

## Electoral Budget and Quality of Electoral Services: Evidence from Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The extant literature on election administration draws a direct relationship between huge election budget and good election delivery. Good quality of electoral services in the advanced industrial democracies is easily advanced as a clear confirmation of this thesis. This study attempts to examine the extent to which the Nigerian case supports the 'good election comes with heavy cash' thesis. The paper finds that whereas there has been a steady increase in the nation's electoral budget since the return of constitutional democracy in 1999, this increase has not been matched with a corresponding increase in the quality of election management. The paper identifies factors that explain poor quality of electoral services in Nigeria and then proposes measures capable of achieving improved election administration in Africa's largest electoral democracy.*

**Keywords:** Election; Budget; Delivery; Democracy; Nigeria.

### Introduction

The centrality of election to democratic governance is universally acknowledged as election remains the most legitimate instrument of leadership recruitment in all democratically ruled societies. In democratic contexts, election does not only confer moral authority on political leadership, it also represents a political instrument through which the electorates compel accountability from elected representatives (Animashaun and Ojo, 2015). Because elections represent the primary mechanism of citizen participation in the democratic process, their smooth and efficient administration is crucial to democratic advancement (James and Jervier, 2018).

When elections are professionally and transparently managed, the outcomes of such elections would not only substantially represent the preferences of the voting public, such elections tend to deepen democratization and consequently become catalysts of development and societal stability (Animashaun, 2019). Elections that are credible and thus meet basic international or regional standards could however only be delivered by election management bodies that are well resourced both in terms of finance and personnel. To effectively discharge its mandate, an election oversight agency must be sufficiently funded and must have a reasonable measure of autonomy over its finances and procurement of its operational needs (Iyayi, 2006).

Until recently, financing of election management bodies did not enjoy serious scholarly attention (James and Jervier, 2018). This is surprising given the crucial role assigned election agencies in democratic governance. A growing body of research has however emerged focusing on documentation of cross-national experiences in the financing of election administrations with emphasis on challenges, conflicts and contradictions associated with the costs and financing of electoral services (James, 2014; Clark and James, 2016). Particularly for developing democracies, Aiyede and Aregbeyen (2011) have noted that growing scholarly interest in the financing of election authorities was driven by the need to support effective electoral governance in democratizing nations.

Nigeria returned to constitutional rule in 1999 after prolonged military dictatorship that spanned one and a half decades. Between 1998/99 (when transition elections were held) and now, Nigeria has witnessed six election cycles that have produced either mandate renewal or termination of mandate for electoral candidates seeking elective offices. Four varieties of election enjoy legal recognition under the current fourth democratic experiment. These are: general elections which are organized within the normal cycle of election; stand-alone or off-cycle elections which are conducted outside of the regular national cycle; run-off elections which are repeat polls occasioned by the failure of the first ballot to produce a clear winner;

and by-elections organized to fill vacant legislative seats arising from either nullification of electoral victory by the tribunals/courts or by reason of death of occupiers of parliamentary seats.

Whereas analysts of electoral politics in Nigeria have given due attention to varying aspects of Nigerian elections such as electoral security (Olurode, 2013; Onyekpere, 2013), electoral violence and voter turnout (Anifowose and Odukoya, 2013; Omilusi, 2017; Pam Sha, 2017), election monitoring and electoral integrity (Aluko, 1999; Gafar, 2015), campaign financing (Ojo, 2015; Aluaigba, 2015) and electoral reform (Jega, 2015; Aiyede, 2015; Animashaun, 2010), the equally important aspect of financing of election administrations is yet to be sufficiently explored. The present paper attempts to fill this scholarly gap. The paper engages the issue of the cost and financing of elections in Nigeria since the democratic rebirth of 1999 with a view to understanding the pattern, processes and consequences of election financing under the current dispensation. What does the institutional framework of election budgeting look like? Who are the key players in election budgeting? Who are the key actors in election financing and what are the sources of their finances? Is there a correlation between election budget and quality election management in Nigeria? Interrogating these questions, the paper finds that relative low funding of the election management body does not solely account for poor election management in Nigeria. It further finds that while Nigeria boasts of an ambitious institutional framework of election management capable of delivering credible and hitch-free elections, vested interests of key actors, unprofessional conduct of poll workers, sabotage by logistics providers as well as needless rivalry and conflicts between branches of government or governmental agencies involved in election budgeting have constrained the institutional architecture from producing intended consequences.

