeria. Geographically, the study focuses entirely on the thirty-six local government units of Edo State, acknowledging its significance as a competitive battleground with pronounced patron-client networks and different ethnic constituents. Temporally, the probe spans the time from the official opening of presidential campaigns in

October 2022 through to the formal conclusion of result collation in March 2023, capturing pre-election tactics, election day administration, and early post-election conflicts. Thematically, the study examines four interrelated dimensions of electoral politics:

- (1) Party financing and campaign strategy;
 - (2) The use of state resources by the incumbent administration,
 - (3) The role of informal patron-client networks and identity mobilization; and
 - (4) the impact of technological innovations, specifically the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing portal (IREV) on transparency and
- Methodologically, the research adopts a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative analysis of official INEC voting and accreditation data with qualitative observations from semi-structured interviews with election officials, party agents, civil society observers, and voters. The study excludes other electoral contests (e.g, gubernatorial or legislative races) and other states, in order to provide an in-depth, context-specific knowledge of how politics influences presidential election administration in Edo State.

Operational Definition of Terms

1. Political influence: The power of political actors, including party elites, incumbents, and state officials to modify electoral administration by resource deployment, direct pressure on officials, or informal networks. Operationalised by the number of documented interference instances in observer reports and post-election petitions.
2. Electoral process: The sequence of stages in a presidential election-voter registration, accreditation, voting, collation, and result announcement measured by compliance with INEC's standard operating procedures, turnout statistics, and incidence of logistical failures (e.g., polling-unit disruptions).

3. Party Financing: Total monetary and in-kind resources mobilised by political parties for campaign activity. Operationalised via INEC-reported campaign expenditure disclosures and third-party audit estimates of spending on rallies, advertising, and grassroots mobilization.
4. Incumbency advantage: Benefits earned by the sitting governor or ruling party candidates resulting from control over state resources and patronage networks. Measured by the volume of public assets (vehicles, staff, community projects) openly deployed for campaign support and comparative media coverage studies.
5. Patron-client networks: Informal links in which patrons (political actors) give products or services to clients (voters) in exchange for electoral support. Operationalised by counts of recorded material distributions (e.g., cash, foodstuffs) and voter testimony regarding inducement offers during the campaign period.
6. Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS): A biometric gadget implemented by INEC to authenticate voters at polling units. Assessed by the percentage of accredited voters processed by BVAS against manual accreditation and by recording device faults or bypass events.
7. INEC Results Viewing site (IREV): An online tool for real-time public viewing of polling-unit results. Operationalized by the proportion of polling units with results submitted within stipulated dates and the number of reported inconsistencies between IREV data and official gazette results.
8. Voter Mobilization: Efforts by political actors and general society to enhance electoral participation. Measured by pre-election event counts (rallies, door-to-door visits), turnout rate departures from historical norms, and survey-based self-reports of contact by campaign agents.

9. Ballot security: Measures taken to protect ballot papers and boxes from tampering or theft. Operationalized by the incidence of sealed-box breaches, chain of custody record completeness, and observer complaints of unlawful ballot movements during collation.
10. Electoral official neutrality: Degree to which INEC staff and ad hoc officials conduct responsibilities without party prejudice. Assessed by observer assessment of official conduct at polling and collation centers, incidence of official recusals, and frequency of complaints brought against specific officials for prejudice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Review

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, and particularly its unfolding in Edo State, underscores how political actors, party dynamics, patronage networks, and institutional arrangements collectively shape electoral administration, voter behavior, and perceptions of legitimacy; this literature review therefore synthesizes theoretical perspectives on clientelism and institutionalism, empirical studies of party politics, campaign strategies, electoral technology deployment (including BVAS), and patterns of electoral malpractice and violence to identify how political influences operated at national and subnational levels during the 2023 cycle and to highlight specific empirical and methodological gaps that the present case study of Edo State seeks to address (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997, Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023).

2.1.1 Contextual Background: Electoral System and Legal Framework in Nigeria

Nigeria's electoral system and legal framework are founded on the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) and a body of electoral statutes and regulations that together delineate the rules for voter registration, candidate nomination, campaigning, voting, collation, and dispute resolution; the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is constitutionally mandated to organize and supervise elections, and recent statutory reforms and administrative innovations, including biometric voter registration, electronic accreditation and electronic result-transmission mechanisms have been introduced to strengthen electoral integrity though their effectiveness has been uneven owing to logistical constraints, implementation gaps, and contestation over legal

interpretation, while the adjudication of electoral disputes through specialized tribunals and the courts remains central to the electoral process despite concerns about protracted litigation and perceptions of partiality, and the formal rules operate within a broader political environment characterized by strong party control over nominations, clientelistic linkages, asymmetric resource distribution among contestants, and periodic security-sector involvement during electoral contests, all of which make it imperative to analyze both statutory provisions and their practical operationalization at national and subnational levels (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Electoral Act, 2022; Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997).

2.1.2 Contextual Background: Political Context for the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria unfolded against a backdrop of intense political realignment, heightened regionalization of party support, and contestation over incumbent-era governance legacies, with three notable dynamics shaping the contest: first, a fragmented opposition and the emergence of strong third-party performance altered traditional two-party dominance and redistributed electoral coalitions across regions (Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa, 2023); second, disputes over candidate selection, intra-party defections, and accusations of godfatherism amplified political volatility and shaped campaign narratives and mobilization strategies nationwide (Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa, 2023). Understanding the 2023 Nigerian presidential and national assembly elections. CDD West Africa.; third, public concerns about electoral administration, including preparations by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the deployment of new technologies, and the capacity to securely collate and transmit results, intensified scrutiny from domestic observer coalitions and civil

society, producing contested assessments of credibility and transparency that influenced post-election litigation and public trust(Situation Room 2023). Report on Nigeria’s 2023 general election. Situation Room Nigeria. Domestic observer groups reported logistical failures and procedural irregularities in parts of the country while also noting improvements relative to past cycles, underscoring a mixed institutional performance that interacted with partisan strategies, security interventions, and local patronage networks to shape both turnout and perceptions of legitimacy Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room.

