



## INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC) AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA (2015 – 2023)

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### ABSTRACT

*Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has grappled with the challenges of good governance since its independence from Britain in 1960 despite its vast natural resources and economic potential. Independent National Electoral Commission was established to promote good governance through credible electoral process. As such, the study titled “Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Good Governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023” was aimed to determine whether Independent National Electoral Commission has enhanced quality leadership in Nigeria (2015-2023); ascertain the extent to which Independent National Electoral Commission has promoted transparency in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023; and find out if Independent National Electoral Commission has ensured accountability in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. The study adopted institutional theory. Content analysis design was adopted for the study. The study revealed that Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly enhanced quality leadership in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023; Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly promoted transparency in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023; Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly ensured accountability in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. The implication is that INEC has significantly not promoted good governance in Nigeria. The study therefore recommended that There is need for Independent National Electoral Commission to conduct free and fair elections in order to enhance quality leadership in Nigeria, there is urgent need for Independent National Electoral Commission be free and fair in order to promote transparency in governance in Nigeria; and there is need for Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure leaders are elected by the people to ensure accountability in governance in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Independent National Electoral Commission, Good Governance

### Introduction

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is a critical institution in Nigeria's democratic process, which ought to play significant role in ensuring good governance in the country (Abada, 2023).

INEC is established to oversee elections and ensure they are free, fair, and credible thereby influencing good governance in Nigeria.

The origin of Electoral bodies in Nigeria can be traced to the period before Independence



when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), established in 1960 conducted the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. The electoral body was however, dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. FEDECO organized the elections of 1979, which ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It also conducted the general elections of 1983 (Agu, 2023). In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which also conducted another set of elections; Local Government councils to National Assembly. These elected institutions were however not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha, on June 1998 aborted the process.

INEC, as it is known today, was established in 1998 by the administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. This was part of a transition program aimed at returning the country to civilian rule after years of military dictatorship (Ali, Dalaram, and Dauda, 2018). INEC's mandate was to conduct elections and ensure the integrity of the electoral process. Since its inception, INEC has been pivotal in organizing and supervising elections at the federal, state, and local levels. In 1998 General Abdulsalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved

NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The body organized all transitional elections that ushered in the 4th republic on May 29 1999 (Agu, 2023).

INEC has conducted the 1999, 2003 the 2007 general elections, the 2011 general elections, the 2015 general elections, 2019 general elections and 2023 general elections. These elections appear to have been fraught with malpractices and violence giving the perception that it does not reflect the will of the people. Udu, Nkwede and Ezekwe (2015) submitted that when an electoral process is perceived as unfair, unresponsive or corrupt, its political legitimacy is compromised and violence can ensue.

INEC's mandate is enshrined in Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as Amended and the Electoral Act (2021). Its core functions include; conducting elections, registration of political parties, and voter education among others (Ashindorbe, 2018). INEC is responsible for organizing, undertaking, and supervising all elections to the offices of the President and Vice President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a State, and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the House of Assembly of each State of the Federation and FCT (Ali, Dalaram, and Dauda, 2018). INEC registers political parties and monitors their activities to ensure compliance with regulations. INEC maintains a register of voters and ensures it is updated regularly. INEC promotes knowledge of sound democratic processes



and provides voter education to promote good governance in Nigeria (Pildes, 2022). The 2021 Electoral Act in Nigeria brought several reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of the electoral process. Signed into law in February 2022, it introduced key provisions that impacted election administration and the conduct of political parties. The Act allows the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to transmit election results electronically, enhancing transparency and reducing opportunities for election fraud. The Act mandates the release of funds for INEC operations at least one year before the general elections, helping INEC to plan and organize more effectively. Political parties are now required to hold direct primaries, where all registered members vote, or indirect primaries, where selected delegates vote. This aims to make candidate selection more democratic and reduce internal party conflicts. The Act increased the timeline for conducting primary elections and submission of candidate lists, giving parties more time to organize and prepare for elections. These reforms among others in the 2021 Electoral Act were widely welcomed as significant steps forward for Nigeria's democracy, aiming to make elections fairer and more inclusive for good governance.

