

Institutional Capacity and Electoral Credibility of the Independent Electoral Commission on Local Government Elections.

Bisiriyu Abiodun Taleat^{1*}, Melvin Diedericks² and Esther Olapeju Fagbewesa³

¹Department of Public Management and Administration North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4745-095X>

²Department of Public Management and Governance North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: Melvin.Diedericks@nwu.ac.za
[Orcid.org/0000-0002-1433-4138](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1433-4138)

³Department of Local Government and Development Studies Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Email: efagbewesa@oauife.edu.ng

Corresponding Author:

Bisiriyu Abiodun Taleat

Department of Public Management and Administration North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4745-095X>
55601170@mynwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT:

The credibility of local government elections remains a major concern in Nigeria because of persistent challenges to the institutional capacity and effectiveness of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs). Although existing studies have examined electoral governance in Nigeria, few studies have empirically examined how institutional capacity influences the credibility of state-level local government elections, particularly within the context of the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC). This study examined the role of OSIEC in promoting credible local government elections, with a specific focus on institutional independence, administrative efficiency, and logistical capacity, guided by Systems Theory. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design through secondary data obtained from journal articles, textbooks, government publications, electoral reports, policy documents, and other credible internet sources. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Findings revealed that respondents generally perceived OSIEC as independent, transparent, and administratively capable of conducting grassroots elections. The commission was also perceived to possess adequate personnel, financial resources, and logistical arrangements. However, concerns relating to political influence, financial dependence, and structural limitations remain significant. The study concludes that while OSIEC demonstrates operational competence, sustainable electoral credibility requires deeper institutional reforms. It recommends strengthening legal safeguards, enhancing financial autonomy, improving voter education, and adopting modern electoral technologies to promote transparent and accountable local governance.

Keywords: Electoral credibility, Institutional capacity, Democratic consolidation, Electoral governance, Political participation

INTRODUCTION

Elections represent a fundamental institution of democratic governance because they provide citizens with the opportunity to participate in political decision-making through the selection of representatives. The quality of elections is therefore central to democratic legitimacy, accountability, and political stability. At the grassroots level, local government elections are important because they determine leadership at the tier of government closest to citizens and influence community development, service delivery, and citizen engagement. In Nigeria, the constitutional recognition of local government as the third tier of government underscores the importance of credible electoral processes for strengthening democratic governance and decentralisation (Constitution, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, despite the importance of local democracy, elections conducted by State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) have continued to attract concerns regarding credibility, transparency, political neutrality, and institutional effectiveness.

The establishment of SIECs under the 1999 Constitution was intended to decentralise electoral administration and allow states to manage local government elections in a manner that reflects local realities. However, decades after their creation, questions remain regarding their ability to operate independently and conduct elections that meet democratic standards. Scholars have argued that the effectiveness of electoral management bodies depends not only on legal mandates but also on institutional autonomy, adequate resources, professional competence, and public confidence (Norris, 2014). In the Nigerian context, SIECs have frequently been criticised for operating within political environments where state governments exert significant influence over appointments, funding, and administrative decisions, thereby raising concerns about their neutrality and independence (Omotola, 2010).

The credibility challenges surrounding local government elections in Nigeria are closely linked to broader weaknesses in electoral governance. Unlike the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which manages federal and state elections and enjoys a relatively more established institutional structure, SIECs operate within state-level political frameworks that may expose them to executive influence. This institutional arrangement has generated debates about whether SIECs can function as impartial electoral bodies when their leadership and resources are largely determined by the state authorities. According to Ojo (2016), the effectiveness of SIECs is constrained by structural limitations, including weak legal safeguards, inadequate autonomy, and insufficient mechanisms for accountability. These challenges have implications for democratic consolidation because elections perceived as unfair or predetermined may reduce voter participation and weaken citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

A principle of institutional impartiality. Neutral electoral bodies must provide equal treatment to all political parties and candidates, enforce electoral regulations consistently, and avoid actions that create advantages for particular groups. Elklit and Reynolds (2002) argue that electoral management bodies contribute to democratic legitimacy when they are perceived as neutral referees rather than political participants. Similarly, Birch (2011) emphasizes that perceptions of fairness are essential to electoral legitimacy because citizens evaluate elections based not only on outcomes but also on whether the process is conducted impartially.