### **Conceptualizing Election Budget**

Election budget loosely refers to legislature-appropriated resources specifically dedicated to the administration of elections throughout the election cycle. Election budget is usually generated for the basic purpose of meeting costs to be incurred in the course of organizing democratic elections.

Generally, electoral budgets in all democracies are a part of the annual national budget. In an election year, election budget is usually presented before the parliament by the election authorities for legislative scrutiny and approval. However, in a non-election fiscal year, election budget tends to be a line item of the national budget or a part of the budget of the Ministry or Department supervising election agency. Among the major line items that make up the components of an election budget are ballot papers, ballot boxes, ballot box seals, logistics/transportation, staffing, both regular and ad hoc, security and stationery.

In broad terms, activities such as compilation of Voter Rolls, engagement of poll workers, boundary delimitation, tallying of votes, transmission of results, election observation/monitoring, election litigation, voter education and policing of the election process constitute electoral costs (Lopez-Pintor, 2000; IIDEA, 2002; OSCE, 2001). In terms of election policing, contemporary electoral security transcends the normal protection of election environment to include protection of sensitive election infrastructure. Thus, election management bodies require substantial resources to procure sound election technology and to guard acquired technology against cyber-attacks. For instance, election authorities need huge resources to undertake a risk assessment activity which is basically aimed at identifying and weighing the impact of vulnerabilities that a potential cyber-attacker can exploit to compromise the security of election infrastructure (CIS, 2018).

Usually, electoral budgets are prepared by election administrations, processed for scrutiny and/or defence before the parliament and implemented after parliamentary approval. In preparing election budgets, due recognition must be given by election administrators to flexibility in order to take care of unintended circumstances. For instance, in parliamentary democracies, unexpected collapse of government would necessitate Prime Minister calling for new election. Even in presidential democracies, there could be legitimate need for polls to be repeated as earlier noted in the paper.

One major concern about election budget across democratic countries is ensuring that election budgets do not harm the local economy while at the same time giving premium to cost efficiency in electoral budgets. Cost efficiency defined as expending less costs and achieving greater value has become a key policy goal in contemporary election administration. Election management bodies (EMBs) across democratic nations now adopt cost-saving mechanisms including the use of technology in order to prune down the cost of organizing elections. Costs are essentially (organizational or public) resources expended in the accomplishment of a given objective or goal (Aiyede and Aregbeyen, 2011). By this logic, election costs simply refer to resources expended on organizing free, fair and credible elections. Against the backdrop of performance deficit of most Africa's democratic regimes, African citizens tend to disapprove of humongous election budgets and tend to favour considerable cuts in election budgets in order to free resources for social provisioning by the state (Lewis and Alemika, 2005; Smith, 2008; Jones and Taussig, 2019). IIDEA (2017) has however cautioned that election should not be perceived as a huge toll on the public purse with no direct social benefit. Rather, election is a public investment with social stability as a major 'return on investment' (IIDEA, 2017).

The Cost of Registration and Elections (CORE) Project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identifies three broad categories of electoral costs namely, core costs, diffuse costs and integrity costs. Core or direct costs are expenses incurred on activities that routinely or directly relate to the management of election process such as voter registration, constituency delimitation, and election technology. Diffuse or indirect election costs refer to costs incurred on election-related services crucial to successful implementation of the electoral process. These costs include resources expended on voter information, education and mobilization efforts. Integrity costs are those costs related to the provision of safety as well as maintenance of non-partisanship and equality in the electoral process (Aiyede and Aregbeyen, 2011). Electoral costs vary across democratic systems as geographical size of a democracy, model of election organization whether simultaneous or staggered, as well as sophisticated election infrastructure on offer influence the overall costs of elections (Aiyede and Aregbeyen, 2011).

Naturally, foundation or transition elections organized in newly democratizing states or post-conflict societies tend to be more expensive than second or third elections in countries that are consolidating democratic rule (Bratton, 1999). In countries organizing founding elections, election-related activities such as inauguration of election management bodies, voter registration, procurement and deployment of election infrastructure, recruitment and training of election administrators as well as voter information and enlightenment programmes tend to make election costs considerably high. It is often assumed that costs of elections will dramatically drop as consolidating elections are conducted over time due to re-use of election facilities, greater transparency in procurement as well as the use of improved technology.

