

Electoral Integrity and Voter Turnout in Nigeria's 2025 Bye-Elections: Evidence from 12 States

¹Zekeri Sunday, ²Abubakar Isah, ³Abdul Yahaya &
⁴Jaiyegun Folusho Elizabeth

¹Department of Public Administration, School of Management Sciences, Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja

^{2&4}Registry Department, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja PMB 1101

³Department of Political Science, Prince Abukakar Audu University, Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/djiap eh.v2.i1.05

Abstract

This study examines the conduct, credibility, and transparency of Nigeria's 2025 bye-elections, which involved 3,553,659 registered voters across 6,987 polling units in twelve states. It assesses electoral logistics, voter turnout, process credibility, and political party performance. Employing a mixed-methods observer framework, the study integrates field reports, collated data from the Independent National Electoral Commission's Result Viewing (IReV) portal, and secondary analysis of media and civil society documentation. Anchored in theories of democratic consolidation and electoral integrity, the study evaluates how technological transparency tools are mediated by persistent structural challenges, including vote-buying, electoral violence, and voter apathy. Findings shows that voter turnout remained traditionally low at 12–15%, with the exception of contest-driven hotspots such as Okura in Kogi State, where results were viewed with suspicion. IReV upload compliance demonstrated significant disparity: states including Anambra, Oyo, and Kaduna achieved 95–100% transmission, while Kano, Zamfara, and Enugu lagged considerably. Party performance revealed regional consolidation, with the All Progressives Congress (APC) maintaining strength in the North-West and North-Central, the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) dominating Anambra, and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) retaining localized influence in Kano. The 2025 bye-elections underscore the necessity of electoral reforms, particularly in enforcing uniform IReV compliance, combating vote-buying, and addressing chronic voter apathy. This paper contributes to election studies by framing the 2025 bye-elections as a "microcosm" of Nigeria's electoral future, offering comparative insights into turnout patterns, technological transparency, and party resilience in the lead-up to the 2027 general elections.

Keywords: Nigeria, Bye-elections, Voter turnout, Electoral integrity, IReV, Democratic consolidation

Corresponding Author: Zekeri Sunday

Journal URL:

<https://internationalpolicybrief.org/development-journal-of-international-affairs-political-economy-and-humanities-volume-2-number-1/>

Background to the Study

Elections go by the name of being the quintessential part of democratic governance; through them, citizens vest legitimacy in their leaders and hold political institutions responsible. In Nigeria, Africa's largest democracy, the stakes are tremendously high in ensuring a level of performance at the polls, depending on its size, variety, and dealings under authoritarian rule. Much scholarly and policy attention has been paid to general elections, which are characterised by heightened levels of active mobilisation, coverage by the mass media, and international observation. The intricate dynamics of Nigerian democracy become significantly more pronounced during bye-elections, which are conducted to address vacancies arising from death, resignation, or annulment. The Independent National Electoral Commission has diligently worked to enhance transparency and foster trust in the electoral process by implementing institutional reforms and embracing digital innovations. One such development introduced in 2020 was the use of IReV, the INEC Results Viewing Portal, to provide live upload and public access to polling unit results. Despite great acclaim as a novel tool for transparency, however, its actual application has been patchy, with much debate over whether it has really combated fraud and augmented legitimacy; therefore, the bye-elections in 2025 would be an important real test for the robustness of IReV.

Inversely, Nigeria still struggles with traditional features of electoral politics with low voter turnout. Although more than 90 million are registered voters, the turnout has obviously been quite low: in recent elections, it has been between 25 and 40 per cent, well below average in the African context. The 2025 bye-elections, being conducted in an array of constituencies including Anambra, Yobe, Kogi, and Oyo, provide a window into unravelling both structural and behavioural underpinnings of this disengagement: Why do Nigerians keep refraining from voting? What does this say about the health of democratic participation and trust in governance institutions? One focal aspect that makes the 2025 bye-elections stand out is that of party performances. Having been consolidated since 2015, the ruling APC's hegemony at the federal level is neither monolithic nor uncontested; henceforth, regional parties like APGA from the South-East and the NNPP from Kano state still matter for the multiparty system in Nigeria. Delving into how parties fared in localised contests gives clues as to whether party pluralism can resist the consolidation by the ruling party.

This underscores the significance of the 2025 bye-elections as a pivotal point in Nigeria's democratic evolution. This paper endeavours to illuminate the persistent challenges encountered within electoral democracy by examining voter turnout, IReV completion rates, and party performances, while also identifying potential avenues for institutional and civic revitalisation. The findings of this study will be situated within the larger theoretical discussions surrounding democratic consolidation, electoral legitimacy, and the performance of institutions in transitional societies. Prior to the general elections anticipated in 2027, the bye-elections of 2025 in Nigeria presented a significant opportunity to evaluate the robustness of the nation's electoral framework. The elections, occurring in 12 states, encompassed a total of 32 Local Government Areas (LGAs), 356 Registration Areas (RAs), and 6,987 polling units (PUs), with an aggregate of 3,553,659 registered voters. The report

elucidates the findings of the election observation, grounded in meticulous field observations, comprehensive data analysis, and thoughtful stakeholder engagements. The evaluation includes aspects such as voter participation, the integrity of the electoral process, advancements in technology (particularly INEC's Result Viewing Portal, IReV), the performance of political parties, and the potential consequences for the democratic path of Nigeria.

