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RELEVANCE OF SYSTEM THEORY TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS: AN EXAMINATION OF INEC'S ELECTION DAY MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relevance of Systems Theory to political analysis, using the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Election Day management in Nigeria as a focal point. The study argues that political institutions, like all systems, comprise interdependent components that must function cohesively to achieve stability, coordination, and legitimacy. INEC's Election Day operations including logistics, voter accreditation, and communication flow, security coordination, and result transmission represent subsystems whose interactions determine the overall success of electoral processes. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data, reports, and institutional frameworks, the study explores how feedback mechanisms, input-output processes, and systemic adaptation influence INEC's performance during general elections. Findings reveal that system breakdowns, such as logistical inefficiencies and weak coordination among electoral stakeholders, often result in electoral tensions, voter disenchantment, and legitimacy crises. The study concludes that applying Systems Theory to electoral management provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of political institutions in Nigeria. It recommends a more integrated approach to election administration that enhances institutional synergy, responsiveness, and systemic stability.

Keywords: Systems Theory, Political Analysis, Election Management, INEC, Nigeria, Governance, Institutional Coordination

Introduction

The study of political systems has long benefited from theoretical models that explain the complex interactions between institutions, actors, and processes within a given polity. Among these frameworks, Systems Theory, as developed by David Easton and other scholars, offers a useful analytical tool for examining how political structures convert societal demands into authoritative decisions through systematic processes of input, conversion, output, and feedback. In the context of developing democracies such as Nigeria, Systems Theory provides valuable insights into the functional relationships among political institutions, particularly in managing electoral processes.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria's electoral management body, serves as a crucial subsystem within the broader political system. Its responsibility for conducting credible elections determines, to a large extent, the legitimacy and stability of the Nigerian state. Election day management represents a critical phase in this process, as it encompasses the deployment of personnel and materials, coordination of security agencies, communication with stakeholders, and transmission of results. The success or failure of these operations reflects the level of systemic coherence within the electoral framework.

Over the years, Nigeria's elections have been marred by challenges such as logistical breakdowns, poor inter-agency coordination, inadequate communication flow, and technological disruptions—especially concerning the use of electronic devices like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). These issues often expose weaknesses in the systemic interaction among the various components of election management. Understanding these problems through the lens of Systems Theory enables scholars and policymakers to identify points of dysfunction, assess institutional responsiveness, and propose reforms that strengthen the electoral system as a whole.

This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the relevance of Systems Theory in political analysis, using INEC's Election Day management as a case study. It aims to demonstrate how Systems Theory can illuminate the complex dynamics that underpin electoral governance in Nigeria. The study further emphasizes that effective election management requires not only technical competence but also systemic integration—where feedback mechanisms, adaptive processes, and coordination among subsystems work harmoniously to sustain democratic stability.

One core area of legitimizing elections is the issue of credibility and fairness, for any democratic election to possess these characteristics, there has to be a standing institution to adjudicate and mediate between or among the competing parties. The prerequisite of representative democracies is a process of elections that is competitive but fair. This is the role of electoral institutions which determine how elections are fought, how the act of voting, generation of results in the election of political representatives and the determination of which political leader (in a presidential system), or party or set of parties (in a parliamentary system), is to form the executive leadership for the next few years (Carter and Farrell, 2009). The importance of electoral umpires is very significant if the tenet of democracy would be upheld whereas their job is very sensitive and evolving in the contemporary time.

Systems theory can help appreciate how Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) managed Election Day only to grapple with the country's perennial electoral challenges. Nigeria has continued to hold elections since the fall of the first republic in 1960, almost all of which possessed some form of irregularity. The credibility of the electoral process has been undermined by instances of electoral fraud, rigging, result manipulation, violence and whatever malpractices there may be. These issues occur at various stages of the electoral process and highlight the weaknesses in the country's election management system.

The credibility and fairness of elections underpin the very legitimacy of democratic governance. Electoral institutions influence the nature of elections and also maintain democracy (Carter & Farrell 2009). Bratton (1998) contended that elections including its organization and management signals whether the basic constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal foundations necessary for a genuine democracy is being laid or not. The implication of this, according to him, is that, there can be elections without democracy, but there cannot be democracy without elections

To understand how Election Day management components can either bolster or erode electoral integrity, one can consider using System theory. Democracy needs competitive elections that are free, held by an impartial office capable of mediating between the parties to gain legitimacy. Organizing elections, administering the voting process, declaring election results and determining who will provide political and electoral governance all play a vital role in how INEC as an electoral umpire, shapes and influences elections. Elections are not only

meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the leaders through a regular consent of the people, but also provide a fertile ground for liberal democracy to thrive and be consolidated (Luqman, 2009).