2.1.3 Contextual Background On Edo State Political Landscape

Edo State’s political landscape is characterized by ethnic and regional diversity, entrenched patronage networks, competitive party politics, and periodic realignments that make it a strategic battleground in national elections; historically dominated by prominent political godfathers and strong party machines, the state has witnessed frequent intra-party contestation, high-profile defections, and shifting coalitions that shape candidate selection, mobilization strategies, and voter loyalties (Situation Room, 2023), while the 2023 presidential contest in Edo illustrated the salience of localized clientelistic linkages, urban-rural electoral splits, and campaign efforts concentrated in key local government areas where incumbency advantages and party structures remain decisive (EJPas, 2023); administrative factors such as voter registration patterns, turnout differentials, and INEC’s operational arrangements in the state also interacted with security deployments and civil society observation to influence both the conduct and perceived legitimacy of the electoral process (Situation Room, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study integrate clientelism and electoral-integrity perspectives to explain how formal rules, resource distributions, patron-client networks, and standards of procedural fairness jointly shape electoral administration, party behavior, and voter responses in Nigeria's 2023 presidential contest in Edo State, with institutionalism emphasizing the role of electoral management bodies' autonomy and rule-bound procedures in mediating implementation outcomes (March and Olsen, 1984), political-economy approaches foregrounding how campaign finance, resource asymmetries, and elite competition alter access to voters and the capacity to influence both administration and outcomes (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997), clientelism and patronage theory explaining targeted material exchanges, personalized brokerage, and party machine dynamics as mechanisms that translate resources into votes (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007), and the electoral-integrity framework supplying normative and diagnostic criteria-transparency, inclusiveness, accuracy, and accountability for assessing how deviations from acceptable standards produce contested legitimacy and fuel post-electoral litigation and mobilisation (Norris, 2014), together providing an operational toolkit for defining core concepts, selecting variables, and tracing causal pathways between political actors, institutional capacities, and observable electoral phenomena in the Edo State case.

2.2.1 Clientelism

Clientelism is a form of political exchange structured around dyadic, reciprocal ties in which patrons with access to resources provide particularistic, excludable goods or favors to clients in return for political support; these exchanges are personal and contingent rather than programmatic or ideology-driven (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007, Hicken, 2011). At the

micro level, interactions comprise recurring one-on-one transactions whereby patrons condition transfers on observable acts such as votes or turnout, establishing persistent dependency and asymmetric power relations between patrons and clients (Stokes 2005, Chandra, 2004).

The mechanics of clientelism rely on targeted distribution, monitoring, and intermediation: patrons seek to maximize electoral returns by tailoring goods to specific voters and minimizing leakage, brokers or local intermediaries identify needy clients, deliver benefits, and verify compliance, and enforcement mechanisms, social sanctions, withdrawal of benefits, or reputational costs sustain the exchange (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Hicken, 2011). Strategic electoral calculation specifies who is targeted, what is supplied, and when advantages are offered, with party competence and institutional incentives determining the sophistication and depth of clientelistic operations (Stokes, 2005).

Clientelism's prevalence and effects are conditioned by institutional and socioeconomic contexts: weak state capacity, sparse public goods provision, poverty, and fragmented party systems increase reliance on clientelistic strategies, while stronger institutions and programmatic parties reduce their attractiveness. Empirically, clientelism can provide short-term material access and political incorporation for marginalized groups but also distorts public spending priorities, undermines programmatic accountability, and fosters corruption and inefficient allocation of state resources (Chandra, 2004, Stokes, 2005).

2.2.2 Core principles of Fraud Theory

Fraud theory begins with the premise that fraudulent acts arise from a combination of individual motivations and situational facilitators rather than from a single cause, the classic formulation is Donald Cressey's Fraud Triangle, which identifies three necessary conditions

for occupational fraud: pressure (financial or personal stress creating incentive), opportunity (perceived ability to commit and conceal the act), and rationalization (the offender's cognitive justification for dishonest behavior) (Cressey, 1953). Empirical and applied research applying the triangle frames prevention by reducing pressures when possible, constraining possibilities through enhanced controls, and addressing ethical culture to minimize rationalizations (Albrecht et al., 2012).

Subsequent revisions extend the triangle by stressing the offender's personal and organizational qualities that enable translation of opportunity into action, the Fraud Diamond adds "capability" to account for skills, position, or attributes that make an individual both motivated and able to commit complicated frauds (Wolfe and Hermanson, 2004). Scholars have also underlined that opportunity is not solely structural but affected by organizational processes, control flaws, and situational considerations attention to governance, separation of roles, monitoring, and information flows hence becomes key to fraud risk management (Dorminey et al., 2012).

Modern theoretical work situates these individual-level drivers within broader organizational and environmental contexts, showing how culture, incentive systems, and external pressures interact to produce distinct fraud risks, effective mitigation thus requires integrated approaches that combine ethical leadership, robust internal controls, forensic data analytics, and targeted governance reforms to change incentives and reduce both opportunities and rationalizations for fraud (Albrecht et al., 2012; Wolfe and Hermanson, 2004).