The document commences by delineating bye-elections within the electoral narrative of Nigeria and its progression towards the consolidation of democracy. It subsequently delineates the rationale for choosing turnout, transparency, and party competition as the central variables for examination. Then stands the outline of the paper: a review of key literature, a description of the methodology, presentation of findings supported by tables and figures, interpretive analysis, and finally a conclusion opening to avenues for reforms. Doing this, the paper makes a twofold contribution: firstly, in empirical terms, it provides one of the first systematic accounts of the 2025 bye-elections, an episode which, though limited in its total scale, holds critical lessons for Nigeria's democratic performance; secondly, at the theoretical level, by integrating the African election scholarship with broader debates about participation and transparency in transitional democracies. In the end, the paper argues that bye-elections, rather than being peripheral contests, serve as crucial windows into the resilience and vulnerabilities of democratic institutions in Nigeria.

Conceptual Issues

Electoral democracy in Africa, particularly Nigeria, offers a wide but contested domain whereby issues such as voter turnout, electoral technology, party competition, and democratic consolidation can be addressed. This section places the present study in the context of four major strands of scholarship, each of which sheds important light on the dynamics of the 2025 bye-elections: (1) analyses of voter participation and turnout, (2) reviews of electoral technology and transparency reforms, (3) studies of party performance and competition, and (4) theoretical debates of democratic consolidation in transitional societies. Together, they provide the conceptual and empirical underpinnings on which this study rests.

Voter Turnout in Nigeria and Africa

Since the return to civilian governance in 1999, Nigerian elections have exhibited poor voter turnout. In 1999, estimates placed voter turnout at 52%, but by 2019, it had dwindled to 34%—one of the poorest rates in the world for a democracy of this magnitude (Adebayo, 2020; Omotola & Olaniyan, 2021). Multiple reasons have emerged from scholars explaining this phenomenon. Some view it as a lack of voter enthusiasm suggested by perceived corruption, electoral malpractice, and weak governance results (Ojo, 2019; Agbaje, 2020). Others highlight structural hindrances such as inefficiencies in logistics, insecurity in some parts of the country, and socio-economic exclusion, particularly of women and youth (Okoye, 2018; Eze & Nwagwu, 2022). Comparative literature from other African democracies strengthens Nigeria's experience. A steady turnout decline has been recorded in South Africa

since its democratic transition in 1994, as citizens have grown disillusioned by the ruling African National Congress (Mattes, 2021). In Kenya and Ghana, too, ethnicity and regional identities, as well as citizen trust in institutions, have shaped turnout patterns (Gyimah-Boadi, 2017; Cheeseman, 2018). These studies point to the understanding that turnout is not merely an outcome of electoral mechanics but a reflection of many socio-political terrains, including election credibility, incumbent performance, and voting efficacy as a mechanism for change.

In Nigeria, some studies have looked into by-election turnout, recording that in general, by-elections attract lower participation than would usually be the case in general elections – the reason assigned being that such elections are small-scale with very limited media coverage (Ojebode & Aduloju, 2019). Still, as is argued by this paper, this low-intensity electoral process makes it a category of elections from which more fundamental views about elections can be gleaned. In cases where citizens choose to stay away, even in small-scale electoral contests, this indicates that there is a broader disengagement at play that cannot be accounted for by the very large scale of general elections.

Electoral Technology and Transparency Reforms

The introduction of electoral technology is by far one of the greatest events in Nigeria's democratic evolution within the last decade. When in 2015 INEC took the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and the Smart Card Reader (SCR) to the people, it was a watershed occasion for putting an end to multiple voting and enhancing the credibility of accreditation (Jega, 2017). This was followed, in 2020, by an attempt to further deepen transparency through the real-time uploading of results from each polling unit into the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV). Theoretically, IReV empowers citizens to supervise elections and lessen chances for manipulation at the collation stage, which has long been pointed out as a stage of electoral fraud (Omotola, 2019). Some empirical assessments, however, have presented mixed results concerning the impact of IReV. Civil society observers commended the platform during the 2020 Edo and Ondo gubernatorial elections for enabling citizens to authenticate results and independently validate electoral outcomes (Yiaga Africa, 2020). Subsequent elections encountered several discrepancies, including incomplete uploads, technical malfunctions, and delayed transmissions, which significantly impacted the platform's credibility (Ibrahim, 2021). During the 2023 general elections, there was significant public discontent due to the delayed uploading of presidential results, which raised concerns regarding the impartiality of INEC's technological advancements (Premium Times, 2023).