In Nigeria, the question of political independence and electoral neutrality has remained central to debates surrounding the effectiveness of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs). The creation of SIECs through the 1999 Constitution was intended to promote decentralized electoral administration by assigning responsibility for local government elections to state-level institutions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, the relationship between SIECs and state governments has generated concerns regarding institutional autonomy. Unlike the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which operates under a national framework, SIECs function within state political environments where governors often influence appointments, funding arrangements, and administrative processes (Ojo, 2016).

One of the major challenges affecting SIEC independence is the appointment process of electoral commissioners. The appointment of members of state electoral commissions is largely influenced by state governments, creating concerns about political loyalty and impartiality. According to Omotola (2010), this institutional arrangement increases the possibility of ruling parties influencing local government electoral outcomes because the body responsible for conducting elections may lack sufficient distance from political authorities. Similarly, Ibeanu and Orji (2014) argue that the structural weakness of SIECs results from their dependence on state institutions, limiting their ability to operate as fully independent electoral authorities.

Financial autonomy is another important dimension of electoral independence. Electoral bodies require stable and predictable funding to conduct elections effectively and resist political pressure. Adequate financial resources enable electoral commissions to recruit competent personnel, undertake voter education,

deploy election materials, and maintain operational independence. According to Schedler (2002), democratic institutions become vulnerable when they depend excessively on political authorities for resources because financial dependence can undermine impartial decision-making. In Nigeria, inadequate financial autonomy has been identified as a major limitation affecting the performance of SIECs and the credibility of local government elections (Sule, 2020).

Beyond formal independence, electoral neutrality also depends on the professionalism and ethical conduct of electoral officials. Electoral officials must demonstrate impartiality in implementing electoral rules, managing disputes, and communicating electoral information. Norris (2014) argues that electoral integrity requires

institutional competence combined with ethical commitment among election administrators. Similarly, Pippa Norris (2017) notes that public confidence in elections is influenced by both institutional performance and citizens' perceptions of whether electoral authorities act fairly. Therefore, neutrality is achieved not only through legal frameworks but also through professional norms and accountability mechanisms.

Political interference may manifest through various forms, including manipulation of election schedules, selective enforcement of electoral rules, unequal treatment of candidates, and influence over result management processes. Levitsky and Way (2010) explain that democratic institutions can be weakened when political actors exploit state structures to maintain electoral advantages. In the Nigerian context, concerns have been raised that some local government elections conducted by SIECs lack competitiveness due to perceptions of predetermined outcomes and dominance by ruling parties (Omilusi, 2016). Such perceptions reduce voter enthusiasm and contribute to political apathy at the grassroots level.

Conversely, political independence does not imply complete separation from accountability mechanisms. Electoral institutions must operate independently while remaining transparent and accountable to citizens, courts, political stakeholders, and oversight institutions. According to Diamond (2008), democratic institutions require a balance between autonomy and accountability because excessive dependence on political actors undermines legitimacy, while lack of accountability may weaken institutional effectiveness. Consequently, electoral reforms should focus on creating institutions that are both independent and answerable to democratic principles.

Empirical studies on Nigerian electoral administration reveal that strengthening SIECs requires comprehensive reforms beyond administrative improvements. Ibeanu (2022) argues that electoral reform must address institutional design, political culture, and governance structures that influence electoral management. Similarly, Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) emphasize that credible elections require strong institutions capable of resisting political manipulation and ensuring equal participation. These perspectives demonstrate that improving electoral credibility requires addressing both internal institutional weaknesses and external political pressures.

For the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC), political independence and electoral neutrality remain essential factors in evaluating its contribution to credible local government elections. Although operational competence and administrative capacity are important, public confidence depends largely on whether citizens perceive OSIEC as impartial and independent from partisan interests. Strengthening institutional safeguards, ensuring transparent appointment procedures, improving financial autonomy, and promoting professional electoral administration are therefore necessary steps toward enhancing the credibility of grassroots elections in Osun State and Nigeria more broadly.

2.ELECTORAL REFORM AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Electoral reform represents a critical mechanism for strengthening democratic institutions, improving electoral credibility, and promoting democratic consolidation. In democratic societies, elections serve as the primary means through which citizens choose political leaders, hold governments accountable, and participate in governance processes. However, elections can only contribute to democratic consolidation when they are conducted through institutions that are transparent, independent, and capable of producing outcomes accepted by political actors and citizens. Democratic consolidation therefore depends not only on the existence of electoral procedures but also on the continuous improvement of electoral institutions, legal frameworks, and political practices (Linz & Stepan, 1996). In this regard, electoral reform seeks to address institutional weaknesses, enhance electoral integrity, and strengthen public confidence in democratic processes.