Experience has however shown that consolidating elections could still be relatively expensive due to factors such as expanded voter population, which pushes up voter registration costs, improved election technology as well as increased 'securitization' of ballot papers. While accuracy, speed, efficiency and effectiveness constitute the major benefits of adoption of technology in the election process, high costs of acquisition and maintenance, security, sustainability, transparency and vendor-dependence remain key challenges of cutting-edge election technology. In developing democracies, inflation within the local economies could also provoke a hike in electoral costs. For example, in Nigeria, during the preparation of electoral budget for the 2015 elections, a litre of petrol sold for N97 while by 2019, a litre of petrol sells between N142 to N145 which impacted on the 2019 election budget proposed by the Independent National Electoral Commission. It is trite that electoral costs will be higher in a large and populous country than a small democracy with a modest population because of the expansive geographical areas to be covered and corresponding costs to be incurred. When elections are conducted in one day, they are more cost effective than polls conducted in a staggered manner as is the practice in Nigeria since resumption of multi-party democratic system in 1999.

Since procurement costs take the lion share of electoral budgets, it is one component of election expenditure that is most susceptible to corruption which in turn scales up the cost of prosecuting election. Therefore, there must be strict adherence to the rules of public procurement in the procurement process including transparent and open competitive bidding in order to check potential corrupt practices in procurement. While election management body should enjoy institutional autonomy to determine where to procure election facilities including election technology, the supervising department and parliamentary committees must ensure that contractors selected by election agency are certified manufacturers or vendors that would not compromise the integrity of the election process.

Three important things are vital to the procurement of election facilities. These are: value for money; prevention of corruption through observance of due process in procurement; and timely delivery. Election management bodies or supervising Ministry/Department must keep effective oversight over the procurement process to ensure that quality is given priority in material procurement. The same measure of oversight is required to checkmate bureaucratic corruption in the procurement process through dubious inflation of costs or double budgeting particularly by public servants in the procurement department, election management body or other allied government agencies involved in electoral procurement. Timely delivery of election materials is important to ensure smooth take-off of elections or pre-election activities such as voter registration or electoral district delimitation.

Election is an expensive project in all democracies, consolidated or transiting. Thus, organizing a successful and credible election constitutes a huge drain on the national revenue of every democratic country. Experience has however shown that while mature democracies like the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada incur economic costs in terms of large electoral budgets, developing or new democracies like those in Africa incur both economic costs and social costs. In Nigeria, apart from the large amount of resources deducted from the public purse to fund elections, the practice of declaring public holidays and closing national borders constitute additional economic costs to the country while deaths, destruction of public/private property as well as internal displacement associated with electoral violence constitute social costs of elections in Nigeria. For instance, while INEC budgeted a staggering N228 billion for the recently-concluded 2019 election, pre- and post-election violence that characterized the poll left in its wake heavy human and material losses. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, a consortium of domestic observer groups, reports that 626 people were killed during the 2019 elections, a figure significantly higher than 106 deaths recorded in 2015. Out of the 2019 figure, the North West geo-political zone of the Nigerian federation (where President Muhammadu Buhari hails from) recorded the highest number of fatalities with 172 deaths (Situation Room, 2019).

### **Election Budgeting in Nigeria: Institutional Framework and Key Players**

Nigeria runs a dual structure of election administration. While the 1999 Constitution, as amended, empowers the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to organize presidential, gubernatorial, national assembly and state assembly polls, elections into the 774 local governments in the country are within the jurisdictional authorities of the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) which are set up by the laws of the House of Assembly of each state. The composition and budgets of SIECs are approved by the state assemblies. Because the states in Nigeria differ in sizes and population, there is bound to be considerable variation in their electoral budgets as well as in cost efficiency. This study focuses on election budgets for national elections and thus its analysis will be restricted to the institutional architecture of election budget for national elections. Nigeria has a relatively robust institutional framework for electoral budgeting. This framework brings together actors from different sectors of the political society who interact in both horizontal and vertical ways to prepare, ratify and implement electoral budget. This institutional architecture comprises election administrators, political executives and elected representatives. Apart from these core players in election budgeting, there are other categories of public servants including security workers and public education officers who are allied players in the generation and implementation of election expenditure.

