

**Developing Strategies for Managing Electoral Logistics in Nigeria**  
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**Abstract**

*The role of logistics in free, fair, and credible elections cannot be overemphasized given the perennial problems of election delay, postponement, and rescheduling in Nigeria due to the late arrival of materials and personnel, causing social, economic, and financial losses to the citizens and the country. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate this electoral logistics challenge that has become existential in our electoral process and develop strategies to improve the system and promote election credibility, inclusiveness, and good governance. Consequently, this paper examined the electoral logistics in Nigeria and proposed some strategies to improve the existing logistics system of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). This conceptual and exploratory study captures the thoughts, experiences, and observations of selected ad hoc staff, political party leaders, private transport companies, and senior officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Lagos through face-to-face and focused group discussions.*

**Keywords:** Logistics, Election, Transportation, Electoral logistics, Nigeria

**1.0 Introduction**

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy and pivotal to the quality of a country's governance and democratic development. They are viable tools for ensuring citizens' participation in choosing their leaders and having the legitimacy to represent them. Elections have become a major mechanism to entrench democratic government with a profound effect on a country's future political life. Elections are complex undertakings that involve many processes, components, and enormous resources. For instance, in 2019, the general elections in Nigeria involved 84 million voters; 814,453 electoral officers; 119,973 polling units in 8,809 wards; 91 political parties; 23,213 candidates vying for 1,558 positions; and the cost of N189 billion. Coordination of all these components constitutes a significant challenge to the delivery, organization, and conduct of free, fair, and credible elections. Jega (2012) noted that conducting elections that are free, fair, peaceful, and credible in Nigeria given its size, population, terrain, and other challenges is a tough assignment.

Since the return to democracy in 1999, poor logistics deployment has been a perennial problem during elections in Nigeria, which has caused several delays over the years (Omotola & Nyuykonge, 2015). Elections have been postponed, rescheduled, and suspended in many instances due to the late arrival of materials and personnel, causing social, economic, and financial loss to the citizens and the country with far-reaching consequences on the integrity of the elections and the citizens' confidence on the electoral management body - Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) - abilities. Unfortunately, Logistics is one area where Nigeria has little capacity due to the dearth of necessary logistics infrastructure, human capital, and appropriate processes and procedures. This was evidenced in the 2018 World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI), which placed Nigeria in the 110th position in the world with an LPI score of 2.53. In Africa, Nigeria was ranked 16th, with South Africa (3.38), Cote d'Ivoire (3.08), Rwanda (2.97), Egypt (2.82), and Kenya (2.81) recognized as top performers (World Bank, 2018).

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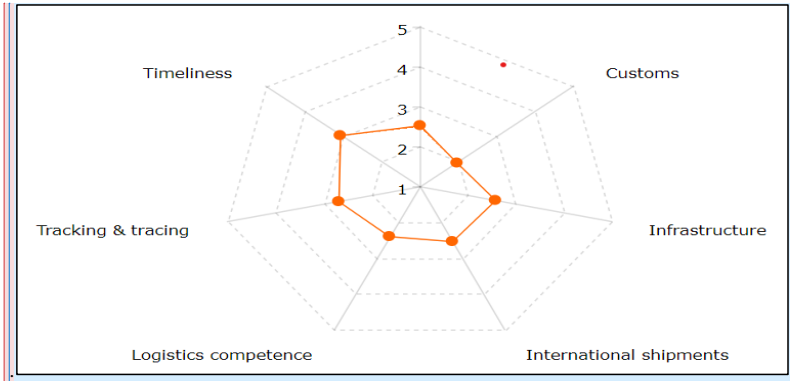


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Source: Country Score Card: Nigeria 2018 | Logistics Performance Index (worldbank.org)

These Logistics problems have become a daunting task to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over the years, as shown in the late distribution and retrieval of election materials, difficulty in movement of electoral officers and security personnel, inadequate logistical support to independent observers, and improper storage and tracking of election materials, among others. The Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement (YIAGA), Africa (an NGO), in their preliminary findings from the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections, observed that at least 110 critical incidents were recorded early on election day which primarily related to the deployment of election materials and personnel. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate this electoral logistics challenge that has become existential in our electoral process and operations, to promote election credibility, inclusiveness, and good governance.

Studies on electoral logistics and supply chain in Nigeria are scarce, as many previous studies on electoral systems focused more on electoral processes, political meddling and logistics, violence, and corruption (Omotola & Nyuykong, 2015; Hassan & Yusuf, 2015; Iwuoha et al., 2021). For a vast geographical entity like Nigeria with some rugged terrain and hard-to-reach areas, developing efficient and effective logistics strategies and processes for deploying and retrieving materials and personnel is crucial. Therefore, this underscores the need for this research, which examines electoral logistics in Nigeria, to develop strategies for its sustainability. In specific terms, the objectives are to:

- examine the components of the electoral logistics system in Nigeria;
- Study the existing distribution structure of electoral materials in Nigeria;
- Review past and existing logistics challenges affecting the electoral system in Nigeria.
- propose strategies that can be used to improve electoral logistics in Nigeria.