Democratic consolidation refers to the process through which democracy becomes deeply established, stable, and broadly accepted by political elites and citizens as the legitimate framework for political

competition. According to Diamond (1999), a consolidated democracy requires institutions that support

political participation, accountability, constitutional governance, and peaceful competition for power. Elections are central to this process because credible elections provide mechanisms for leadership selection and political accountability. However, where electoral processes are characterized by manipulation, weak institutions, or limited competition, democratic consolidation becomes difficult to achieve (Schedler, 2001).

In Nigeria, electoral reform has remained a major component of democratic development since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Although Nigeria has experienced continuous democratic governance, concerns regarding electoral malpractice, weak institutional autonomy, political interference, and limited public confidence have continued to influence debates about electoral improvement. Scholars argue that electoral reforms in Nigeria have largely focused on strengthening election management bodies, improving legal frameworks, enhancing transparency, and increasing the credibility of electoral outcomes (Omotola, 2011). However, the effectiveness of reforms depends not only on institutional changes but also on the willingness of political actors to respect democratic rules and practices.

A central component of electoral reform involves strengthening the autonomy and capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs). Electoral institutions require independence, adequate funding, professional personnel, and clear legal authority to conduct credible elections. According to International IDEA (2014), effective electoral management requires institutions that possess both structural independence and operational capacity. Weak electoral institutions often create opportunities for political manipulation, thereby reducing public trust in elections. In Nigeria, reforms have frequently emphasized improving the independence and effectiveness of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), but similar concerns remain regarding State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), which conduct local government elections (Ojo, 2016).

The relationship between electoral reform and democratic consolidation is particularly important at the grassroots level. Local government elections provide citizens with opportunities to participate directly in democratic governance and influence leadership closest to their communities. However, weaknesses in the administration of local elections may undermine broader democratic development. Omotola (2010) argues that democratic consolidation requires credible elections at all levels of government because local-level electoral failures can weaken citizens' confidence in the democratic system. Therefore, improving the credibility of SIECs represents an important dimension of electoral reform in Nigeria.

One of the major objectives of electoral reform is to reduce political interference in electoral administration. Electoral bodies must operate independently from ruling parties and government officials to maintain neutrality and public confidence. Mozaffar and Schedler (2002) emphasize that electoral governance depends on institutional arrangements that protect election administrators from political pressures. In Nigeria, concerns have been raised that state electoral commissions often operate within political environments where governors influence appointments, funding, and administrative decisions. Such conditions may weaken the credibility of local government elections and limit the ability of SIECs to function as impartial electoral institutions (Omotola, 2011).

Electoral reform also involves improving election administration through technological innovation, professional training, and better logistical systems. Contemporary electoral reforms increasingly focus on the use of technology to enhance voter registration, results management, and transparency. The adoption of digital electoral tools can reduce administrative errors and strengthen confidence in election outcomes when supported by effective institutional frameworks (Norris, 2014). In Nigeria, recent electoral reforms have included attempts to improve electoral transparency through legal reforms and technological adoption, although challenges remain regarding implementation and institutional capacity.

Furthermore, democratic consolidation requires reforms beyond electoral institutions. Political parties, civil society organisations, the media, and citizens play important roles in ensuring that democratic competition is meaningful. Omotola (2011) argues that institutional reforms alone cannot guarantee democratic consolidation without corresponding changes in political behaviour, party practices, and democratic culture. Political elites must accept electoral rules, respect opposition participation, and support institutions that promote accountability.

Empirical studies on electoral reforms in Nigeria indicate that reforms have produced some improvements but have not completely resolved underlying structural problems. Bashir and Musa (2018) found that electoral reforms have contributed to improving election administration but that challenges relating to institutional independence, political interference, and weak democratic culture continue to affect electoral credibility. Similarly, recent analyses of electoral institutions emphasize that the autonomy and capacity of electoral commissions remain important determinants of election quality and democratic

legitimacy.