Against the backdrop of Nigeria operating ‘Independent Model of election administration’ (as against the Governmental Model), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) prepares a composite electoral budget incorporating costs of line items of activities to be carried out by other agencies of government. Despite this formal institutional autonomy however, INEC remains an executive body under the federal executive as stipulated in Section 153 (1) of the 1999 Constitution, as amended. As stated in Section 154 (1) of the Constitution, the chairmen and members of the executive bodies listed in the Constitution are to be appointed by the President. Analysts have observed that this singular provision fundamentally undermines the much-touted institutional autonomy ascribed to all the 14 Federal Executive Bodies (Iyayi, 2006).

After generating the election budget in an election year, the proposed budget will be transmitted to the two chambers of the federal legislature by the leadership of the election oversight agency for legislative scrutiny and ratification. A common practice in most democracies including Nigeria is that after presentation of election budget to the plenary of the parliament, the legislature thereafter sends the budget to standing committee(s) of the legislative institution which is charged with the responsibility of subjecting the budget to rigorous scrutiny before sending its report to the parliament which will form the basis of the passage or otherwise of the budget by the parliament. As a rule, the legislature is vested with the constitutional powers to tinker with the proposed budget in a manner that may hike the figure submitted by the election management body or decrease same.

The political context of election budgeting is important both for hitch-free budget approval after thorough scrutiny and for government’s attention to the material needs of the election management body. While parliamentary democracy may give room for easy electoral budget passage, the presidential system may not particularly if the incumbent regime has the character of a ‘divided government’ in which the legislative and executive branches of government are under the control of opposing political parties (Fashagba, 2009). This was the scenario in Nigeria during the consideration and passage of the 2019 election budget as contestation between the presidency (controlled by the ruling All Progressives Congress) and the National Assembly (with presiding officers of the two chambers of the federal legislature having defected to the opposition PDP) unduly delayed the passage of the election budget.

### **Election Financing: Issues, Actors and Sources**

This section of the paper examines election financing as a broad concept transcending the sphere of the election management bodies. Conceptualization of electoral finance by ACE Project as the costs that a country incurs in organizing election is not only narrow but misleading. The argument here is that election financing is a multi-stakeholder enterprise involving other key actors apart from the election agency which is the institutional regulator of the electoral process. These key actors include political parties, electoral candidates, donor agencies, election observer groups, civil society organizations and the media. While these actors have differing objectives cum motives for funding elections and election-related activities, their funding engagements and programmatic interventions must conform to the extant regulatory framework of election financing and general public finance regulations.

As the state agency which bears legal responsibility for organizing elections, the Election Management Body (EMB) maintains varying character of relationship with these actors. For instance, while EMB exercises regulatory/enforcement powers over political parties and electoral contestants, it has collaborative relationships with the donor community, civil society and the media for the purpose of ensuring effective discharge of its mandate. In the Nigerian context, INEC is vested with powers to enforce the provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act in relation to the financing of party and candidate campaign activities. On the other hand, while donor agencies give technical and material assistance to INEC, CSOs and the media lend immeasurable support to the election agency in such areas as voter education, peace advocacy and oversight of the electoral process through election observation and election reportage.

Four key issues are emphasized in the discourse on election financing namely, transparency, accountability, equality and enforcement. These four are major elements of regulation of election financing in democratic countries. Transparency is aimed at promoting openness in the financial dealings of political parties and candidates. Most democratic countries have disclosure laws which are aimed at ensuring "... timely dissemination of information about parties and candidates' receipt and expenditure of material resources" (Santucci and Ohman, 2009). Accountability entails making elected officials accountable to the people while in elective office as well as ensuring elected representatives pursue the common good rather than satisfying individual or group interests. One instrument of ensuring accountability of elected officials to the electorate is exclusive state funding of campaign expenses. This will guard against potential risks associated with sourcing election finance from wealthy individuals or special interests which tends to make post-election regimes responsive to narrow or private monied interests rather than pursuing the public good (Samuels, 2001; Ohman, 2012). Equality is aimed at creating a level playing electoral field for parties and candidates to compete. Most electoral democracies seek to achieve this through provision of state funds to political parties as well as prohibition of accessing funds by parties and candidates from certain sources including corporate and foreign. Enforcement entails making political parties, candidates and other actors in the democratic process comply with the laws and regulations governing election spending. While cross national research (Scarrow, 2003; Walecki, 2009) has reported that regulatory instruments of election financing have failed to stem the tide of political finance scandals, Pinto-Duschinsky (2002) has identified "...availability of too much law but too little enforcement" as a major regulatory deficit across the more than eighty democracies he studied.