Good governance is characterized by the principles of quality leadership, transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law (Norris, 2024). INEC has a role to play in promoting good governance in Nigeria through several avenues. For

instance, credible elections are the bedrock of democracy and good governance (Omotola, 2021). INEC's role in conducting free, fair, and credible elections helps to ensure that elected officials are the true representatives of the people. Over the years, INEC has introduced various reforms to improve the electoral process. These include the use of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and Smart Card Readers to curb electoral fraud, and the introduction of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) to ensure an up-to-date voter register (Omotola, 2021).

By ensuring transparent electoral processes, INEC is supposed to foster accountability among political leaders. When elections are conducted fairly, elected officials are more likely to be accountable to the electorate (Omotola, 2021). INEC has over the years made some efforts to increase transparency by publishing election results at polling units and utilizing technology to enhance the integrity of the electoral process (Olaniyi, 2021). INEC has a role in enhancing civic participation through voter education and public engagement for good governance. By educating the electorate on their rights and responsibilities, INEC empowers citizens to participate actively in the democratic process (Omotola, 2021). This participation is essential for holding leaders accountable and ensuring that governance is transparent and reflects the will of the people.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has grappled with the challenges of good governance since its independence from Britain in 1960 (Pildes, 2022). Despite its



vast natural resources and economic potential, Nigeria's journey towards effective governance has been marred by political instability, corruption, ethnic tensions, and economic disparity. The early years of Nigeria's independence were characterized by political instability (Lawal, 2023). The First Republic (1963-1966) saw significant regional and ethnic divisions, leading to a series of military coups. The overthrow of the civilian government in 1966 marked the beginning of a long era of military rule, which lasted until 1999 with brief interludes of civilian governance (Pildes, 2022). This instability hindered the development of robust democratic institutions and practices necessary for good governance. Under military rule, governance in Nigeria was marked by authoritarianism, suppression of political freedoms, and widespread human rights abuses. The lack of democratic accountability led to rampant corruption, mismanagement of public resources, and a disconnect between the government and the governed. Military leaders often prioritized personal and sectional interests over national development, leading to widespread poverty and underdevelopment despite the country's oil wealth.

Corruption has been one of the most persistent challenges to good governance in Nigeria (Sajó, 2021). It permeates all levels of government and society, undermining public trust in institutions and stymieing economic development. From the embezzlement of public funds by military regimes to the mismanagement of oil revenues by successive civilian

administrations, corruption has significantly impeded Nigeria's progress. Efforts to combat corruption, such as the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003, have had mixed results, often hampered by political interference and inadequate enforcement mechanisms (Saminu, 2024). The weakness of institutions and the rule of law is another issue in governance in Nigeria. The judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and other institutions responsible for ensuring accountability and justice are often compromised by corruption and political interference (Lawal, 2023). This undermines citizens' confidence in the state and perpetuates a culture of impunity. Moreover, INEC does not seem to be independent as intended. The role of the INEC is greatly impaired and compromised by the fact that it is constituted by the President, coupled with the absence of an independent source of funding and its reliance largely on the Presidency for its finances (Agu, 2023). Despite these challenges, there have been efforts to improve governance in Nigeria. The return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a significant turning point, with successive governments undertaking various reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, improve transparency, and foster economic development (Agu, 2023).

Elections are a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, and their transparency is crucial for good governance (Yakubu, 2016). In Nigeria, electoral processes have been plagued by a lack of transparency, leading to widespread electoral



fraud, rigging, and violence. Issues such as the manipulation of voter registers, lack of transparency in vote counting, and the opaque financing of political campaigns undermine the credibility of elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made strides in improving transparency, such as introducing biometric voter registration and electronic transmission of results, but significant challenges remain (Yakubu, 2016). Despite its efforts towards good governance, INEC seems to face numerous challenges that hinder its role in promoting good governance in Nigeria. INEC has often faced political interference, which undermines its independence and credibility with possible effect on good governance (Yakubu, 2016). It is against this background that it becomes imperative to assess Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Good Governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria, despite its vast natural resources and potential, has struggled to achieve good governance since gaining independence from Britain in 1960. The failure of good governance in Nigeria can be attributed to a range of interconnected issues including political instability, corruption, ethnic and religious conflicts, economic mismanagement, and weak institutional frameworks. INEC is supposed to promote the emergence of quality leadership through the conduct of free and fair elections. There have been concerns about the credibility of INEC's operations, including the collation and announcement of results. Lack of credibility