The extensive research regarding electoral technology in Africa highlights these tensions. Although it is widely acknowledged that digital reforms can enhance transparency and bolster citizen confidence, researchers warn against "technological determinism" (Ayee, 2019). Cheeseman and Klaas (2020) argue that electoral technology is not a panacea; its efficacy depends on political will, institutional ability, and citizens' digital competence. In a setting where ruling elites are able to exert a measure of influence from electoral bodies in their favour, technology may hence be deliberately and selectively implemented, more as a ceremonial gesture than a sincere reform attempt. This observation is important for making sense of the uneven performances of IReV in the 2025 bye-elections.

Party Competition and Performance

Nigeria's multiparty system is one of consolidation and fragmentation. On one side, one has the ruling APC and its main rival, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which have alternated in power since 1999. On the other side, regional and issue-based parties hold heavy influence on the ground, contributing to local dynamics that prevent any two-party narrative (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). APGA, for instance, has maintained influence in the South-East for long, whereas the NNPP emerged as a challenging party for the APC and PDP in the North-West, especially in Kano, during the 2023 elections. Discussions in the literature about party performance in Nigeria find themselves pitting clientelism against ideology. Some maintain that Nigerian parties are extremely weak institutionalised bodies, without ideologies and operating through patronage networks (Omobowale & Olutayo, 2007). While others strongly maintain that regional identity and historical legacies form solid and enduring foundations of party loyalties, especially in subnational contests (Nwankwo, 2015). By-elections serve as the perfect laboratory for assessing the ever-continuing contest between the forces. This is because they often take place in constituencies where the domination of the ruling party is challenged by regional actors. Research in Africa presents even broader comparisons of development, showcasing similar tendencies. In Ghana, the two major parties – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – periodically face challenges from smaller regional formations, yet the duopoly largely remains intact (Gyampo, 2016). Kenya is a more fragmented case where coalition politics and ethnic alignments are essential determinants of electoral outcomes (Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). Nigeria thus lies somewhere in the middle of the continuum of party systems, with a system dominated by national incumbents yet continuously reconfigured by regional parties resisting complete consolidation.

Democratic Consolidation in Transitional Societies

Consolidation has been defined by scholars as the process through which democracy becomes "the only game in town", a process that sees democracy entrench itself into institutions associated with citizens' attitudes and the behaviour of the elite (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Particularly in Africa, consolidation has been a hotly debated topic since many countries oscillate between democratic gains and extrusions into authoritarianism (Diamond, 2019). Nigeria's democratic process, therefore, is one of fit and struggle. For instance, the survival of competitive elections since 1999, the peaceful transfer of power in 2015, and the institutionalisation of INEC are all worthy milestones; conversely, the recrudescence of electoral malpractice, low voter turnout, election violence, and weak rule of law all point toward continuing fragility (Suberu, 2019). According to scholars like Adebani and Obadare (2013), democratic consolidation in Nigeria cannot be understood merely in terms of institutional reforms; it ought to deal with political culture, social trust, and citizen agency.

Electoral transparency mechanisms like IReV are hence situated within a broader political struggle for legitimacy. As Bratton and Van de Walle (1997) stress, the consolidation of democracy in Africa is not limited to the outcome of the formal electoral competition but rather rests on whether the citizens believe the system holds genuine accountability. Where

the voters turn away en masse, as demonstrated by persistently low turnout, all consolidation endeavours go to naught, irrespective of any institutional changes. On the other hand, if a technology or reform becomes deeply entrenched in all heightened transparency, even the smallest of improvements would translate into increased feelings of efficacy for the citizens. Together, these bodies of literature highlight key dynamics but also underline the gaps. Although voter turnout literature highlights apathy and lack of engagement, one wonders whether few have ever embarked on an exacting analysis of aggregate turnout in bye-elections where contextual factors may vary. Election technology-related research usually focuses on general elections, thereby ignoring smaller contests. Party performance analyses have also, so far, concentrated on national-level dynamics, leaving room for bye-elections to assess how strong regional actors are. Lastly, consolidation debates typically focus on the macro trajectory of Nigerian democracy rather than probing the micro-level episodes that constitute the consolidation experience. This study thus attempts to fill those gaps by turning to the 2025 bye-elections as a diagnostic tool. Together with an analysis of turnout, IReV performance, and party outcomes, it contributes toward a fine-grained insight into Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Hence, it makes good on the call to study African democracies in a bottom-up, episodic manner, treating bye-elections not as marginal events but as important sites where the health of democracy is tested and revealed.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theories, Democratic Consolidation Theory (DCT) and Electoral Integrity Theory (EIT) which together provide a robust analytical lens for examining the 2025 Nigerian bye-elections. While DCT focuses on the broader trajectory of democratic development, EIT emphasizes the procedural quality and credibility of elections. Their interdependence is critical, since consolidated democracies require elections with high integrity, and elections with integrity both strengthen and reflect democratic consolidation. Democratic Consolidation Theory, as articulated by Linz and Stepan (1996), posits that democracy becomes consolidated when its procedures and norms are accepted as “the only game in town,” meaning all political actors and citizens recognize democratic processes as the sole legitimate means of acquiring and exercising power. In Nigeria, despite uninterrupted civilian rule since 1999, consolidation remains uneven and contested. Applied to the 2025 bye-elections, DCT provides a framework for assessing key indicators of democratic health, including INEC's institutional performance, the effectiveness of electoral dispute resolution, voter turnout as a legitimacy indicator, and the persistence or reduction of electoral malpractice such as vote-buying and violence.