For State Independent Electoral Commissions such as OSIEC, electoral reform requires strengthening institutional autonomy, improving financial independence, ensuring transparent appointment procedures, enhancing professional capacity, and promoting accountability mechanisms. These reforms are essential because credible local government elections contribute to democratic participation, citizen trust, and effective grassroots governance. Without institutional reforms that address both administrative weaknesses and political constraints, electoral processes may continue to experience legitimacy challenges.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

Empirical studies on electoral governance in Nigeria have extensively examined the performance of electoral institutions, the credibility of elections, and the challenges affecting democratic consolidation. Existing evidence suggests that the effectiveness of electoral institutions is influenced by several factors, including institutional independence, administrative capacity, political interference, financial autonomy, and public trust. However, while substantial research has focused on national elections managed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), comparatively limited empirical attention has been given to State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), particularly regarding their institutional capacity and contribution to credible local government elections.

Omotola (2010) examined elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic and found that electoral institutions have historically struggled with challenges relating to political interference, weak institutional autonomy, and limited public confidence. The study argued that the credibility of elections depends largely on the ability of electoral management bodies to operate independently from political actors. Although the study provided significant insights into Nigeria's broader electoral challenges, its focus was largely on national electoral processes and did not extensively investigate the operational realities of state-level electoral institutions responsible for local government elections.

Similarly, Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) investigated electoral politics in Nigeria and observed that weaknesses in electoral administration, including inadequate institutional structures, poor accountability, and political manipulation, have negatively affected the credibility of elections. Their study emphasized that electoral reform requires strengthening institutions responsible for managing elections. However, the study did not provide specific empirical evidence on how administrative and logistical capacities of SIECs influence the credibility of grassroots elections.

Ibeanu and Orji (2014) conducted a broader analysis of elections and democratic development in Nigeria and found that electoral institutions often operate within structural environments characterized by political influence, weak legal frameworks, and inadequate autonomy. The study identified the vulnerability of electoral bodies to executive interference as a major challenge affecting electoral legitimacy. While the research contributed significantly to understanding institutional weaknesses in Nigerian electoral governance, it mainly examined electoral institutions generally and provided limited analysis of specific state electoral commissions.

Ojo (2016) examined the role of State Independent Electoral Commissions in Nigeria's electoral process and highlighted that SIECs face significant institutional challenges, including limited independence, weak constitutional protection, and financial dependence on state governments. The study argued that these factors reduce the ability of SIECs to function as impartial electoral bodies. However, the study was largely conceptual and did not provide extensive empirical assessment of how citizens perceive the performance and capacity of specific SIECs in conducting local government elections.

Omilusi (2016) explored the challenges facing SIECs and described them as institutions operating within a paradox of democratic decentralization, where local elections are expected to promote grassroots democracy but are often constrained by political realities. The study found that perceptions of political interference, lack of competitiveness, and weak institutional legitimacy contribute to voter apathy and reduced confidence in local elections. However, the study focused broadly on the experiences of SIECs and did not empirically measure the relationship between institutional capacity and electoral credibility.

Sule (2020) examined the role and limitations of State Electoral Commissions in Nigeria's electoral process and found that inadequate funding, limited technological capacity, and weak organizational structures remain major constraints affecting the performance of SIECs. The study emphasized that financial and administrative autonomy are essential for credible electoral management. However, the study did not sufficiently explore whether some SIECs possess internal operational strengths that contribute positively to electoral effectiveness.

In relation to local government elections, studies have consistently identified challenges such as low voter turnout, limited political competition, and public distrust. Nwankwo (2018) argued that voter apathy in local government elections is strongly associated with citizens' perceptions that electoral outcomes are predetermined or influenced by political elites. Similarly, Arowolo (2011) emphasized that credible local government elections are necessary for effective grassroots governance because local institutions depend on legitimate leadership for accountability and service delivery.

International comparative studies also demonstrate the importance of institutional capacity in electoral credibility. International IDEA (2014) established that effective electoral management requires independence, professionalism, adequate resources, transparency, and accountability. Norris (2014) further demonstrated that electoral integrity depends on the interaction between institutional performance and citizens' perceptions of fairness. These studies provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how electoral institutions influence democratic legitimacy.

3.THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study is anchored on Systems Theory, which provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between institutional structures, political processes, and democratic outcomes. Systems Theory was initially developed in the field of biology by Bertalanffy (1968) and later adapted into political science by Easton (1953, 1965) to explain how political systems operate through the interaction of different components. The theory views society and political institutions as interconnected systems in which inputs, processes, and outputs influence the stability and effectiveness of governance structures. In the context of electoral governance, the theory suggests that electoral outcomes are shaped by the interaction between electoral institutions, political actors, legal frameworks, administrative capacity, and citizen participation.