Political scientists see themselves engaged in revealing the relationships underlying political events and conditions, and from these revelations they attempt to construct general principles about the way the world of politics works. Political Science inquiry today is influenced by the theories that have been developed and presented over several centuries. It is worthwhile on this note express the importance of applying System theory.

In this paper, System theory was discussed in details for proper context and used as a tool to assess the components associated with Election Day management in Nigeria, simplifying the process while outlining its relevance.

Literature review

Election management in Nigeria

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria mandates the INEC to organize elections into executive and legislative offices at the federal and state levels; to register, monitor and regulate political party operations, monitor party finances and campaigns; to create and maintain a register of qualified voters; to delimit constituencies for representation; to delegate its powers to Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) and to carry out other functions conferred on it by an Act of the National Assembly. The Electoral Act (2010) adds the conduct of voter education and the prosecution of electoral offenders to the INEC's responsibilities. Therefore, one of the indispensable features of democratic system in any society is the existence of election management body, herein referred to as "INEC". While the stability of democracy determines the stability of election management body, the transparency and fairness of the body determines the stability of a state as well as the legitimacy of a government.

Adetula (2007) argued that there exists a direct relationship between political instability and unstable election management system and this relationship is mutually reinforcing. Nigeria has experienced several dissolutions and reconstitution of election management bodies as a result of military incessant incursion in the politics of Nigeria. Election management body not only ensure that elections are organized and managed efficiently, but also promote fairness, openness and transparency and hence contribute to the legitimacy of democracy as well as the enhancement of the rule of law. Election management body plays prominent role in the

process of democratic designs and consolidation in third wave democracies (Carter and Farrell, 2009).

Election administration as Jinadu notes entails the organization and conduct of elections to elective (political) public office by an electoral body (Jinadu, 2007). This definition Jinadu aptly notes subsumes both structure and processes. By structure is meant the bureaucracy that is set up or established to organize and conduct elections which is usually an electoral body like INEC. It should be noted however, that apart from this specific bureaucracy whose primary function is the administration of elections, there are agencies or institutions like the police, security agencies and civil society organizations (CSO's) whose support and cooperation through the provision of logistical support is vital to the operation of the electoral body. By process however, is meant the rules, procedure and activities relating to among others: the establishment of electoral bodies, the appointment of their members, selection and training of electoral officials, constituency delimitation, voter education, registration of political parties, registration of voters, the nomination of candidates, balloting, counting of the ballots, declaration of results, and in some cases supervision of party nomination congresses (Jinadu, 2007).

In another submission, election administration is defined as the management; and process of organization of all stages of an electoral cycle (i.e. the pre-election, election and the post-election stages) by an electoral body (Ajayi, 2009). In spite of the fact that the foregoing definitions of election administration suggest the existence of an independent electoral body upon which the administration of elections is incumbent, it should be noted that experience in some countries across the globe indicate that election administration is not necessarily incumbent on an independent body.

The importance of election administration relates to wider set of activities that borders on institutional framework in which voting and competition take place. Election administration is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional responsibilities, involving application of electoral rules and resolving electoral disputes. It involves the interaction of constitutional and institutional rules that determine the electoral procedures and pattern of competition, campaigns, voter registration, counting of votes and declaration of results. In these processes, (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006) submitted that the interplay of power structures and processes are central to the outcomes. The most important among these relates to the election management body and other institutional political framework which include political parties, mass media, and the courts of law. This further depends on the level of interaction among them and the level of institutionalization (Pastor, 1999).

These institutions are very important for effective and efficient election organization and management because the possibility of elections or electoral processes leading to transition or alternation of power is a function of an unbiased, impartial and independent election commission (Jinadu, 1997).