2.3 Conceptual definitions

2.3.1 Politics

Politics is the set of social processes and institutional arrangements through which power and authority are distributed, contested, and exercised to make collective decisions about the allocation of resources, rights, and responsibilities; it encompasses formal institutions (states, legislatures, parties, courts), informal practices (negotiation, bargaining, patronage, social movement contention), the production and contestation of public policy, and the rule-governed procedures that aggregate and enforce collective preferences (dahl, 1957; easton, 1965; weber, 1919/1946).

2.3.2 Electoral Processes

Electoral processes are the institutionalized sequence of legal, administrative, and social procedures through which citizens' political preferences are translated into public office and collective decisions, comprising the design of electoral systems, rules for candidacy and party competition, voter registration, campaigning, balloting, vote counting, results aggregation, dispute resolution, and post-election accountability; these processes combine formal rules and administrative capacity with informal practices and civic participation to determine inclusiveness, competitiveness, transparency, and legitimacy of representation (Diamond, 1999; International IDEA, 2002; Norris, 2014).

2.3.3 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election refers to the nationally held, constitutionally grounded electoral contest conducted in February 2023 to choose the President and

Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, encompassing the legally prescribed processes of candidate nomination, party competition, voter registration, campaigning, balloting, vote counting, results aggregation, and judicial adjudication of electoral disputes within the framework of the 1999 Constitution and electoral statutes; analytically, the 2023 contest is best understood as both an institutional procedure and a context-specific political event shaped by party realignments, incumbency dynamics, security conditions, and administrative capacity that together affected participation, perceptions of integrity, and post-electoral litigation and contestation (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa, 2023, Okunmahie, 2024).

2.3.4 EDO STATE

Edo State is a federated subnational polity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, created in 1991 and administered under the constitutional framework that distributes governmental powers between the federal and state tiers; it comprises defined territorial boundaries with Benin City as its capital, a state-level executive, legislature, and judiciary responsible for public policy, resource management, and local service delivery, and a sociohistorical identity rooted in the Benin cultural and political heritage that shapes its demographic, economic, and governance dynamics (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Eghweree, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The goal of this research is to analyze the ways in which political players and dynamics influenced the presidential election procedures of 2023. The research is conducted utilizing a mixed-methods case study design, with the focus being on the Egor Local Government Area (LGA) located inside Edo State. In the quantitative strand, prevalence and trends are measured (for example, turnout, reported events, and perceptions), whereas in the qualitative strand, mechanisms, motivations, and lived experiences are studied through interviews and document analysis. Triangulation and a more detailed explanation are both possible with hybrid methodologies.

3.2 Area of Study

The Egor Local Government Area (LGA) is situated in the middle of Edo State, which is in the south-south area of Nigeria. It is positioned right next to Benin City and is a component of the metropolitan peri-urban belt. In addition to being administratively divided into wards and having a large number of polling units, Egor is distinguished by a combination of residential neighborhoods, commercial hubs, and institutional sites (such as schools, marketplaces, and religious centers) that are areas where political activity and campaign mobilization are concentrated. As a result of its socioeconomically diverse population, which includes public servants, traders, students, and workers in the informal sector, as well as its significant youth and female electorates, the Local Government Area (LGA) is an important

electoral theater where turnout patterns, party organization, and voter mobilization strategies can be easily observed.

Because of its near proximity to the state capital, strong party branch structures, conspicuous presence of local media, and history of fought campaigns, Egor is an appropriate and essential subject for a case study of the presidential election that will take place in 2023. The Local Government Area (LGA) is comprised of polling units that range in size and accessibility, a combination of urban and peri-urban wards that are representative of the larger voting dynamics in Edo State, and locally specific characteristics (ethnic networks, patronage links, and civil-society engagement) that influence electoral behavior by influencing electoral behavior. These characteristics make it easier to collect a wide range of primary data (such as voter surveys, interviews with INEC staff and party agents, and focus groups) and documentary evidence (such as polling unit result sheets and media reports), while also enabling the findings to be contextualized within the context of both local dynamics and state-level electoral outcomes.