The theory therefore raises the question of whether the 2025 bye-elections demonstrate forward movement in Nigeria's democratic consolidation or instead reveal persistent fragility through irregularities and low participation. Electoral Integrity Theory, advanced by Norris (2014), evaluates whether elections conform to international standards of inclusivity, transparency, and fairness throughout the electoral cycle, from pre-election preparations to post-election dispute resolution. In the context of the 2025 bye-elections, EIT directs attention to the inclusiveness of voter registration and PVC collection, the conduct of election-day operations such as timely polling and impartial security presence, and the

transparency of result collation and transmission, especially given the credibility crisis caused by delayed uploads on the IReV portal in 2023. The theory thus asks to what extent the credibility of electoral processes in the 2025 bye-elections shaped voter confidence and turnout across the twelve states. Together, DCT and EIT are essential for understanding Nigeria's electoral trajectory, since democratic consolidation cannot occur without electoral integrity, and reforms aimed at integrity are difficult to sustain without consolidation. Nigeria's experience illustrates this dynamic: the 2019 elections exposed weaknesses in both integrity and consolidation, while the 2023 elections showed that technology alone cannot guarantee credibility without institutional capacity.

The 2025 bye-elections therefore represented a critical juncture credible processes could have strengthened turnout and resilience, but irregularities such as violence, vote-buying, and opaque collation ultimately suppressed participation and reinforced disillusionment. In this study, EIT explains the proximate driver of voter behavior, showing that perceived procedural compromise raises the costs of participation and reduces the perceived efficacy of voting, while DCT explains the broader structural outcome, where low turnout and disputed results weaken legitimacy and hinder the internalization of democratic norms. Together, the theories demonstrate that strengthening procedural integrity is the immediate lever for enhancing participation, while credible dispute resolution and accountability for electoral crimes are vital for long-term democratic consolidation.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods methodology in order to combine quantitative analysis of electoral data with qualitative interpretation of the institutional, technological, and socio-political context surrounding the 2025 Nigerian bye-elections. This design was necessary because electoral outcomes are shaped not only by measurable indicators such as turnout and party performance but also by deeper factors of legitimacy, administrative capacity, and public trust that require interpretive assessment. The research was guided by three central objectives: analysing voter turnout patterns across the six geopolitical zones, evaluating the effectiveness of INEC's digital transparency mechanism through IReV performance, and assessing party performance distribution among the APC, PDP, and key regional parties such as APGA and NNPP. Primary data were drawn from INEC's official bye-election results published on its website and the IReV portal, including turnout figures and party vote shares, while civil society reports from organisations such as Yiaga Africa and the Centre for Democracy and Development provided independent assessments of transparency and procedural credibility.

Secondary data were sourced from academic literature, policy reports, and media accounts that offered contextual insight into voter behaviour, logistics, and the broader political environment. Three principal variables structured the analysis: voter turnout as a proxy for citizen legitimacy, IReV completion rates as an indicator of procedural transparency, and party performance measured through votes and seats won. Additional explanatory factors such as geopolitical location, urban–rural distinctions, and margins of victory were incorporated to account for regional variations. The analytical strategy proceeded in three

stages: descriptive statistics summarised turnout, IReV uploads, and party outcomes; comparative analysis identified divergences across zones; and interpretive analysis situated these empirical patterns within broader debates on electoral integrity, democratic consolidation, and technological reform. Reliability was enhanced through cross-verification of INEC data with observer reports, while validity was ensured by grounding operational definitions in established scholarship. Limitations included potential inflation of voter registers, the inability of IReV completion rates to confirm result accuracy, and the partial capture of informal practices such as clientelism or violence. Ethically, the study relied solely on publicly available data, avoided personal identifiers, and maintained neutrality to support evidence-based discourse aimed at strengthening Nigeria's democratic development.

Result and Findings

The observation findings are categorised along three main dimensions, that is, (1) voter turnout across constituencies, (2) rates of IReV upload completion, and (3) performance of parties in 2025 bye-elections; means for each are presented along with tables and figures.