However, effective election organization and management alone does not guarantee good elections, but there are other dependent factors or variables which include: social, economic and political variables. These variables do intervene to play an important role in influencing the process, integrity, and outcome of elections. Notwithstanding; effective, efficient and good elections are not possible without effective election administration (Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002). It is however, for this reason that focus on recent research on electoral studies and democratization have shifted toward election administration with election management bodies as the focus. On these studies, evidence have shown that election management bodies are pivotal to overall quality of elections, perceptions of credibility and legitimacy.

What Happens on Election Day?

According to the (INEC, 2024) official website; the following statements are summarized as the Election Day Management guide;

- Polling Hours
- Polling units open for accreditation and voting from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Voters in the queue by 2:00 PM will still be allowed to vote. Voting is only permitted at the polling unit where a voter registered and got accredited.

Eligibility Criteria: To vote, one must:

- Be a Nigerian citizen, at least 18 years old, with a Permanent Voter Card (PVC).
- Be listed in the Register of Voters at their assigned polling unit.

Accreditation Procedure

- Join the queue; separate queues may be created for men and women.
- Present your PVC for verification using the card reader.
- Upon authentication, officials check your name on the Register of Voters, mark it, apply indelible ink to your finger, and issue an accreditation tag.

Voting Procedure

- Join the queue and verify your PVC and registration.

- Receive a stamped and endorsed ballot paper.
- Mark your preferred candidate/party in secret, roll the ballot paper, and drop it in the ballot box.
- Leave the polling unit or stay peacefully to observe results.

Election Day Offenses

Prohibited actions include:

- Campaigning or persuading voters.
- Carrying weapons, wearing party symbols to intimidate voters, or causing disturbances.
- Snatching election materials or loitering after voting.
- Using phones in the polling booth.

Reporting Election Offenses

- Report offenses like vote buying to the INEC Situation Room or via the INEC App.

Rights of a Voter

- Right to register, vote, and be voted for.
- Right to secrecy and privacy when voting.
- Right to attend rallies and receive election information.
- Right to recall an elected representative if necessary.

Responsibilities of a Voter

- Register and verify their name on the Register of Voters.
- Vote peacefully and in accordance with electoral laws.
- Keep the PVC safe and undamaged.
- Encourage others to participate in the election process.

This guide outlines the essential steps, rights, and responsibilities to ensure free and fair elections.

Key Actors on Election Day

- Election Day in Nigeria involves several key actors whose roles and responsibilities ensure the smooth conduct of the electoral process. Below are a list of these actors and the roles they play;
- Officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

To manage the voting process at polling units are called Presiding Officers (POs) and Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs). They manage the accreditation of voters, issue ballots and supervise the counting of votes and transmission of results.

- Per election rules, results are declared by Returning Officers, who supervise collation at different levels.
- Apart from the provision of election materials, training of personnel and enforcement the Electoral Act are responsibilities that is guaranteed to INEC.

Political Party Agents

- Represent their parties at polling stations to observe proceedings and ensure fairness.
- Monitor voter accreditation, ballot counting, and collation of results. They may challenge irregularities and certify the results by signing official forms.
- Their presence deters malpractice and enhances transparency

Security Agencies

- Include the police, military, and civil defense corps, tasked with maintaining law and order.
- They protect polling units, election materials, and officials while ensuring voters' safety. Security forces also address any violence or attempts to disrupt the process

Observers (Domestic and International)

- Domestic groups like the **Situation Room** and international organizations like the EU monitor the process for compliance with democratic standards.
- They provide impartial reports and recommendations on the election's conduct and credibility

The Judiciary

- Plays a critical role post-election by resolving disputes and petitions. Their impartiality is vital for upholding the rule of law and ensuring fairness in adjudication

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- These groups advocate for fair practices, monitor the electoral process, and provide voter education.
- They also support reform initiatives to strengthen electoral systems and governance

The Media

- Provides real-time updates and analysis to inform the public about election activities.
- Acts as a watchdog by reporting irregularities and promoting accountability

Electorate

- Voters are central to the process, casting their ballots to elect leaders. Their participation is facilitated by proper identification and adherence to voting procedures.

Political Candidates

- Alongside their party agents, candidates ensure their campaigns comply with regulations and that their supporters behave lawfully during the elections.
- The roles of these actors collectively determine the integrity and success of the electoral process in Nigeria.

This paper seeks to understand through System theory, how these roles and agents affect the outcomes of election and Election Day. How they have impacted the evolution of elections in Nigeria.