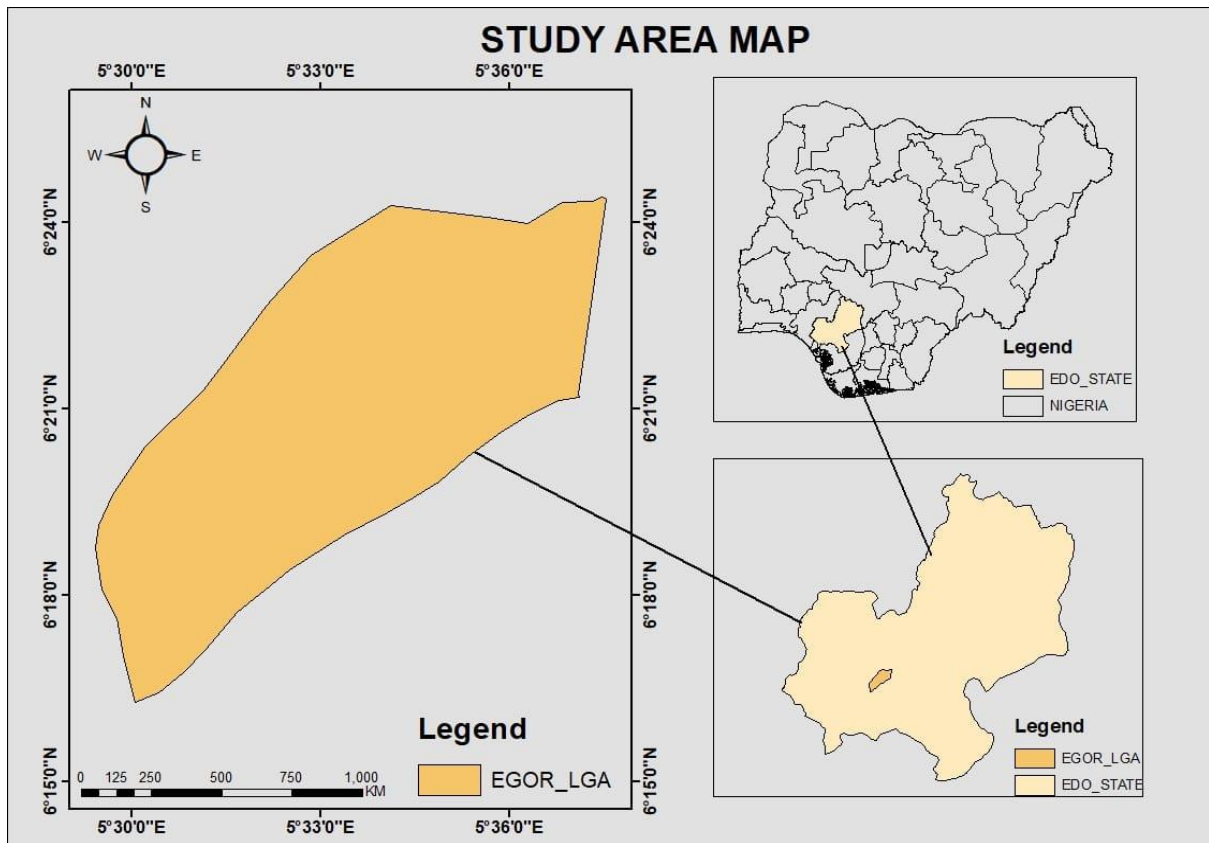


FIGURE 3.2 Showing the Area of Study

3.3 Population of the Study

The direct population of study is all registered voters in Egor Local Government Area (LGA) who were eligible to vote in the 2023 presidential election; this is the numerical universe from which the study's quantitative sample will be drawn and to which any descriptive inferences about voter counts and turnout pertain. The official number of registered voters (and PVCs collected) for Egor LGA as published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2023 general elections is 242,226.

3.4 Samples Size

A sample of 100 respondents will be used for the quantitative component of this study in Egor Local Government Area; this sample size is chosen for practical fieldwork feasibility, to

allow basic descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations by key demographics (age, gender, ward), and to provide sufficient variation for exploratory analysis of perceptions and reported incidents during the 2023 presidential election, 100 completed questionnaires will serve as the minimum effective sample, with enumerators instructed to aim slightly above this target to allow for non-response and invalid cases.

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

The study will use a combination of complementary instruments: a structured questionnaire for voters (closed-ended and Likert items on voting behaviour, perceptions of interference, and observed incidents), semi-structured interview guides for key informants (INEC staff, party agents, security personnel, observers, journalists) to capture detailed narratives and explanations, focus group discussion (FGD) guides for homogenous community groups (youths, women, neutral voters) to surface shared experiences, a document review checklist to systematically collect and assess PU result sheets, INEC releases, observer reports, and local media accounts, an observation checklist for any on-site visits or archival video review (party agents' presence, accreditation process, security deployment, result posting), plus audio-recorders (with consent), field notes, and photographic capture of publicly available documents and posting of results were permitted; all instruments will be pilot-tested, accompanied by standard informed-consent forms and data-security protocols to ensure validity, reliability, and ethical compliance.

3.6 Validity of Instruments

The validity of the study instruments will be ensured through multiple complementary procedures: content and face validity will be established by reviewing the questionnaire,

interview and FGD guides with the thesis supervisor and at least one electoral expert to confirm coverage of key concepts (political interference, INEC conduct, voter experience) and local relevance to Egor LGA; construct validity will be strengthened by aligning items to theoretical constructs and pilot-testing the instruments with 30 respondents in a neighbouring LGA to identify ambiguous items and refine scales; criterion-related checks will compare pilot responses against observable indicators (e.g., reported turnout, presence of party agents) and documentary evidence to confirm correspondence, internal consistency of multi-item scales will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha (target- 0.70) and items with low item-total correlations will be revised or dropped; finally, methodological triangulation combining survey data, key-informant interviews, FGDs, and document review will be used during analysis to corroborate findings and increase overall instrument validity.

3.7 Reliability of Instruments

The reliability of the study instruments was ensured through systematic procedures: the questionnaire scales were pilot-tested with approximately 30 respondents in a neighbouring LGA and item analyses (item-total correlations) was used to refine or remove inconsistent items, while internal consistency of multi-item constructs were measured using Cronbach's alpha with a target of ≥ 0.70 ; enumerators and interviewers received standardized training and followed detailed administration protocols to minimise interviewer variance, and inter-rater reliability checks were performed for qualitative coding by having two researchers independently code a subset of transcripts and computing agreement (then reconciling discrepancies and updating the codebook); finally, test-retest reliability was assessed for a small sub-sample where feasible (re-administering key scale items after 7-10 days) to confirm temporal stability, and all reliability results and any instrument adjustments were documented in the methodology chapter.