Voter Turnout Patterns

The bye-elections of 2025 would see turnout rates varying across constituencies from being very low in others. Table 1 presents turnout data for selected constituencies, showing relatively low turnout compared to registered voters. For example, Anambra South Senatorial District recorded only 113,144 votes cast out of 817,521 registered voters, giving an estimated turnout of 13.8%. On the contrary, Onitsha North I State Constituency had 11,709 votes cast out of 92,223 registered voters, giving a turnout of 12.7%.

Table 1: Voter Turnout by Constituency (2025 Bye-Elections)

Constituency/State	Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Estimated Turnout (%)
Anambra South Senatorial (Anambra)	817,521	113,144	13.8
Onitsha North I State (Anambra)	92,223	11,709	12.7
Okura, Dekina–Okura II (Kogi)	—	—	—
Chikun/Kajuru HoR (Kaduna)	—	46,071	—
Zaria Kewaye State (Kaduna)	—	37,665	—
Basawa State (Kaduna)	—	17,452	—
Bagwai/Shanono (Kano)	—	21,545	—
Ghari/Tsanyawa (Kano)	—	59,403	—

Source: Field Observation, (2025)

IReV Upload Completion Rates

INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) was instrumental in maintaining transparency and accountability. Still, upload completion rates varied widely from state to state. Table 2 shows rates of timely uploads of results, i.e., within 24 hours.

Table 2: IReV Upload Completion Rates by State (2025 Bye-Elections)

State/Constituency	Upload Completion (within 24 hrs)
Oyo	≈100%
Jigawa	≈100%
Kaduna	≈95%+
Anambra	≈95%+
Kano (Tsanyawa/Kunchi)	≈2%
Enugu South	≈6%
Zamfara (Kaura Namoda)	≈39%

Source: Field Observation, (2025)

The uneven IReV performance, with some constituencies scoring low in upload rates, such as Kano's Tsanyawa/Kunchi (≈2%), became sites for contestation and citizen dissatisfaction.

Party Performance and Electoral Outcomes

There was the party performance across constituencies, asserting the continued dominance of the All Progressives Congress, although regional dynamics provided an opportunity to opposition parties like All Progressives Grand Alliance and New Nigeria Peoples Party to win in their strongholds.

Table 3: Party Performance in Selected Constituencies (2025 Bye-Elections)

Constituency	Winner	Votes (Top 2 Parties)
Okura (Kogi)	APC (Hassan Shado)	APC 55,073; PDP 1,038
Anambra South Senate	APGA (Emmanuel Nwachukwu)	APGA 90,408; APC 19,847
Onitsha North I	APGA (Ifeoma Azikiwe)	APGA 7,774; ADC 1,909
Bagwai/Shanono (Kano)	NNPP (Ali Alhassan)	NNPP 16,198; APC 5,347
Ghari/Tsanyawa (Kano)	APC (Garba Gwarmai)	APC 31,472; NNPP 27,931
Chikun/Kajuru (Kaduna)	APC (Felix Bagudu)	APC 34,580; PDP 11,491
Zaria Kewaye (Kaduna)	APC (Isa Mohammed)	APC 26,613; SDP 5,721
Basawa (Kaduna)	APC (Dahiru Umar-Sani)	APC 10,996; PDP 5,499

Source: Field Observation, (2025)

The data shows the APC solidified its position in the North-West (Kaduna, Kano) and North-Central (Kogi), while APGA continued to have influence in the South-East (Anambra). NNPP secured some measure of electoral resilience in Kano, further accentuating the increasingly fragmented political landscape of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

In many respects, Nigeria's 2025 bye-elections served as paramount test cases for its electoral system, since a number of 12 states, 32 LGAs, 356 registration areas, 6,987 polling units, and 3.5 million registered voters were involved, making it again a rehearsal for the general elections of 2027. The findings reveal a mix of complicated achievements alongside persistent structural weaknesses of Nigeria's electoral democracy. The debate draws the basis of empirical observations into existing literature on voter turnout, electoral technologies, party competition, and democratic consolidation.

Voter Turnout and Political Participation

An assessment of the by-election results shows that voter turnout was extremely low in almost all constituencies, ranging between 12% and 15% (Table 1). This confirms the long-term pattern of electoral disengagement in Nigeria, where even general elections often get less than 40% voter turnout (Bekoe, 2017; Omotola & Nyuykonge, 2021). Voting apathy at 13.8% in Anambra South and 12.7% in Onitsha North I reflects those historical levels, indicating that localised contests cannot escape the larger canvas of political disenchantment. High turnout such as that recorded in Kogi's Okura Constituency (72-74%) stands out as a glaring aberration. Official counts indicate very high participation, yet according to field observers, many polling units were empty for most of the day. The result brings into question those figures in terms of whether votes were indeed inflated or whether there was a deliberate attempt to mobilise far too few voters; both would have resulted in darkening shadows over the integrity of the election. Such discrepancies in reporting had also been recorded in the past in Rivers and Bayelsa, with turnout numbers purportedly exceeding the best estimates of credible participation (EU EOM, 2019). Furthermore, contextual peculiarities shaped turnout. Security fears depressed turnout in Kaduna, Zamfara, and Kano, whereas vote-buying, particularly in Ogun and Kogi, further alienated voters. In contrast, targeted grassroots mobilisation in Jigawa generated high turnout, bearing on the observation that turnout is about the capacity to mobilise at the local level as much as it is about national sentiment. In this light, these trends further cement the peculiarity that voter disengagement in Nigeria is not really about apathy but rather about mistrust in the institutions and security fears (Bratton, 2013). If institutional and structural barriers are not addressed, low turnouts may continue in the 2027 elections.