Concept of Theory and Political Theory

It is commonly agreed that theory attempts to provide explanations to phenomena. According to (Vogt, 2005), Theory is defined as a statement or group of statements that clarify the mechanics of the world around us and frequently explains relations among phenomena. In the view of (Gelso, 2006), Theory constitutes the core body for analysis, assists in a resourceful development of the field, and is a necessity in applying real world problems. As stated by Heinen (1985), theory is a group of rationally arranged laws or relationships that define a discipline, and seeks to clarify a problem, describe revolutionary elements of a phenomenon, or provide predictive utility in a systematic way (Stam, 2007).

The Oxford English Dictionary states a theory as "a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something". Three words are of particular interest here. First, the definition is clear that a theory is an explanation; theories offer or provide accounts of how and why things are as they are. Second, they "intend" to explain. This implies that they may not which is a useful caveat. Third, "something" implies phenomena separate to and independent of the theory. As the Oxford English Dictionary definition goes on to state, "especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained". This suggests that a theory explains not just a, or the, particular instance of something but all and any instances. So, implicit in this part of the definition is a proposition that a theory, if it is valid and is to have value, provides an explanation with general and perhaps universal application. This clearly associates the notion of theory with "scientism" (Warburton, 2004) and so with scientific principles and practices.

In summary, the concept of theory is inextricably connected to notions of science that, in origin at least,

refers to investigating the world according to a set of rules and principles. In very simple terms, a theory attempts to explain phenomena based on systematic observation in a way that can be tested and corrected.

On the other hand, Political theory can be defined as the discipline which aims to explain, justify or criticize the disposition of power in society. It delineates the balance of power between states, groups and individuals. (Held, 1996) Opines that political theory is a "...network of concepts and generalizations about political life involving ideas, assumptions and statements about the nature, purpose and key features of government, state and society, and about the political capabilities of human beings." According to (Coker, 1934), "...a branch of political science concerned chiefly with the ideas of past and present political thinkers and the doctrines and proposals of political movements and group discussion of the proper scope of governmental action ... has usually been regarded as a proper part of political theory." Among the various sub-fields of political science, political theory is regarded as the hardcore of the discipline. From the beginning, political theory referred to a subject matter that included ideas about politics, ideas in politics and the study of those ideas (Barry, 1995).

It is the desire to properly understand government as a group of entities and how they relate which leads our focus to Systems Theory. Many perceive this theory as a comprehensive framework for understanding how political systems function, how different political entities (such as government institutions, political parties, or interest groups) interact, and how these interactions can affect the overall stability, functioning, and evolution of political systems. Hopefully, further investigation into this subject will elucidate our understanding.

System Theory

The key figure in mid-twentieth century systems theory is Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist and philosopher who starting in the 1920s advocated an organismic conception of biology in opposition to the "mechanistic, one-way causal paradigm of classical science." Situated in the problem context of theoretical biology, Bertalanffy developed the distinctions and vocabulary used in systems theory and beyond to this day: distinctions between closed and open systems, between causality and functional complexity, and a generalized concept of entropy (Müller, 1996).

With a background in biology, systems theory developed in the 1950s against the backdrop of a need to have a set of systematical theoretical constructs to discuss the empirical world (Boulding, 1956). "General systems theory is the skeleton of science in the sense that it aims to provide a framework or structure of systems on which

to hang the flesh and blood of particular disciplines and particular subject matters in an orderly and coherent corpus of knowledge" (Boulding, 1956).

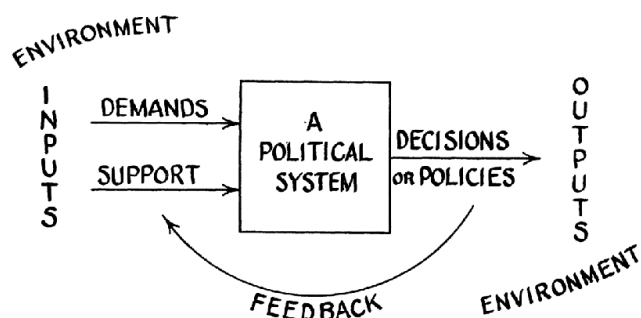
Another origin of systems theory came from cybernetic systems theory in mechanical engineering (Ashby, 1954). The term cybernetics refers to control and communication in the machine system (Almaney, 1974). Similar to general systems theory, the concepts of cybernetic systems theory were found useful in explaining the behaviors of social systems extended from machine systems. Specifically, cybernetic systems rely on different feedback or control mechanisms to help the system maintain a stable state. For example, if an organization's marketing strategy fails to increase the sales record, the feedback from the consumers and the market will force the organization to change its strategy in order to survive and maintain its desired goal of keeping up its sales performance. The disruptions or variations in the environment will thus force the system to respond and adjust in order to maintain this state of equilibrium.