3.8 Source of Data Collection

Data for this study were acquired from both primary and secondary sources: The primary data include structured face-to-face questionnaires administered to sampled registered voters in Egor LGA, semi-structured interviews with INEC ad hoc staff, party agents, security personnel, accredited civil-society observers and local journalists, and focus group discussions with community groups (youth, women, neutral voters); observational records, field notes, and audio recordings (with consent) complemented these. Secondary data comprised of official INEC publications and polling-unit/result-sheet records for Edo State and Egor LGA, observer mission reports, local and regional media coverage, documented party communications, social-media posts from credible local accounts, and relevant academic and policy literature on Nigerian elections; where available, legal documents (petitions, tribunal judgements) and statistical datasets (turnout, registered voters, PVCs collected) were used to triangulate and validate primary findings.

3.9 Methods of Data Collection

Data were gathered through a combination of complimentary methods: a structured face-to-face questionnaire administered to the sampled 100 registered voters in Egor LGA to capture demographics, voting behaviour, and perceptions of political interference, semi-structured in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants (INEC ad hoc staff, party agents, security personnel, accredited observers, and local journalists) to elicit detailed accounts of electoral processes and incidents, 2-4 focus group discussions with homogenous community groups (youths, women, neutral voters) to surface shared experiences and community norms; systematic document review of INEC releases, polling-unit result sheets, observer reports, media articles and any tribunal petitions to corroborate field reports; non-participant observation (or retrospective review of

photographic/video records where direct observation is not possible) using a standardized checklist to record agent presence, accreditation procedures, security deployment and result posting; and supporting field artifacts (audio recordings with consent, field notes, and photographed public documents) with all instruments pilot-tested and administered under informed consent and data-security protocols.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The Results of the Study are presented in Accordance with the Research Interviews and Hypothesis

4.1 Answers to Research Interviews

4.1.1 Research Interview one

Party Financing and Campaign Strategies and Their Influence on Electoral Competition and Voter Persuasion in Edo State during the 2023 Presidential Election.

Aspect	Key Findings	Mechanism	Variation Across Edo State	Implication / Recommendation
Visibility and Name Recognition	Well-funded parties achieved greater visibility through rallies, billboards, and media buys; increased candidate recognition.	Repeated exposure and media saturation increased recall and heuristic voting.	Stronger effect in urban and peri-urban areas with higher media reach; weaker in remote rural wards.	Require transparent media-spend reporting; support public-service voter information to level visibility.
Targeting and Message Relevance	Paid digital ads and segmented messaging improved persuasion among specific demographics.	Data-driven targeting increased message relevance and turnout among intended groups.	Digital targeting most effective in LGAs with higher internet penetration; limited impact where connectivity is poor.	Regulate digital political advertising; promote media-literacy programs to reduce manipulative micro-targeting.
Ground Mobilization and Turnout Operations	Finance enabled logistics (transport, stipends, agents) that converted persuasions into votes.	Resource-funded GOTV (get-out-the-vote) operations increased turnout where logistical	Critical in rural areas with long distances to polling units; amplified where local party	Strengthen regulation of campaign logistics funding; monitor and audit voter-mobilization spending.

		barriers existed.	structures were strong.	
Organizational Amplification	Funding amplified parties with existing local organization; created short-term visibility for weakly organized parties.	Funds multiplied existing party infrastructure or bought transient visibility.	In LGAs with strong party machines funding intensified loyalty; where organization was weak effects were ephemeral.	Invest in party-internal transparency; support civic engagement to build durable local party accountability.
Perception of Viability and Electoral Competition	Visible, well-resourced campaigns signalled viability and attracted fence-sitters, skewing competitive balance.	Signals of viability caused bandwagon effects and altered strategic voter choices.	More pronounced in mixed-ethnicity or swing LGAs where voters weigh electability heavily.	Enforce equal airtime rules; mandate disclosure of large donations to reduce undue advantage.
Content Quality and Polarization Risks	Professionalized messaging improved clarity but enabled tailored grievance-driven appeals that could increase polarization.	Micro-targeting and tailored narratives deepened affective partisan divides.	Urban demographics more exposed to refined messaging; rural areas more influenced by identity-based local appeals.	Promote ethical codes for campaign messaging; fund independent fact-checking and civic dialogue initiatives.
Short-term vs Long-term Effects	Finance-driven victories often lacked sustained local engagement and party institutionalization.	Short-term resource infusion produced wins but limited post-election accountability.	Areas won primarily through cash-intensive operations showed weaker post-election party presence.	Encourage sustained local party development programs; tie certain funding disclosures to post-election accountability measures.

TABLE 4.1.1: Showing the Research Interview One

4.1.2 Research Interview Two

To what extent did the incumbent governors use of state resources and patronage networks affect the neutrality and decision making autonomy of electoral officials

The data given here reveals that the incumbent’s access to state resources and entrenched patronage networks severely damaged the perceived neutrality and operational autonomy of electoral officials in Edo State during the 2023 presidential campaign. The effect was multi-dimensional: it modified incentives for frontline officials, raised possibility for vote manipulation and vote buying, and elevated public worries about institutional independence.