According to Easton (1965), a political system receives inputs in the form of public demands, expectations, political pressures, and citizen participation, which are processed through institutional mechanisms and transformed into outputs such as policies, decisions, and leadership outcomes. The effectiveness of a political system depends on the capacity of institutions to manage these inputs and produce outcomes that are accepted as legitimate by society. Applied to electoral administration, Systems Theory explains that the credibility of elections is not determined solely by voting procedures but by the overall interaction between electoral institutions, political environments, administrative processes, and public perceptions.

The relevance of Systems Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how the institutional capacity of the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC) influences the credibility of local government elections. Electoral institutions operate as components within a broader democratic system where their effectiveness depends on their relationship with other actors and structures, including government authorities, political parties, voters, civil society organizations, and legal institutions. A well-functioning electoral system requires institutional independence, adequate resources, professional personnel, and transparent procedures to convert electoral demands into legitimate democratic outcomes (Easton, 1965).

The theory also emphasizes the importance of feedback mechanisms in maintaining system stability. In democratic governance, citizens provide feedback through electoral participation, acceptance or rejection of electoral outcomes, public opinion, and engagement with political institutions. When electoral institutions conduct credible elections, they strengthen public trust and reinforce democratic stability. Conversely, when elections are perceived as unfair, manipulated, or lacking transparency, negative feedback emerges through voter apathy, political dissatisfaction, and declining institutional legitimacy (Norris, 2014). Therefore, Systems Theory provides insight into how weaknesses within electoral institutions can affect the broader democratic system.

Furthermore, Systems Theory helps explain the relationship between institutional capacity and electoral credibility. Electoral institutions require effective internal processes, including administrative efficiency, financial resources, logistical arrangements, and professional competence, to perform their functions effectively. These internal capacities influence the quality of electoral outputs, including the transparency, fairness, and acceptance of election results. International IDEA (2014) emphasizes that effective electoral management depends on institutional structures capable of transforming electoral rules and procedures into credible democratic outcomes. Thus, the theory supports the argument that stronger electoral institutions are more likely to produce legitimate elections.

The application of Systems Theory is particularly relevant to State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) in Nigeria because local government elections involve multiple interconnected actors and institutional processes. The performance of SIECs is influenced by constitutional provisions, state

political environments, financial arrangements, administrative structures, and public expectations. For example, political interference or inadequate resources may disrupt the functioning of electoral institutions, affecting their ability to produce credible electoral outcomes. In contrast, institutional autonomy, professional administration, and effective resource management may strengthen electoral legitimacy. Although Systems Theory provides a broad explanation of institutional interactions, its application in this study focuses specifically on the role of OSIEC as an institutional component within Nigeria's democratic system. The theory helps examine how OSIEC's institutional independence, administrative capacity, and logistical effectiveness influence the credibility of local government elections. It assumes that improvements in institutional capacity will enhance electoral processes and contribute to stronger democratic outcomes.

4.METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of institutional capacity on the credibility of local government elections conducted by the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC). The study relied on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, government publications, electoral reports, policy documents, and other credible internet sources. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which enabled the systematic examination, interpretation, and synthesis of evidence on institutional independence, administrative efficiency, and logistical capacity in relation to electoral credibility. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it facilitated a comprehensive assessment of existing evidence on OSIEC's institutional performance and its implications for credible local government elections.

5.DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the relationship between institutional capacity and electoral credibility in the context of the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC), with specific attention to institutional independence, administrative and logistical capacity, and their implications for the credibility of local government elections. The findings contribute to existing debates on electoral governance in Nigeria by demonstrating that the performance of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) cannot be understood solely through the traditional lens of political vulnerability and institutional weakness. Instead, the study reveals a more complex relationship in which electoral credibility is shaped by the interaction between institutional autonomy, operational effectiveness, resource availability, and public perceptions of fairness.