The third source of systems theory in organizational communication research is structural functionalism (Parsons, 1951). It emphasizes the functions fulfilled by system components as the system responds to environmental demands. The four functions of actions, including adaptation, goal attainment, pattern maintenance, and integration, are necessary to maintain a system's existence and effectiveness, as well as the system's goal of seeking equilibrium. Specifically, adaptation involves system components' open exchanges with the environment in order to acquire resources to maintain the development of the system. Goal attainment concerns the use of resources to accomplish goals with regard to other systems in the environment. Pattern maintenance and integration focus on the development and maintenance of a system's symbolic frames of reference and use of resources for internal coordination.

Due to its congregation of origins from multiple disciplines (engineering, mathematics, biology, physics, economics, and political science), the principles and constructs of systems theory are meant to be applicable to organisms and human behaviors in different disciplines. It is on this note that (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972), described Systems theory as a macro-level theory, that can be used to understand biological, physical, and social systems. The General System Theory was expected to provide the social scientists, a common set of principles transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, a format for the organization and synthesis of highly divergent material and a set of directions about potentially fruitful and heuristic investigations.

David Easton was the first to think of analyzing politics from the point of view of systems analysis which he presented in his work, Political System (1953). According to Easton, "Political System is that system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented". System analysis conceives politics in terms of the political system. Easton has selected the political system as the basic unit of political analysis and concentrated on the intra-system behaviour of various systems. He says that outside the political system, there are other systems (physical, biological, social psychological) for instance. Political system is distinguished from the other systems by the authoritative allocation of values made by the former which broadly constitutes the political process (Easton, 1953).

Easton holds that all political systems are both open and adaptive. He concentrated on the study of the nature of the exchanges and transactions that take place in a close circuit but is made because of the "demands" from the society or "environment". Because of the "supports" from the environment, they become "authoritative" (Easton, 1953). The political system according to Easton, receives inputs from the environment in the form of demands and supports; it produces outputs in the form of policies and decisions. The outputs flow back into the environment through a feedback mechanism, giving rise to fresh demands. In this direction, it represents a flow model of political system. This is because in every political system, a cyclic process is going on. First of all, there is a political system which is created in which demands are made as input. With its regulatory mechanism, the system allows only a limited number of demands; and actions are taken by the authorities which are transformed to the society in the form of output. The outputs are responded by the society that is communicated back to the authorities to enable them to take further actions in the matter. Thus, every output is a feedback for the authorities for subsequent actions. Input-Output is a continuous process. See the diagram below as a graphic illustration;



The image above describes the system theory according to David Easton, showing how the demands and support

get into the Political System (Black box). Most times, activities within the Political System is not available to the public. The result of demands and support are decisions and policies which in turn can create more demands and support hence the presence of the feedback feature highlighting the presence of a ripple effect in the Systems theory.

Merits of System Theory

The greatest usefulness of the system theory lies in its comprehensiveness. Systems theory adopts macro-approach to the study of political life and therefore studies the entire system as its unit of analysis as opposed to micro-approaches which study behaving individual. It is therefore viewed by some as an advancement upon earlier traditional, descriptive and institutional, and legal-formalistic orientations.

Unlike the allocative theories which are mostly status-quo biased, and which fail to take cognizance of conditions under which allocations actually take place, thus creating the impression that the "political pie" to be allocated must always remain same, the systems theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how the "pie" itself comes into existence, how and why it gets cut up in one way rather than another. It therefore "prompts the asking of new questions and the adoption of different perspective towards an old subject" (Lieber, 1972).

The Systems theory is particularly commendable because of its dynamic nature. It enables an interpretation of political life as a dynamic system of behavior (as a process or an interacting set) capable of converting inputs into outputs. The salient point here is that the political system does some work which could be identified as outputs and the system theory signalizes the dynamic of the system showing the kind of work it does; Note the feedback process, etc.