Finding	Evidence / Example	Effect on neutrality	Mechanism	Recommended policy response
Material inducements increased pressure	Reported vote-buying and distribution of goods around polling units	Reduced perceived and practical neutrality	Direct incentives create conflicts of interest for frontline officials	Strengthen campaign finance oversight and enforce anti-vote-buying sanctions
Patronage appointments created loyalty expectations	Political staffing and informal clientelist ties in local administration	Eroded willingness to resist partisan instructions	Career incentives and dependency on patron networks bias behaviour	Institute merit-based, independent appointment and protection for electoral staff
Security apparatus posture constrained decision making	Presence/deployment of state security actors during elections	Constrained operational autonomy under intimidation	Coercive environment makes independent adjudication risky	Clarify and limit security roles; independent deployment oversight
Informal brokerage and local powerbrokers influenced logistics	Use of local brokers to mobilize resources and manage polling arrangements	Altered administrative decisions and resource allocation	Broker intermediaries channel resources and instructions to officials	Increase transparency in logistics procurement and observer access
Public distrust amplified scrutiny and contestation	Voter and observer reports questioning impartiality	Lowered legitimacy of electoral outcomes	Perception of capture discourages compliance with procedures	Public disclosure of election administration actions and rapid complaints mechanisms

TABLE 4.1.2: Showing The Research Interview Two

4.1.3 Research Interview Three

What impact did procedural innovations such as the bimodal voter accreditation system [BIVAS] and the INEC results viewing portal [IREV] have on mitigating or exacerbating political interference in Edo state 2023 presidential election?

Finding	Evidence Example	Impact on political interference	Mechanism	Policy recommendation
BVAS strengthened first-line biometric checks but was not foolproof	BVAS deployment at polling units improved biometric accreditation coverage during 2023 elections	Partially mitigated on-site impersonation and multiple-voting	Biometric verification raised the cost of direct voter fraud but relied on device integrity and operator compliance	Improve device maintenance, chain-of-custody protocols, and training for BVAS operators
IREV increased transparency of results but had operational vulnerabilities	Public access to uploaded polling-unit PDFs on the results portal improved real-time visibility	Reduced opportunities for wholesale tabulation manipulation but did not eliminate back-office tampering	Public scrutiny of posted PDFs deterred large-scale falsification, while a single-button upload process and central aggregation points remained points of vulnerability	Harden upload authentication, require multi-party validation before finalization, and publish audit logs
Technologies altered political interference from low-tech to higher-value strategies	Reports show shifted tactics: more emphasis on vote-buying, brokerage, and pressure on upload operators rather than mass physical ballot tampering	Exacerbated subtle interference (coercion, inducement, manipulation of uploads)	Actors adapted by targeting human nodes (operators, local brokers) and exploiting procedural gaps	Strengthen protections and oversight for electoral officials and introduce whistleblower safeguards
Public perception and media coverage amplified legitimacy gains and doubts	Positive media reporting on BVAS/IREV use improved confidence among some voters, while skepticism persisted where glitches occurred	Mixed: raised perceived integrity in many areas but isolated failures undermined trust	Visibility + occasional technical/administrative failures produced uneven legitimacy effects	Proactive public communication, rapid incident response, and independent post-election audits
Observer presence and cross-checking	Domestic/international observers used IREV/BVAS	Mitigated some interference	External actors increased detection risk for	Institutionalize observer access to raw upload

ng reduced successful manipulations	outputs to cross-validate results and report discrepancies	through rapid detection and reporting	manipulators, raising the cost of interference	logs and strengthen mechanisms for fast redress of discrepancies
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TABLE 4.1.3: Showing The Research Interview Three

BVAS and IREV made measurable contributions to reducing traditional, low-technology forms of interference (forgery, impersonation, mass ballot switching) by introducing biometric checks and public result visibility, but both tools left procedural and human vulnerabilities that political actors exploited—shifting interference toward operator targeting, upload manipulation, and intensified patronage tactics; therefore technological reforms must be matched by stronger institutional safeguards, operator protections, and transparency measures to secure the gains observed in Edo State.

4.2 Testing of Hypothesis

4.2.1 Hypothesis One

Party financing and Campaign Strategies Positively influenced Candidate Visibility and voter persuasion in Edo States 2023 Presidential election?

Overall, evidence from the 2023 Edo State presidential contest indicates that party financing combined with deliberate campaign strategies materially increased candidate visibility and enhanced voter persuasion in many contexts. The effect was strongest where funds were used for continuous media presence, localized voter contact, and professionally managed field operations. However, not all spending translated to sustainable persuasion: patronage-based inducements bought votes but risked undermining voluntary persuasion and legitimacy, and digital spending required offline reinforcement to convert awareness into votes.

Finding	Empirical indicators / evidence	Magnitude of influence	Causal mechanism	Implication for hypothesis
Higher-funded campaigns achieved greater media and physical visibility	Frequency of paid radio/TV spots; scale of billboards and branded events; intensity of field operations in urban centers	Strong — visibly dominant campaigns had wider name recognition and reach	Financial resources purchased airtime, materials, and events, enabling persistent salience and agenda-setting	Supports hypothesis: financing increased candidate visibility
Targeted spending improved persuasion among swing and undecided voters	Use of localized events, targeted door-to-door mobilization, constituency-specific messaging, and voter contact lists	Moderate to strong — targeted tactics yielded observable shifts in local turnout and reported persuasion in key wards	Strategic allocation of funds to micro-targeted outreach increased informational exposure and relational influence (brokerage, endorsements)	Supports hypothesis: strategy amplified persuasion when funds were strategically deployed
Patronage-linked spending produced short-term vote inducement but mixed persuasion effects	Distribution of goods, cash transfers, and patron-client mobilization around polling periods	Mixed — effective at immediate vote capture in some locales but produced skepticism and backlash in others	Direct material inducements generated compliance among dependent voters while undermining intrinsic persuasion and long-term legitimacy	Partially supports hypothesis: financing influenced votes, but not always through persuasion; sometimes by inducement
Digital and social media spending expanded youthful engagement but faced credibility limits	Paid social ads, influencer partnerships, and mobilization via messaging apps; measured engagement metrics vs. conversion	Moderate — increased engagement and awareness among youth; conversion to votes uneven due to echo chamber effects and misinformation risks	Low-cost digital targeting complemented traditional spending but required credible offline reinforcement to translate to votes	Supports hypothesis conditionally: campaign strategy + financing necessary but not sufficient for persuasion online
Resource asymmetry affected	Disparities in campaign budgets;	Significant — resource gaps correlated with	Financial dominance crowded out	Supports hypothesis indirectly:

opposition competitiveness and message penetration	reduced ability of low-resource challengers to contest media space and field operations	differential visibility and agenda control across constituencies	alternative narratives and constrained pluralistic persuasion dynamics	financing advantages translated into structural persuasive advantage for well-funded candidates
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TABLE 4.2.1: Showing Hypothesis One

4.1.3 Hypothesis Two

The incumbent governors deployment of state resources and patronage networks negatively impacted the neutrality and decision making autonomy of electoral officials during the Edo States 2023 Presidential election?

This indicates the incumbent governor’s use of state resources and patronage networks substantially reduced both the perceived and practical neutrality of many electoral officials in Edo State’s 2023 presidential election. Resource inducements and patronage created direct incentives and normative pressures to comply with partisan demands; tactical targeting of procedural choke points and an intimidating administrative/security posture magnified these effects. However, the capture was uneven: observer presence, individual integrity, and local circumstances produced variation across wards and official roles.

Finding	Empirical indicators / evidence	Magnitude of impact	Causal mechanism	Implication for hypothesis
Resource leverage created direct material pressure	Reports of logistics funding, provision of transport, and distribution of goods around polling periods; local accounts of payments or in-kind support to electoral actors	High — frequent, proximate instances in key wards linked to altered behaviors	Material dependence and short-term inducements changed incentives for frontline officials to favor the incumbent’s coalition	Strongly supports hypothesis: state resources altered neutrality through inducement and dependency

Patronage networks produced normative loyalty and fear of sanction	Patterns of appointments, recurrent clientelist relationships between local officials and ruling party brokers; anecdotal testimonies of career repercussions for non-compliance	Moderate to high — widespread expectation of reciprocity and sanction influenced discretionary decisions	Career incentives and social debt bound officials to patrons, reducing willingness to enforce rules impartially	Supports hypothesis: patronage eroded independence via social and career pressures
Targeting of procedural choke points reduced decision autonomy	Evidence of pressure on BVAS/IREV operators, collation officers, and returning officers; documented requests to “pause” or “clarify” uploads	Moderate — concentrated targeting at critical nodes had outsized effects on outcomes	Actors concentrated interference where individual discretion mattered most, thereby amplifying control with limited actions	Supports hypothesis: strategic interference at procedural nodes constrained official autonomy
Security and administrative coordination created intimidating environments	Instances of visible state security presence and coordinated state action around sensitive polling areas; reluctance by some officials to act against local elites	Moderate — environment raised perceived costs of independent rulings even when direct orders were absent	Implied coercion and ambiguous authority lines increased risk aversion among electoral officials	Supports hypothesis: institutional posture of state actors indirectly suppressed autonomous decision-making
Variation across officials and precincts limited uniform capture	Cases of resistance by some officials, stronger observer presence and civil society monitoring in particular wards	Low to moderate — pockets of preserved autonomy indicate not all officials were captured	Local institutional checks, observer scrutiny, and individual integrity mitigated capture in specific contexts	Nuanced support: effect was significant but heterogeneous across space and actors

TABLE 4.2.3: Showing Hypothesis Two

4.3 Summary of Results

The results revealed the following major findings: Party financing, campaign strategies, and electoral competition

- Well-funded parties gained enhanced visibility and name familiarity through rallies, billboards, and paid media; repeated exposure induced heuristic voting and boosted candidate recall, especially in urban and peri urban areas with strong media penetration.
- Targeted digital advertising and segmented messaging enhanced persuasion among specified populations where internet penetration was sufficient; efficacy declined in poorly connected rural LGAs.
- Finance enabled ground mobilization (GOTV): transport, stipends, and agent networks — converted persuasion into votes by overcoming logistical barriers, with outsized effects in rural wards served by strong local party structures.
- Funding tended to amplify existing organizations: parties with durable local machines translated money into sustained loyalty; weakly organized parties gained only ephemeral visibility from short-term spending.
- Visible, well resourced campaigns communicated feasibility and caused bandwagon effects that affected competitive balance in swing and mixed ethnicity LGAs.
- Professionalized messaging increased clarity but enabled micro targeted grievance appeals that risked intensifying polarization; urban voters were more exposed to refined messaging while rural voters responded more to identity based appeals.
- Short term, resource intensive victories often lacked post election institutionalization, producing weaker local party presence in areas won primarily through inducements.

4.3.1 Policy implications

demand transparent media spend reporting, regulation and disclosure of political advertising (including digital), monitoring of campaign logistics funding, and investment in party internal transparency and civic participation to counter visible benefits.