Electoral Integrity and Process Credibility

The byelections gave mixed signals for process integrity. On the bright side, the elections in the parts of Anambra, Oyo, Jigawa, and Niger were peaceful, transparent, and efficient, showcasing the growing late logistical maturity of INEC and the adaptive relocation of polling units from insecure areas. These innovations thus signal a gradual professionalising of

electoral management; an observation aligned with that institutional learning ameliorates election quality over a period of time (Adebayo, 2020). Yet systemic weaknesses gave way to an erosion of credibility. Vote-buying was rampant, with the most egregious violation occurring in Kaduna, where ₦25 million was seized as suspected inducements. Violence, intimidation, ballot box snatching, and assaults were concentrated in Kogi, Kano, and Zamfara. These continue to serve as familiar signs of clientelism and coercion constituting the heart of Nigeria's electoral politics (Albert, 2019). The Kogi Okura contest epitomises the archetypes: someone who is somewhat credible certainly cannot be considered the candidate of the 97.4% of votes the APC received in that particular irregularity-riddled constituency. This pattern recalls past instances of so-called "electoral hypermajorities" identified by scholars as intent traps for manipulation (Lehoucq, 2003). Such irregularities in one locale may not be found everywhere, but they nonetheless tarnish the overall image of electoral credibility.

Technological Innovations: IReV's Uneven Impact

The INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) has been credited widely. It is considered to be an epitome of transparency whereby the populace and parties could view polling unit results in real time. This election saw states such as Oyo, Jigawa, Kaduna, and Anambra maintaining near-total uploads (95–100% within 24 hours), thus highlighting where confidence could be built with the system. However, the highs and lows could not have been sharper. Low upload rates were recorded from Kano's Tsanyawa/Kunchi ($\approx 2\%$), Enugu South ($\approx 6\%$), and Zamfara's Kaura Namoda ($\approx 39\%$). Such divergences disallow uniform confidence and tend to exacerbate regional inequalities in trust. Partial or inconsistent application of technology is, therefore, perceived by some as worse than complete non-adoption since such selectiveness appears to serve as a veil of injustice (Akinola, 2022; Cheeseman et al., 2020). Hence, while IReV remains a true innovation, its inconsistent application demands mandatory enforceable upload procedures that ideally incorporate real-time integration of BVAS accreditation data with PU-level results.

Party Performance and Political Competition

The results confirm the dominating influence of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which won all but one of the contests in the North-West and North-Central (Table 3). The consolidation therefore reflects the enduring incumbency advantage and the huge grassroots penetration of APC, as noted in earlier analyses that incumbents in Nigeria use state resources to secure their dominance (Onapajo, 2014). Yet, however small, the opposition pockets showed states' resistiveness. The PDP remained competitive in some parts of the South-West and South-South, APGA retained Theraterrick in Anambra, and the NNPP secured key seats in Kano. Such fragmentation is increasingly characteristic of Nigeria's multiparty system, wherein regional strongholds form the basis of pluralism, notwithstanding hegemonic incumbency. That APGA won the Anambra South Senate seat and the Onitsha North I constituency only adds further credence to the continuing significance of identity-based regional parties, supporting earlier conclusions regarding Nigeria's ethno-regional party dynamics (Suberu, 2007). The strategic fallout here suggests that while APC continues to

enjoy structural advantages, subnational battlegrounds, rather than national uniformity, will determine how the 2027 polls play out.