erodes public trust in the electoral process. INEC has been accused of compromising its independence and partiality in election outcomes. Unfortunately, leadership in Nigeria appears to be influenced by political elites. Leaders who emerged from electoral outcomes have been embedded in corruption. Corruption is deeply embedded in the political and administrative systems, affecting every level of government and society. Corruption among leaders undermines public trust in government institutions, deters investment, and diverts resources away from essential public services. High-profile cases of embezzlement, bribery, and misappropriation of funds have been rampant, with little accountability for those involved. Despite being one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria suffers from significant economic mismanagement and disparity. The over-reliance on oil revenues has made the economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations, neglecting other critical sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. Mismanagement of oil revenues, coupled with corruption, has led to inadequate investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. This has resulted in high levels of poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, which in turn exacerbate governance challenges.

Despite Nigeria's vast resources and potential, the country has grappled with significant challenges that can largely be attributed to a failure in quality leadership. This issue manifests through various facets including political corruption, lack of vision,





ethnic and religious favoritism, and inadequate governance structures. Leaders at various levels of government have been involved in corrupt practices, including embezzlement of public funds, bribery, and nepotism. This corruption erodes public trust in government institutions and diverts resources that could have been used for public services and infrastructure development. High-profile corruption scandals have been common, and efforts to combat this issue have often been undermined by lack of political will and the same corrupt influences they aim to eliminate. Nigerian leaders have often been criticized for short-term thinking and prioritizing personal or sectional interests over national interests. Many development programs and policies are poorly conceived, lack continuity, and are not effectively implemented (Lawal, 2023). This short-sightedness has led to inconsistent economic policies, underdeveloped infrastructure, and inadequate social services, contributing to persistent poverty and underdevelopment.

In Nigeria, persistent lack of transparency across various sectors has been a significant impediment to the country's development and governance. This deficiency is evident in areas such as government operations, public finance, electoral processes, and the oil and gas industry. The lack of transparency in government operations is a critical issue in Nigeria (Lawal, 2023). Many government activities and decisions are shrouded in secrecy, limiting public access to information. This opacity fosters an environment where corruption can thrive

unchecked, as officials are not held accountable for their actions. For instance, procurement processes are often not transparent, leading to inflated contracts and the awarding of contracts to unqualified firms based on nepotism or bribery.

Transparent management of public finances is essential for accountability good governance (Agu, 2023). However, Nigeria's public finance management is often opaque, with limited access to budgetary information and expenditure reports. Budget processes are not always inclusive, and there is often a significant discrepancy between budget allocations and actual expenditures. This lack of transparency facilitates the embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds. Efforts to audit public accounts and ensure financial transparency have been undermined by political interference and corruption. The lack of transparency in Nigeria has far-reaching consequences for development and governance. It undermines public trust in government institutions, leading to widespread cynicism and disengagement from the political process. It also hampers economic development by deterring investment and fostering an unpredictable business environment. Social services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure suffer due to the misallocation and embezzlement of public funds. Additionally, the lack of transparency exacerbates social inequalities, as resources meant for development are siphoned off by corrupt elites.



Accountability is a crucial element of good governance, ensuring that public officials are held responsible for their actions and that government activities align with the law and public interest INEC ought to promote accountability by ensuring credible elections for people to choose accountable leaders. In Nigeria, the persistent lack of accountability seems to have affected development, trust in institutions, and overall governance. In Nigeria, government officials often operate with minimal oversight, leading to widespread corruption and inefficiency. Political appointments are frequently based on patronage rather than merit, which fosters a culture of impunity. Officials are rarely held accountable for their actions, which results in the misuse of public funds, poor service delivery, and ineffective policy implementation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to examine Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Good Governance in Nigeria 2015 – 2023. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. To determine whether Independent National Electoral Commission has enhanced quality leadership in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.
2. To ascertain the extent to which Independent National Electoral Commission has promoted transparency in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.
3. To find out if Independent National Electoral Commission has ensured accountability in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Has Independent National Electoral Commission enhanced quality leadership in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023?
2. Has Independent National Electoral Commission promoted transparency in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023?
3. Has Independent National Electoral Commission ensured accountability in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023?