Motivation for financing election and sources of funding election-related activities vary among the actors in election financing. Political parties and candidates fund their election campaigns with the primary motive of winning elections and controlling political offices (Nassmacher, 2009; Haughton, 2012). In achieving this goal, political parties draw resources from both private and public sources. While private sources include membership dues, donation, profit from commercial ventures and special levies on members (particularly those seeking elective offices and those holding political appointments), public sources principally include public financing of political parties through state grants, free airtime and logistics support to political parties.

Donor agencies fund election process in developing democracies with the aim of ensuring hitch-free and credible elections as part of their home countries' democracy assistance programmes to enhance or strengthen democratic rule in new democracies (Knack, 2004; Animashaun, 2014). Many of these democracy aid agencies which depend on resources appropriated for democracy promotion or external development assistance in their home countries' budgets (Carothers, 1999; Elklit and Reynolds, 2000) are active in Nigerian democracy. They include United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID) now United Kingdom Agency for International Development (UKAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Norwegian Development Corporation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Foundation for Election System (IFES) and European Union Support for Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EUSDGN). Donor support for election administration comes in two forms: individual donor assistance and multiple donor assistance. The former involves electoral assistance given by individual donor agencies to election management body such as technical and material support to INEC from USAID, UKAID and IFES while the latter involves election support from coalition of donors such as Joint Donor Basket funded by a consortium of donor agencies (Open Society Foundations, 2015). Since the transition elections of 1999, the donor community has always generously donated to Nigeria's election agency with the conviction that the democratic support would greatly assist in achieving not only credible elections but seamless democratic transfer of power between regimes. The official Report of the 2015 General Elections released by INEC reveals that the election agency received funding support from development partners to the tune of N5.2

billion which was expended on such activities as workshops, seminars, conferences, enlightenment programmes and recruitment of consultants.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) engage in election financing with the twin purpose of political empowerment and oversight of the electoral process. Relying largely on foreign grants for their interventionist programmes, they engage in such activities as voter education, peace advocacy, capacity building for voters, party officials and election workers including security operatives as well as election observation. In carrying out these empowerment and oversight activities, CSOs act either individually or as a group. For instance, whereas there are individual CSOs in Nigeria who are active in Nigeria's election process such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP) and Centre for Social Justice, there are also coalition organizations such as Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) and Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR) who are engaged in similar activities.

The public media in Nigeria embark on election reportage as part of their constitutionally assigned mandate (as stipulated in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, as amended) of upholding the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people. This election reportage involves deployment of media workers for election observation and coverage of election processes such as voting, vote tallying, collation and announcement of results. Media houses rely on their organizational resources to fund these activities.

### **Election Budget and Quality of Election Management: Evidence from Nigeria**

This section of the paper seeks to situate the Nigerian case in the context of the relationship between level of the resource base of election management bodies and their capacity to efficiently deliver their mandate. Analysts have maintained that the volume of resources at the disposal of election agencies greatly determines the quality of their electoral services (James and Jervier, 2018). In the case of Britain for instance, Clark (2014) has demonstrated a statistical link between funds available to the Electoral Commission and the frequency with which it meets its performance standards.

References have been made in the literature to democratic countries where successful elections have been prosecuted with heavy tolls on the public purse (Gidlund, 1991). For instance, India expended the sum of 600m USD on the country's 2014 general elections in which over 553m voters cast the ballot (Abdallah, 2018). In Canada, the 2015 federal elections in which 17 million voters participated cost the former British colony a staggering 443m USD translating to per voter cost of 17 USD. The 2015 figure was higher by 53 % than the 2011 elections which gulped 293m USD (Election Canada, 2016). In the United Kingdom, the 2015 parliamentary elections cost the country 114, 733m GBP with 30.8m voters out of eligible 46.4m voters turning out for polling (UK Government, 2018). The hotly-contested 2016 presidential and congressional elections which produced Donald John Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America cost the American treasury 6.5b USD with 130 million voters casting the ballot (OpenSecrets, 2017). In Kenya, the 2017 general and re-run elections of August 8 and October 26 respectively cost the East African country 536m USD (African News, 2018) while Nigeria's close neighbour, Ghana, expended 152m USD on the 2016 presidential and parliamentary polls (Ghana Web, 2019).