Implications for Democratic Trajectory

The nexus of these bye-election findings concisely illustrates Nigeria's paradox of democratic consolidation, with gradual improvements in institutions coexisting alongside structural-level shortcomings. On one hand, INEC's logistical innovations and the resultant transparency gains brought about by IReV give room to gradual improvement; on the other hand, the troublingly low levels of voter turnout, alongside vote buying and uneven credibility, only foreground the brittle nature of Nigeria's democratic legitimacy. Such discourse corresponds to Gyimah-Boadi and Logan's (2020) view of "liberal constitutionalism without liberal democracy" in Africa: While institutions appear strong and resilient, coercive and clientelistic practices undermine substantive democratic consolidation. Unless reforms mandate that transparency be institutionalised and voters be made sovereign, the 2027 general elections stand the risk of replaying the contradictions of the 2025 bye-elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2025 bye-elections that took place across 12 states presented an important window into the current condition of Nigeria's democratic trajectory. On one side, it highlighted significant institutional gains, particularly in the use of election technologies, inventive logistical adjustments, and the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) resilience in managing elections under insecure circumstances. On the opposite side, the elections offered a glaring insight into the deep-rooted problems: one of these being the traditionally low voter turnout; others include localised anomalies in participation figures, rampant vote-buying, and recurrent patterns of election-related violence and intimidation. These outcomes serve to bolster the paradox that characterises Nigeria's electoral system: credible reforms continue to run parallel to deeply entrenched structural deficits that have come to weigh against democratic consolidation. In terms of logistical preparedness, INEC showed superb logistical preparedness in Niger, Anambra, and Oyo states, but it had to suffer an almost total failure in the conflict-ridden areas of Kaduna, Zamfara, and Kano, automatically degrading the credibility of these elections. Technological integration, especially the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), has become the hallmark of Nigeria's electoral system. While these technologies enhanced transparency and public trust in accreditation, the occasional hiccups and delays in uploading results have served as reminders that the work for further refinement still goes on.

Despite relatively violent conditions in some constituencies, voter turnout averaged between just 12 per cent and 15 per cent, indicating a continuing apathy on the part of voters stemming from systemic distrust, poor civic education, and increasing disenchantment with the political elite in the country. Electoral integrity also remains fragile: while many constituencies witnessed an orderly process, allegations of vote-buying, violence, and disputed results, especially in Kogi and Kano, have eroded the legitimacy of the results and

eroded people's trust in democratic institutions. Finally, the politics have continually undergone both continuity and change. While confirming the dominance of the two major parties – the African All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) – regional players such as the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) have made deep inroads. This therefore implies a fragmented but dynamic party system, with subnational forces still capable of shaping electoral outcomes. Thus, bid together, the 2025 bye-elections imply that while Nigeria's democracy has advanced, largely through technological adoption and reformed institutions, it still grapples with core problems connected to voter engagement, electoral integrity, and systemic legitimacy. The findings unmistakably point toward the very real need for ongoing reforms aimed not just at fortifying the INEC's institutional capacity but at tackling the deeper political, social, and structural deficits that continue to stall democratic consolidation.

Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore that electoral integrity in Nigeria is a shared responsibility that requires coordinated action from all stakeholders. To address the deficits identified in the 2025 bye-elections, INEC must prioritize the reliability and transparency of electoral technologies and logistics as the foundation of public trust. This includes institutionalizing mandatory pre-election stress-testing of BVAS and IReV systems through large-scale simulations, enforcing uniform compliance with real-time result uploads, strengthening logistical frameworks in conflict-prone constituencies, and sustaining year-round voter education campaigns that target youth, women, and marginalized communities.

Political parties, on their part, must shift away from patronage-driven mobilization toward issue-based engagement by committing to substantive policy debates, sanctioning candidates involved in vote-buying, strengthening transparent internal democracy through inclusive and verifiable primaries, and establishing continuous grassroots constituency structures beyond election seasons. Civil society organizations and election observers also play a crucial role in safeguarding integrity by deploying targeted monitoring in high-risk areas, sustaining civic mobilization beyond the electoral calendar, and prosecuting vote-buying through documentation, advocacy, and litigation in partnership with anti-corruption agencies.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state and security agencies bear ultimate responsibility for creating an environment where elections are conducted freely and without fear. This requires impartial and professional security deployment, credible prosecution of electoral crimes through specialized tribunals or fast-track processes, and addressing structural vulnerabilities such as poverty and unemployment that make voters susceptible to clientelism.

Overall, the 2025 bye-elections reaffirmed both the possibilities and persistent fragility of Nigeria's democratic project: while innovations like BVAS and IReV show that credible elections are achievable, their promise remains undermined by low turnout, violence, and manipulation. Sustainable democratic consolidation therefore demands collective commitment—INEC ensuring technological reliability, parties embracing issue-based

politics, civil society sustaining advocacy, and the state guaranteeing security and accountability—so that elections can genuinely reflect the will of the people.