### **Findings of the Study**

In line with research question 1, findings revealed that Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly enhanced quality leadership in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. Accusations of rigging, vote buying, and other forms of electoral fraud have been rampant. These malpractices undermine the credibility of elections and often result in the election of leaders who may not represent the true will of the people (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). There have been concerns about the transparency of INEC's operations, including the collation and announcement of results. Lack of transparency erodes public trust in the electoral process. INEC has been accused of being influenced by political elites, compromising its independence. This perception of bias can lead to skepticism about the impartiality of election outcomes (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023).



INEC's efforts in voter education have sometimes been insufficient, leading to low voter turnout and a lack of understanding among citizens about the electoral process. This results in the election of leaders who do not have broad-based support (Schedler, 2022). The way INEC manages electoral disputes and petitions can impact perceptions of fairness. Delays or perceived bias in handling these disputes can undermine confidence in the electoral process. These factors contribute to a political environment where good leadership is difficult to achieve, as the electoral process may not always produce leaders who are accountable, transparent, and genuinely representative of the electorate's will. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving the quality of leadership in Nigeria (Schedler, 2022).

In line with research question 2, Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly promoted transparency in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. Allegations of result manipulation have been frequent. When election outcomes are believed to be tampered with, it undermines the credibility of the elected officials and erodes trust in the transparency of governance. Instances where INEC has failed to provide clear and timely information about electoral procedures and results contribute to a perception of opaqueness. Transparency in the collation and announcement of results is crucial for public confidence (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). The perceived inconsistency in the application of electoral laws and guidelines

can foster a sense of unfairness. When INEC appears to enforce rules selectively, it raises questions about its impartiality and transparency (Schedler, 2022). Delays in reporting election results or in addressing electoral grievances can create suspicion and mistrust. Timely and transparent communication is essential for maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. Issues such as inaccurate voter registers, disenfranchisement of eligible voters, and registration irregularities have been reported (Schedler, 2022). These issues can diminish the perceived legitimacy of the electoral process and, by extension, the transparency of governance. INEC's handling of allegations and evidence of electoral fraud is critical. If the commission is seen as not taking strong and impartial actions against electoral malpractice, it can undermine the transparency of the entire governance system (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). Restricting access to information about the electoral process, including financial disclosures and campaign spending, hinders transparency. For a transparent governance system, citizens need comprehensive information about the electoral process and the candidates (Schedler, 2022).

In line with research question 3, Independent National Electoral Commission has not significantly ensured accountability in governance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. When leaders manipulate the electoral process to get into power, they do not become accountable to the people (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). This explains why there is high corruption cases involving presidents,





governors, senators, house of representatives members, house of assembly members, local government council officials and indeed the public office holders over the years (Schedler, 2022). Corruption in Nigeria has

been a persistent issue, and various studies and reports have documented its prevalence between 2015 and 2023. Here are some key statistics and findings from this period:

**Table 1: Corruption Perception Index (CPI): Nigeria's rankings in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2015-2023):**

Year	Ranking and Score
- 2015:	Nigeria ranked 136th out of 168 countries with a score of 26/100.
- 2016:	Nigeria ranked 136th out of 176 countries with a score of 28/100.
- 2017:	Nigeria ranked 148th out of 180 countries with a score of 27/100.
- 2018:	Nigeria ranked 144th out of 180 countries with a score of 27/100.
- 2019:	Nigeria ranked 146th out of 180 countries with a score of 26/100.
- 2020:	Nigeria ranked 149th out of 180 countries with a score of 25/100.
- 2021:	Nigeria ranked 154th out of 180 countries with a score of 24/100.
- 2022:	Nigeria ranked 154th out of 180 countries with a score of 24/100.

Source: Transparency International (2024).