If we accept the argument that the foregoing elections were largely successful (though there were reservations about American and Kenyan elections) because of heavy public investment in the polls, then the Nigerian case would appear to negate the theory that good elections come with heavy cash. Since 1999, the quality of Nigerian elections has been declining in spite of progressive increase in electoral expenditures over the election cycles. According to one source, a total of N730.99 billion budgetary vote has been allocated to INEC since 1999 with N450 billion of this figure budgeted for electoral expenditure, N191.8 billion for personnel costs, N36.9 billion for overhead costs and N54.7 billion for capital expenditure (Abdallah, 2018). Whereas the country incurred a total of N1.5 billion on electoral expenditure in 1999, the cost grew to N29 billion in 2003 and N45.5 billion in 2007. Electoral expenditure for 2011 elections was N111 billion while N87.8 billion was incurred in electoral expenditure during the 2015 elections in which

the total cost of delivering the general elections stood at N108.88 billion (Abdallah, 2018). With 70 million voters in the Voter Rolls in 2015, INEC spent a whopping N108.8m billion to prosecute the 2015 general elections. In 2019, with 73 million electors, the commission budgeted N242 billion which provoked serious controversy within the polity. In comparative terms, the N108.8 billion (625million USD) which INEC expended on the 2015 polls was higher than 600 million USD spent by the Electoral Commission of India to organize the 2014 general elections in world's largest electoral democracy in which over 553 million voters participated (Abdallah, 2018).

The reports of election observer groups which have monitored Nigerian elections since democratic restoration of 1999 offer useful insights into the nature of the problems with election administration in Nigeria. The Carter Centre, a United States-based observer group which monitored the 1999 elections reports that the polls were characterized by "ballot box stuffing, alteration of results and incongruence between low voter turnout and high vote tally announced..." (Carter Centre, 1999). In the 2003 elections, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) finds that there were credible allegations of electoral fraud in many states. For instance, in Enugu state, the local election monitor coalition reports that "polling officials in many centres stamped and gave bundles of ballot papers to agents of a political party which they then proceeded to thumb print in the full view of security personnel before stuffing them into the ballot boxes" (TMG, 2003). Similarly, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) which deployed 118 observers to monitor the elections reports that "the presidential and a number of gubernatorial elections were marred by serious irregularities and fraud; in a certain number of states, minimum standards were not met" (EUEOM, 2003). The 2007 elections are widely acclaimed as the most flawed elections in the electoral history of Nigeria (Egwu, 2013). It thus received scathing comments from both election analysts and accredited observers. The Transition Monitoring Group finds that the elections "were seriously marred by egregious irregularities to the extent of not only compromising the integrity of the ballot in many states...but also calling into question the reliability and validity of the results declared by INEC..." (TMG, 2007). Even the 2015 elections touted as a "national success" (Downie, 2015) and which received wide positive comments within and outside the country were not without their own fair share of shortcomings. In its final report on the historic elections, the EUEOM notes that the elections were characterized by "...incidents of violence, abuse of incumbency at state and federal levels, and attempts at manipulation" (EUEOM, 2015). The wide expectations that the 2019 elections would build on the relative success of 2015 did not materialize as the elections fell short of popular expectations. The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) reports that the elections were marred by late opening of polling while essential election materials like ballot boxes, polling booths, ballot papers, copy of voter rolls and Smart Card Readers were not available at some voting centres". Similarly, in its Statement on the 2019 Presidential Election released on Wednesday 27 February 2019, YIAGA Africa, one of the local civil society organizations that monitored the polls, noted that the elections were characterized by late opening of voting, cancelled ballots which it estimated at 3.3% of registered voters as well as discrepancies between the number of registered voters announced by INEC before the elections and after polling (YIAGA Africa, 2019). What the foregoing demonstrates in bold relief is that perennial electoral failure in Nigeria has little to do with poor funding even if the current level of funding of INEC is still relatively low compared to omnibus responsibilities assigned to the commission. While one can concede the fact that the commission is relatively under-resourced which affects its capacity to effectively discharge some of its important responsibilities such as tracking of campaign funds and handling of election-related litigations, the commission has always received fairly reasonable budgetary vote for electoral expenditure. What could then explain incessant poor quality of election administration in Nigeria?