Whereas partial theories of political allocation take persistence of the political system for granted and therefore concern themselves with structures or practices by which laws are made and implemented, in counter-distinction, the System theory is preoccupied with problems of system, problems of persistence, transformation and change. How systems manage to cope with disturbances and how they manage to survive either in stable, stressful or changing environments while trying to allocate values authoritatively for society.

Limitations of the System Theory

Perhaps, the greatest weakness of the Systems theory identified by (Birch, 1993), is its democratic bias, which fails to explain what happens in dictatorial or autocratic systems. The arrows Easton's flow model point only in one direction, from the public which articulates public

demands and guarantees support to the decision makers, meanwhile, in practice, a great number of policy changes originates within “the bureaucracy” and are appropriately called “withinputs” as distinct from “inputs” which originates from environment.

Another limitation of the System theory is that it has no logical place for political authority. It may appear alright to say that decision making within the “black box” (the political system) results in what Easton calls “authoritative allocation of values for society”. Yet, a question emerges, what makes such allocation authoritative? (Birch, 1993) reveals, “there is no place in this model for the Crown, as the source of authority in Britain and other monarchies, or for the Constitution as the source of authority in the United States and some other republics”.

In the view of (Oran, 1968), the system framework de-emphasizes questions of power and influence in an effort to emphasize systemic processes and functions. By overlooking goals and their formulation, the framework omits a great deal which constitutes the essence of the stuff of politics. It therefore distorts reality in the interest of conceptual neatness. Moreover, the approach is not suitable for the study of political institutions and political culture, nor does it give scope to historical and ideological factors.

Nexus between System Theory and Election Management

The systems theory of political science, as developed by thinkers like David Easton, views politics as an interconnected system where various inputs (such as demands and supports) are processed by political institutions to produce outputs (policies and decisions). Feedback mechanisms then allow the system to adjust and respond to societal needs and changes.

In the context of Election Day management in Nigeria, the systems theory can be applied as follows:

Inputs:

- **Demands:** Citizens' expectations for free, fair, and credible elections; calls for transparency and accountability in electoral processes.
- **Supports:** Voter participation, funding for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and international or local monitoring groups.

Processing:

- The electoral management body (INEC) acts as the system's processing mechanism. It organizes the logistics of elections, trains staff, deploys

technology like BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System), and sets up polling units.

- The laws, regulations, and frameworks for elections (e.g., Nigeria's Electoral Act) shape how the process operates.

Outputs:

- The successful conduct of elections, including accurate vote counting and declaration of winners.
- Provision of credible and timely election results.

Feedback:

- Post-election reports from observers, complaints, and court cases serve as feedback to improve future elections.
- Public satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the process influences future political participation and trust in the system.

Specific Connections:

- **Interdependence:** Election Day management requires coordination among various subsystems, such as security agencies, the media, and civil society. Disruptions in one area (e.g., ballot box snatching or technical failures) can negatively impact the entire system.
- **Adaptation and Feedback Loops:** INEC uses feedback from past elections (e.g., voter disenfranchisement, logistic challenges) to adjust strategies for subsequent elections. For instance, the introduction of technology like BVAS reflects an adaptive response to earlier challenges with voter verification.
- **Stability and Resilience:** Systems theory highlights the importance of stability. In Nigeria, effective election management helps maintain political stability by ensuring legitimacy and public trust in governance.

By viewing Election Day management through the lens of systems theory, it becomes clear that a well-functioning electoral process requires the seamless integration of multiple components, all contributing to the broader goal of sustaining democracy in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

In order to evaluate Election Day Management in Nigeria, this paper applied the System theory. The foremost propound of System theory is Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist and philosopher who starting in the 1920s advocated an organismic conception of biology in opposition to the “mechanistic, one-way causal paradigm of classical science.” With a background in biology, systems theory developed in the 1950s against the backdrop of a need to have a set of systematical

theoretical constructs to discuss the empirical world (Boulding, 1956).

To further enrich this theory, David Easton was the first to think of analyzing politics from the point of view of systems analysis which he presented in his work, *Political System* (1953). According to Easton, "Political System is that system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented". System analysis conceives politics in terms of the political system. Easton has selected the political system as the basic unit of political analysis and concentrated on the intra-system behaviour of various systems. He says that outside the political system, there are other systems (physical, biological, social psychological) for instance. Political system is distinguished from the other systems by the authoritative allocation of values made by the former which broadly constitutes the political process (Easton, 1953).