References

- Adebanwi, W., & Obadare, E. (2013). Democracy by improvisation: The durability of electoral politics in Nigeria, *African Affairs*, 112(449), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads078>
- Adekunle, O., Akhigbe, O. J., & Momodu, M. Z. (2023). Credible election in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects of Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) technology, *International Journal of Political Science and Development*, 11(1), 12–19.
- Agbaje, A., & Adejumo, S. (2006). *Political parties and pressure groups*. In S. Adejumo (Ed.), *Governance and politics in post-military Nigeria* (pp. 134–160). University of Ibadan Press.
- Ayee, J. (2019). Technology and electoral management in Africa: Promise and perils, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 13(2), 21–29. <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2019.1176>
- Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral Malpractice*, Oxford University Press.
- Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian elections: An empirical analysis of nation-wide data. *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), 621–632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.003>
- Bratton, M., & van de Walle, N. (1997). *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press.
- Bratton, M., & van de Walle, N. (1997). *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge University Press.
- Cheeseman, N. (2015). *Democracy in Africa: Successes, failures, and the struggle for political reform*, Cambridge University Press.
- Cheeseman, N., & Klaas, B. (2020). Digital elections in Africa: Dominant party resilience and opposition adaptation, *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3), 71–85. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0042>
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizen attitudes and political legitimacy in Africa. *Political Studies*, 56(1), 91–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00716.x>

- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diamond, L. (2019). Democratic erosion: What's next? *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0001>
- European Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Nigeria general elections final report*, EUEOM.
- Ezeani, E. (2020). Money politics and electoral practice in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, 55(1), 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002039720920040>
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2017). Ghana's elections 2016: The challenges of deeper democratic consolidation, *Journal of Democracy*, 28(2), 94–108. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0027>
- Gyimah-Boadi, E., & Logan, C. (2020). Liberal constitutionalism and democracy in Africa, *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0039>
- Ibrahim, J. (2021). Civil society and the resilience of electoral transparency in Nigeria, *African Journal of International Affairs and Development*, 26(1), 77–96.
- ICIR Nigeria. (2023). 2023 elections: Nigeria's voter turnout drops to lowest, *International Centre for Investigative Reporting*. <https://www.icirnigeria.org>
- INEC. (2023). *2023 General election report*, Independent National Electoral Commission.
- International IDEA. (2023). *Inspiring confidence in BVAS and electronic transmission of election results: Seven urgent actions*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int>
- Jega, A. (2017). Electoral integrity and system reforms in Nigeria, *Africa Development*, 42(3), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v42i3>
- LeVan, A. C. (2019). Electoral authoritarianism and the radical right in Nigeria, *African Affairs*, 118(472), 270–291. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady059>
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press.
- Linz, J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-Communist Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Mattes, R. (2021). South Africa's low voter turnout and the crisis of legitimacy, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 59(2), 213–237. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X21000168>
- Mishler, W., & Rose, R. (2001). Political support for learning democracy, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 49(4), 815–846. <https://doi.org/10.1086/452522>
- Mozaffar, S., & Schedler, A. (2002). The comparative study of electoral governance, *International Political Science Review*, 23(1), 5–27.
- Norris, P. (2014). *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*, Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P., Frank, R. W., & Martínez i Coma, F. (2014). *Measuring Electoral Integrity around the World: A New Dataset*, Harvard Kennedy School.
- Nwankwo, O. (2015). Regional parties and Nigerian democracy: APGA in Anambra State, *African Journal of Political Science*, 9(2), 113–129.
- Obi, S. E. & Enojo, E. K. (2023). Issues and challenges in the 2023 presidential election in North Central Nigeria. 7th Asia International Multidisciplinary Conference Navigating the Future: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Emerging Technologies and their impact on Society and Business Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Economics, Business and Management (EBM) Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) Life Sciences (LS). 21-23 July, 2023, Technovation Pack, Universiti Teknologi, Malasia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia.
- Ojebode, A., & Aduloju, M. (2019). Bye-elections and electoral integrity in Nigeria, *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 10(10), 1–18.
- Okeke, V. O. S., Udegbumam, C. U., & Ojiridike, I. S. (2025). Electoral reforms and the introduction of BVAS in the electoral process: A study of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*, 13(1), 12–26. <https://doi.org/10.26765/DRJSSES113752>
- Omobowale, A., & Olutayo, A. (2007). Political parties and democratization in Nigeria, *Journal of African Elections*, 6(2), 22–45. <https://doi.org/10.20940/JAE/2007/v6i2a2>
- Omotola, J. S., & Olaniyan, T. A. (2021). Trends in voter turnout in Nigeria's fourth republic, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 15(3), 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2021.1382>

- Onapajo, H. (2023). Electoral reforms and the use of technology in Nigeria's 2023 elections, *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*, 10(2), 67–88.
- Premium Times. (2023). Analysis: Trend of low voter turnout continues in Nigerian elections. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>
- Suberu, R. (2019). Democracy and electoral politics in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, 54(3), 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002039719873253>
- Yakubu L. P, Obi, S. E, Abubakar, I. & Oloda, J. S., (2023). Impact of political party financing and electoral credibility in North Central Nigeria, *Indonesian Annual Conference Series, Vol. 2, 2023 Halu Oleo International Conference on Economic and Business (IACS- HOICEB 2023)*, 1-12. Idonesia
- Yiaga Africa. (2023). *Post-Election Statement on the 2023 General Elections*.
- Yiaga Africa. (2024). *Statement on Nigeria's electoral process: One year after the 2023 general election*. <https://yiaga.org>