One major explanation for electoral failure in Nigeria is the unprofessional conduct of election workers. Some of these workers are partisan thereby giving loyalty to politicians who may have facilitated the employment of these workers into the commission. While ad-doc election workers may not owe allegiance to specific politicians, they are poorly trained and thus easily get overwhelmed by the rigour of election duty which may make them commit costly errors capable of undermining the integrity of the election

process. Another factor related to unprofessionalism of election officials is collusion between election workers and politicians aimed at influencing the outcome of elections. This is often executed through material inducement of election officials with a view to making them discharge their election duties in a way favourable to the inducing politicians. During the 2015 elections, there were allegations that former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke, distributed about N23 billion among INEC workers across the six geo-political zones of the Nigerian federation in order to compromise their official conduct (Sule, Sani and Mat, 2018). Two officials of INEC, Christian Nwosu and Tijani Indah Bashir) were convicted in January 2019 by a Federal High Court sitting in Lagos presided over by Justice Muhammed Idris. The two election officials were found guilty of accepting bribes from Mrs Alison-Madueke. Lack of effective institutional autonomy by INEC which constrains the commission from checkmating impunity by political incumbents particularly in the area of misuse of State Administrative Resources (SARs including legislative resources, media resources and coercive resources) constitutes a serious challenge to credible election administration in Nigeria. Evidences are abound in the current dispensation of instances in which incumbent leaders exploited their control of these resources to undermine the candidacy of opposition politicians. When an election management body is perceived as lacking institutional independence (a charge often raised by opposition parties or losing electoral candidates seeking a scapegoat for their dismal electoral performance), the legitimacy of the electoral process and its outcome can be called into question (Tekle, 1997). Sabotage by transport owners/workers or logistics providers could also considerably undermine election management. Because some of these logistics contractors are often partisan, they could deliberately compromise logistics arrangement particularly in the area of deployment of election materials to satisfy partisan interests. Profitability of state power particularly for economic security as well as the zero-sum character of politics in Nigeria could also impede credible electoral delivery. Because the control of the state provides an avenue to wealth and those who control the state do so with a 'winner-take-all' posture that effectively excludes the opposition from the spoils of office, electoral competition is reduced to warfare in which competitors deploy all means, fair or foul, to emerge victorious.

### **Conclusions**

Organizing election is a complex enterprise and the resource strength as well as efficiency of election management body are crucial to the processes and outcome of election (Akanji, 2018). The complexity of elections is underscored by the fact of being "the largest peacetime activities ever undertaken within a nation" (IIDEA, 2017). Theoretical reflections and existing scholarly works suggest that sufficient funding of election authorities greatly influences the quality of election management which in turn impacts on the legitimacy of the election and its outcome. While the study upholds this conclusion, it however contends that, at least in Nigeria, relative paucity of resources alone does not explain the perennial crisis of elections. As has been demonstrated in the paper, there are other serious challenges outside of funding that undermine election management in Nigeria. These challenges relate more to the perception, attitude and values of key actors in the electoral process including policymakers/politicians, election workers and logistics suppliers. Without development of positive values or value-reorientation and attitudinal change on the part of these actors, no amount of investment on election administration will produce the desired result.

### **Recommendations**

Election workers, both tenure and ad-hoc, should discharge their duties with high sense of patriotism and be strictly professional in their official conduct. Policymakers should put into place policy measures with strict sanctions for violators of electoral rules which must be applied or implemented without bias. Politicians should perceive elective office as a call to public service rather than a license to primitive accumulation which must be attained at all costs. Above all however, the issue of funding still remains ever crucial to successful election management. An Election Trust Fund could be instituted to which a certain percentage of government revenue will be deposited for the purpose of financing elections. This Fund which could also draw contributions from other stakeholders in the election process will serve as a strong resource base for the election agency. Establishment of the Fund will also considerably address the problem

of delays in the disbursement of appropriated funds to INEC which often characterizes its operation and which negatively impacts on staffing and procurement needs of the commission.

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