According to Easton, a political system is a complicated cyclical activity in which a group of procedures routinely convert inputs into outputs. In a political system, authorities establish public policies, according to Easton. Decision-making and policy-making are inextricably linked. However, not every choice constitutes a policy. Decision-making is identifying a problem, carefully analysing potential solutions, and selecting one option for action. Policy decisions offer a feeling of direction for administrative actions.

In general, systems theory focuses on three levels of observations: the environment, the social organization as a system, and human participants within the organization. This multi-level focus can be traced back to the original pursuit of initiating dialogue among disciplines through systems theory. It is argued that this pursuit can be accomplished through different ways. One of them is to find general phenomena that are observable across many disciplines. For instance, it is common to find in any social systems where aggregations of individuals interact with one another and with the environment and develop interdependent relationships. The biological notions of population change and individuals' interaction with the environment can apply to human organizations. Populations refer to the aggregates of individuals defined by common attributes and experiencing dynamic growth and declines of individual components. Each population exhibits dynamic patterns of its own and engages in dynamic interactions with other populations.

Methodology

Qualitative research is a systematic approach aimed at exploring and understanding social phenomena through detailed, in-depth inquiry. To examine the outlined concepts of election management in Nigeria, qualitative

methodology provides a robust framework for acquiring data.

Data were obtained mainly from secondary sources. These include online publications, articles from reputable journals, internet materials and relevant textbooks.

This approach was adopted because of the Rich Contextual Insights it offer which enables understanding of the lived experiences of participants, reflecting the socio-political realities of elections in Nigeria. The need for Flexibility which accommodates dynamic and complex phenomena, such as electoral challenges was also a defining factor for this decision. Conclusively, it ensures Theory-Building by supporting the development of context-specific frameworks linking system theory and election management.

Conclusion

In the Nigerian context, systemic challenges such as electoral fraud, violence, and irregularities have historically undermined electoral integrity. However, applying systems theory provides a valuable lens for analyzing the interdependence and dynamics within the election management process, particularly the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). By focusing on the processes and components of Election Day management, systems theory offers insights into strengthening electoral institutions, enhancing credibility, and consolidating democratic principles. Ultimately, free and competitive elections, facilitated by robust institutional frameworks, remain indispensable for the growth and sustainability of democracy in Nigeria.

Effective election administration involves managing the entire electoral cycle (pre-election, election, and post-election stages) and depends on a collaborative effort with institutions like security agencies, civil society organizations, and the judiciary. However, factors such as political instability, social and economic conditions, and power structures significantly influence the integrity and outcomes of elections. Research emphasizes that well-structured, impartial election management bodies are central to the credibility of elections and the consolidation of democracy.

Applying systems theory to Election Day management in Nigeria underscores the importance of an interconnected and adaptive approach to electoral processes. The theory highlights the role of inputs (citizen demands and institutional support), processing (INEC's logistical and regulatory functions), outputs (credible elections and results), and feedback (observer reports and public reactions) in ensuring electoral integrity. Effective coordination among various subsystems and continuous adaptation to challenges are crucial for maintaining

stability, legitimacy, and public trust in Nigeria's democracy. However, persistent issues like technical failures, security challenges, and voter disenfranchisement indicate gaps in the system that require urgent attention.

To improve Election Day management in Nigeria, it is essential to enhance coordination among subsystems by fostering collaboration with security agencies, civil society organizations, and the media to minimize disruptions such as violence or logistical failures. Investing in electoral technology, such as refining tools like BVAS, will enhance transparency and reduce fraud, while regular testing and updates can prevent technical failures. Increasing voter education through extensive campaigns will raise awareness about electoral processes, technology, and the importance of participation, thereby boosting public trust and engagement. Adequate funding and support for INEC are critical, including sufficient resources for personnel training, infrastructure, and operational effectiveness. Accountability must be fostered through transparent prosecution of electoral offenses, ensuring adherence to established rules. Encouraging international and local monitoring will enhance the credibility of elections by providing unbiased assessments, while promoting inclusivity by addressing barriers to participation will ensure that elections reflect the will of all citizens, particularly marginalized groups.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can strengthen its electoral system, enhance public trust, and further consolidate its democratic processes.

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