The EFCC, Nigeria's anti-corruption agency, has made numerous arrests and prosecutions related to corruption between 2015-2023: The EFCC reported recovering over ₦980 billion (approximately \$2.6 billion) in stolen funds. They have also secured thousands of convictions related to corruption cases, including high-profile cases involving politicians, public officials, and private sector actors (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). A survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2019 revealed that Nigerians paid bribes amounting to approximately ₦675 billion (about \$1.7 billion) to public officials in one year. The same survey indicated that police officers, judiciary officials, and public utility providers were among the most corrupt public officials in terms of bribe solicitation and acceptance (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023).

Afrobarometer surveys between 2015 and 2023 consistently showed that a significant percentage of Nigerians perceived the level of corruption to be high or very high. For instance, in a 2021 survey, about 65% of Nigerians believed that corruption had increased in the past year. Reports have indicated significant corruption in the oil sector, with billions of dollars in revenue losses due to illicit activities (Nwonwu, Mwai, & Igonikon, 2023). The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has often been highlighted for lacking transparency. Corruption in the healthcare sector has led to the diversion of funds meant for public health services, impacting service delivery and outcomes. Bribery and embezzlement in the education sector have affected the quality of education and access to resources.



Several high-profile corruption cases were pursued, involving former governors, ministers, and other top officials. While some led to convictions, others were stalled or resulted in acquittals, often leading to public dissatisfaction with the anti-corruption efforts. Here are a few notable examples (Ibeogu, 2019):

1. Diezani Alison-Madueke: Former Minister of Petroleum Resources, accused of embezzling billions of dollars from the Nigerian oil sector, including alleged diversion of \$2.5 billion from the state oil company, NNPC (Iweala, 2022). She has been under investigation by the EFCC and other international agencies. Properties and assets worth millions of dollars have been seized. She currently faces charges in Nigeria and is also being investigated in the UK (Iweala, 2022).

2. Abdulrasheed Maina: Former Chairman of the Pension Reform Task Team, accused of embezzling over ₦2 billion in pension funds. He was arrested and faced charges of money laundering and fraud. In 2021, Maina was sentenced to 8 years in prison for money laundering (Iweala, 2022).

3. Sambo Dasuki: Former National Security Adviser, was implicated in the misappropriation of \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement to fight Boko Haram insurgency. He was arrested in 2015 and spent several years in detention. In 2019, he was released on bail, and his trial is ongoing (Iweala, 2022).

4. Orji Uzor Kalu: Former Governor of Abia State. Kalu was accused of embezzling ₦7.65 billion of state funds. He was convicted in 2019 and sentenced to 12 years in prison, but

the Supreme Court later ordered a retrial (Iweala, 2022).

These statistics and reports illustrate the deep-rooted nature of corruption in Nigeria and the ongoing challenges in addressing it. While there have been efforts to combat corruption, significant improvements are needed to enhance transparency, accountability, and governance in the country. Nigeria has witnessed numerous high-profile corruption cases involving prominent political figures and public officials.

### **Conclusion**

Good governance is characterized by quality leadership, transparency, and accountability. For there to be good governance, the electoral process must be transparent and accountable. INEC's efforts to publish election results promptly and make electoral processes open to observers are steps toward enhancing transparency. Good governance requires political leaders who are committed to democratic principles. INEC's role is facilitated or hindered by the political environment. When political leaders respect the electoral process and outcomes, it strengthens democracy. Conversely, political interference erodes INEC's effectiveness and the overall governance structure.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for Independent National Electoral Commission to conduct free and fair elections in order to enhance quality leadership in Nigeria. Emergence of quality



leaders that will promote good governance in Nigeria requires INEC performing its duties of overseeing free, fair and credible elections.

2. There is urgent need for Independent National Electoral Commission be free and fair in order to promote transparency in governance in Nigeria. Ensuring that the people vote out leaders who are not people oriented through free and fair election will

hold leaders to be transparent in governance.

3. There is need for Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure leaders are elected by the people to ensure accountability in governance in Nigeria. Ensuring that corrupt leaders are voted out of office through free, fair and credible electoral process is the responsibility of INEC.

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