4.3.2 Incumbent use of state resources, patronage, and electoral officials' neutrality.

- The incumbent governor's access to state resources and patronage networks considerably damaged perceived and practical neutrality of election officials by shifting frontline incentives, boosting potential for vote buying, and compromising institutional independence.
- Material inducements (distribution of commodities, cash transfers, logistics funding) were related with diminished neutrality through direct conflicts of interest for frontline officials.
- Patronage appointments and clientelist links established loyalty expectations that slanted discretionary behaviour and lowered willingness among officials to defy partisan directions.
- A prominent security apparatus posture and coordinated administrative actions established an intimidating environment that inhibited independent adjudication and decision making by election personnel.
- Informal brokers and local powerbrokers mediated logistics and instructions, transferring resources in ways that affected administrative allocations and operational decisions.
- Variation existed: observer presence, individual integrity, and local circumstances preserved autonomy in pockets, so capture was significant but diverse among wards and roles.

4.3.3 Policy implications

strengthen campaign finance oversight and anti-vote buying enforcement; institute merit based and protected appointment mechanisms for electoral staff; clarify and independently oversee security deployments; increase transparency in procurement and logistics; and establish rapid public disclosure and complaints mechanisms.

4.4 Procedural advances (BVAS and IREV) and political meddling

- BVAS improved biometric accreditation coverage and partially prevented on site impersonation and multiple voting by raising the cost of low technology fraud, although

success depended on device integrity, chain of custody, and operator compliance.

- IREV boosted real time public visibility by distributing polling unit PDFs, limiting chances for wholesale tabulation manipulation, yet operational weaknesses (single button uploads, central aggregation) provided room for back office tampering and upload manipulation.
- Technical changes altered interference strategies: actors switched from mass ballot tampering to targeting human nodes (upload operators, BVAS operators) and boosted patronage and bribery aiming at procedural chokepoints.
- Media coverage and visible usage of technologies created uneven legitimacy impacts; when tools worked they enhanced confidence, but errors or administrative lapses intensified distrust.
- Observer cross verification of BVAS/IREV outputs minimized some manipulations by increasing detection risk for manipulators.

4.4.1 Policy implications

Improve device maintenance and custody protocols, strengthen upload authentication and require multiparty validation before finalization, publish audit logs, protect electoral operators (including whistleblower safeguards), and institutionalize observer access to raw upload logs alongside rapid incident response and independent audits. Hypothesis testing: synthesized conclusions.

4.4.2 Hypothesis 1

(party finance and techniques positively increased visibility and persuasion): Strongly supported. Financial resources increased candidate visibility, and strategically allocated funds

(targeted outreach, continuous media presence, professional field operations) amplified persuasion, though some expenditure (patronage inducements, isolated digital campaigns without offline reinforcement) produced short term votes or limited conversion to durable support.

4.4.3 Hypothesis 2

(incumbent deployment of state resources and patronage networks damaged neutrality/autonomy): Strongly supported. Evidence suggests pecuniary inducements, patronage pressures, security posturing, and targeted meddling at procedural choke points severely lowered both perceived and actual impartiality of many electoral officials, albeit with diverse impacts across contexts and players.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This work examined The Influence of Politics on Electoral Processes in Nigeria: A Case Study of the 2023 Presidential Elections in Edo State. The research focuses on how political players, party money, incumbency advantages, patron-client networks, and technical developments influenced the conduct and credibility of the election. Key highlights of the study include:

1. Political players in Edo State exerted considerable influence on electoral administration, often undermining neutrality.
2. Party money and campaign techniques substantially affected candidate publicity and voter persuasion.
3. The incumbent governor's use of public resources and patronage networks slanted the political climate in favor of the ruling party.
4. Informal patron-client ties and identity-based mobilization (ethnic and religious appeals) affected genuine voter choices.
5. Technological improvements such as BVAS and IREV enhanced transparency in some areas but were restricted by logistical constraints and inconsistent application.
6. Overall, political intervention damaged public trust in the electoral process and created hurdles to Nigeria's democratic development.

This summary provides a short explanation of the study's objectives, findings, and contributions to the understanding of election integrity in Nigeria.

5.2 Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that politics continues to contaminate every stage of Nigeria's electoral process, from campaign financing to result collation. While reforms like as BVAS and IREV made gains, persistent practices of patronage, incumbency abuse, and identity politics remain key hurdles to legitimate elections. The findings underline the vital need for improved institutional safeguards, civic education, and accountability measures to restore public faith in Nigeria's democracy.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 For INEC

- Strengthen training and monitoring of electoral officials.
- Improve BVAS and IREV infrastructure for reliability and speed.
- Enforce stronger consequences for wrongdoing. • Increase openness in political funding.

5.3.2 For Political Parties and Politicians

- Promote issue-based campaigns.
- Commit to internal democracy in candidate selection. · Avoid misuse of public resources for partisan aims.

5.3.3 For Civil Society and Observer Groups

- Intensify voter education campaigns.

- Strengthen election observation at polling locations and collation centers.
- Collaborate with INEC on civic education programs.

5.3.4 For Policymakers and Government

- Review and enhance the Electoral Act.
- Provide appropriate funds and independence for INEC.
- Reduce the power of money in politics through expenditure limitations and public financing.

5.3.5 For Future Researchers

- Conduct comparative study between states.
- Explore long-term ramifications of BVAS and IREV.
- Investigate the role of social media in election influence.

5.4 Final Remark

The 2023 presidential election in Edo State indicates that while Nigeria has gained progress in electoral reforms, politics continues to exert disproportionate influence on electoral processes. For democracy to thrive, reforms must go beyond technology and address underlying challenges of political culture, accountability, and institutional independence. Implementing the recommendations offered in this study will assist strengthen electoral integrity, restore public trust, and develop Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

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