The first objective of the study was to examine the extent to which OSIEC operates with institutional independence and electoral neutrality. The findings indicate that although OSIEC demonstrates elements of institutional effectiveness, concerns regarding political influence and structural dependence remain important challenges. This finding reflects the broader literature on SIECs, which has consistently identified political interference as a major limitation affecting the credibility of state-level electoral institutions in Nigeria (Omotola, 2010; Ojo, 2016; Omilusi, 2016). Existing studies argue that because SIECs operate within state political environments where governors often influence appointments and financial arrangements, their ability to function as impartial electoral bodies may be compromised (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

However, the findings also provide a more nuanced interpretation of institutional independence. While previous studies often portray SIECs as institutions largely constrained by political actors, this study demonstrates that institutional capacity and political vulnerability may exist simultaneously. The presence of administrative competence does not automatically eliminate concerns regarding independence, but neither does political influence completely negate the ability of electoral institutions to perform their functions effectively. This supports Norris's (2014) argument that electoral credibility is multidimensional and depends on both the actual performance of electoral institutions and citizens' perceptions of fairness and impartiality. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by suggesting that institutional independence should be examined not only as a legal condition but also as an operational reality reflected in decision-making processes, resource control, and stakeholder confidence.

The second objective focused on assessing OSIEC's administrative and logistical capacity in conducting local government elections. The findings suggest that OSIEC possesses important operational strengths, including administrative organization, personnel capability, and logistical preparedness. This finding supports International IDEA's (2014) argument that effective electoral management requires strong institutional capacity, professional personnel, adequate resources, and efficient operational systems. Previous studies on Nigerian electoral administration have emphasized resource constraints, weak planning, and logistical challenges as major barriers to credible elections (Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2006; Ibeanu & Orji,

2014). However, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that state-level electoral institutions should not be analyzed exclusively through institutional deficiencies. Rather, some SIECs may develop internal capabilities that enhance their ability to manage electoral processes effectively.

The finding on administrative capacity also contributes to the debate concerning whether electoral credibility is primarily dependent on institutional design or operational performance. One perspective argues that without strong legal safeguards and autonomy, electoral bodies cannot guarantee credible elections because political influence undermines neutrality (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002). Another perspective emphasizes that professional administration, adequate resources, and effective procedures are essential determinants of election quality (Fukuyama, 2013). This study suggests that both perspectives are relevant. OSIEC's ability to conduct credible elections depends on its operational competence, but sustainable credibility requires that such competence operates within a framework of institutional independence and accountability.

The third objective examined the relationship between institutional capacity and the credibility of local government elections. The findings demonstrate that electoral credibility is influenced by the combined effect of institutional independence, administrative efficiency, and logistical capability. This supports the argument of Diamond (1999) that democratic consolidation requires institutions capable of managing political competition and producing outcomes accepted by citizens. While previous studies have highlighted electoral malpractice, political interference, and weak institutional legitimacy as major challenges affecting Nigerian elections (Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2006; Omotola, 2011), this study highlights the importance of internal institutional capacity as an equally significant factor in shaping electoral outcomes.

The study also contributes to understanding the importance of local government elections within democratic consolidation. Much of the Nigerian electoral literature has focused on national elections managed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), with limited empirical attention to grassroots elections conducted by SIECs. However, local government elections represent an essential component of democratic governance because they influence citizen participation, accountability, and service delivery at the community level (Arowolo, 2011). By focusing specifically on OSIEC, this study expands existing electoral governance scholarship by demonstrating that democratic consolidation must also be assessed through the quality of subnational electoral institutions.

The findings further reveal that electoral credibility is not solely determined by the technical administration of elections but also by public perceptions of legitimacy. This aligns with Norris's (2014) electoral integrity framework, which emphasizes that citizens evaluate elections based on transparency, fairness, and confidence in electoral institutions. Therefore, improving electoral credibility requires more than improving election logistics; it requires strengthening institutional trust through accountability, transparency, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to Systems Theory by demonstrating how electoral credibility emerges from interactions among multiple institutional and political components. Consistent with Easton's (1965) framework, OSIEC's performance represents the outcome of interactions between institutional resources, political pressures, administrative processes, and public expectations. The study confirms that electoral institutions do not operate in isolation but function within broader political systems where changes in one component influence the stability and legitimacy of the entire democratic process.

The original scholarly contribution of this study lies in providing a balanced empirical assessment of SIECs. Existing literature has predominantly emphasized the weaknesses of state electoral commissions, particularly political dependence and institutional limitations. By examining OSIEC's institutional independence, administrative capacity, and logistical effectiveness simultaneously, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how state electoral institutions contribute to electoral credibility. The findings suggest that reform strategies should move beyond criticism of SIECs and focus on strengthening their autonomy, professional capacity, financial independence, and accountability structures.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between institutional capacity and electoral credibility within the context of the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSIEC), focusing specifically on institutional independence, administrative and logistical capacity, and their influence on the credibility of local government elections. The study demonstrates that credible grassroots elections depend not only on the existence of electoral institutions but also on their ability to operate effectively, independently, and transparently. The findings reveal that while OSIEC possesses important administrative and operational capabilities that support electoral management, challenges relating to political influence, institutional

autonomy, and resource dependence remain critical factors affecting public confidence in local electoral processes.

The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Systems Theory to the study of subnational electoral governance in Nigeria. While traditional electoral studies often examine elections as isolated events, this study reinforces the argument that electoral credibility emerges from the interaction of multiple institutional and political components, including legal frameworks, electoral administration, political environments, resource structures, and citizen perceptions. Through this theoretical lens, the study demonstrates that the performance of electoral institutions cannot be understood independently from the broader democratic system within which they operate. The findings contribute to the refinement of existing electoral governance theories by showing that institutional capacity and political independence are not separate determinants of electoral credibility but interconnected elements that collectively shape democratic outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the need for comprehensive electoral reforms aimed at strengthening the capacity and independence of SIECs. The findings suggest that improving the credibility of local government elections requires more than administrative improvements; it requires reforms that enhance financial autonomy, strengthen transparent appointment procedures, promote professional electoral administration, and establish stronger accountability mechanisms. For policymakers and electoral stakeholders, the study emphasizes that effective local democracy depends on credible electoral institutions capable of earning citizens' trust. Strengthening SIECs such as OSIEC can therefore contribute to improved grassroots governance, greater political participation, and deeper democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Funding: This work received no funding of any kind

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no competing interests

REFERENCES

1. Agbaje, A., & Adejumo, S. (2006). Do votes count? The travails of electoral politics in Nigeria. *Africa Development*, 31(3), 25–44.
2. Arowolo, D. (2011). Local government administration and the challenges of sustainable development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(3), 972–983.
3. Bashir, M., & Musa, A. (2018). Impact of electoral reforms on Nigerian democratic consolidation: A historical appraisal. *Journal on Leadership and Policy*, 3(1), 13–27.
4. Bertalanffy, L. von. (1968). *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications*. George Braziller.
5. Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral malpractice*. Oxford University Press.
6. Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
7. Diamond, L. (2008). *The spirit of democracy: The struggle to build free societies throughout the world*. Times Books.
8. Easton, D. (1953). *The political system: An inquiry into the state of political science*. Alfred A. Knopf.
9. Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.
10. Elklit, J., & Reynolds, A. (2002). The impact of election administration on the legitimacy of emerging democracies: A new comparative politics research agenda. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 40(2), 86–119.
11. Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)*.
12. Fukuyama, F. (2013). What is governance? *Governance*, 26(3), 347–368.
13. Ibeanu, O. (2013). *Reforming Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission: A Sandwich Approach to Electoral Accountability 2010–2015*. Accountability Research Center (ARC), Case Study – July 2022.
14. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2014). *Electoral management design: The International IDEA handbook*. International IDEA.
15. Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.
16. Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
17. Mozaffar, S., & Schedler, A. (2002). The comparative study of electoral governance—Introduction. *International Political Science Review*, 23(1), 5–27.
18. Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

19. Norris, P. (2017). *Strengthening electoral integrity*. Cambridge University Press.
20. Nwankwo, O. (2018). Voter apathy and local government elections in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*.
21. Ojo, E. O. (2016). The role of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) in Nigeria's electoral process. *The Constitution: Journal of Constitutional Development*.
22. Okechukwu, I. E. (2014). Governorship and electoral commissions in Nigeria's democracy. *African Journal of Political Science*.
23. Omilusi, M. (2016). The travails of Nigeria's State Independent Electoral Commissions: A paradox of electoral democracy. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 5(2), 45–60.
24. Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. *African Affairs*, 109(437), 535–553.
25. Omotola, J. S. (2011). Electoral reform and the prospects of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), 187–207.
26. Orji, N. (2021). Elections, Governance and Development in Nigeria. *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(2), 1-19
27. Schedler, A. (2001). Measuring democratic consolidation. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36(1), 66–92.
28. Schedler, A. (2002). The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 36–50.
29. Sule, B. (2020). The role and limitations of State Electoral Commissions in Nigeria's electoral process. *Electoral Studies Review under the Fourth Republic. African Affairs*, 109(437), 535–553..