The research is unique because it is case-specific and deals with a subject area that has brought many irregularities to electioneering in Nigeria. It will improve the existing logistics and supply chain system of INEC by highlighting new ways of getting electoral materials from order processing to the destination. It will generate new ideas and information on “how to do it best” in electoral logistics management.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Electoral Process in Nigeria

The electoral process is a complex undertaking that requires enormous logistical, operational, and strategic planning, given the country's massive voting population and the number of election locations across challenging topography and tough terrain (INEC, 2020a). The commission noted that for the country to experience free, fair, peaceful, and credible elections, logistical and other issues affecting the electoral system must be addressed. These include inadequate infrastructural facilities, cumbersome procurement

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process, sorting, packaging problems, difficulty in distributing personnel and materials, problems with reverse logistics, and desperation to win the election by the political actors.

The electoral system in Nigeria has been managed under different election management bodies since pre-independence in 1959. These bodies include the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) from 1959-1964, Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) from 1964-1966, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) from 1979-1983, National Electoral Commission (NEC) from 1987-1993, National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) from 1996-1998, and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which was established in 1998 (Momah, 2021).

Since its creation in 1998, INEC has organized six electoral transitions between 1999 and 2019, making it the longest Electoral Management Body (EMB) in the history of Nigeria. The commission has offices in all the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with the mandate to conduct elections for various political offices in Nigeria as stipulated in the Third Schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended). The constitution also empowers the commission to register political parties, provide rules and regulations for them, monitor their finances and campaigns, promote voter and civic education, register eligible voters, and prepare, revise, update, and maintain the voter register. The commission has a national chairman, 12 national commissioners, 37 Resident Electoral Commissioners in the 36 states and FCT, 774 Electoral Officers in each Local Government Areas (LGA), and more than 16,000 permanent staff.

In 2019, the commission conducted an election for the President's office with 73 candidates on the ballot paper. Governorship and House of Assembly elections were also organized in 29 states. A total of 1,066 candidates contested for 29 vacant governorship seats, and 14,580 candidates contested for 991 seats in the States' Houses of Assembly. The National Assembly elections comprising Senate and House of Representatives involved 6,584 candidates – 1904 contested for 109 available Senate seats and 4,680 candidates contested for 360 seats in the House of Representatives. At FCT, 105 candidates contested for Six chairmanship positions, and 701 contested for 62 councillorship positions. Ninety political parties participated in the election with over 84 million registered voters that spread across 176,996 voting locations. The sum of N189 billion (\$487.6 million) was approved for the conduct of the election.

Some of the key activities involved in the conduct of an election include the issuance of notice of election, political parties' primaries and campaigns, the nomination of candidates, publication of the official voters' register and list of nominated candidates, voting, counting, and announcement of results. All these activities have stipulated legal, constitutional, and operational frameworks to ensure effective coordination and credibility of the electoral process.

## 2.2 Electoral Logistics

Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP) defines logistics as “*part of supply chain management that plans, implements, and controls the efficient, effective forward and reverse flow and storage of goods, services and related information between the point of origin and the point of consumption in order to meet customers' requirements.*” Concerning the above definition, election logistics can be explained as a process, actions, and plans to ensure an efficient and effective flow of election materials, equipment, and personnel for the successful conduct of elections. It forms part of the electoral process that plans, implements, and controls the effective forward (distribution/delivery) and backward (reverse) logistics and storage of electoral materials and other related activities to ensure smooth and timely delivery to polling units. Green (2017) affirmed that efficient logistics practices play a crucial role in developing healthy democracy through free, fair, and credible elections.

Iwuoha et al. (2021) observes that “*election logistics deals with the whole gamut of planning, techniques, organization, implementation system, and control of the complex and interdependent tasks of the movement, transportation and distribution flow of election materials and officials from one location to the other during*

the election.” The authors identified three critical steps that must be followed for an adequate and effective electoral logistic plan. The first step deals with identifying all the complex tasks involved in the electoral process and devising or putting up a structure to handle them, including unforeseen situations. The second step involves breaking these complex tasks into manageable components and assigning them to appropriate personnel who can handle them effectively. The third step entails developing a sustainable security plan and protective measures for electoral materials and officials throughout the distribution chain. Efficient and effective logistics and supply chain activities for elections require detailed planning that covers order processing, procurement, storage and warehousing, distribution and delivery, sorting, packaging, transportation, security, and comprehensive tracking for both distributions and returns chain (Ace Project, 2021). All these activities are germane to the success of any election and could be seen as a foundation for credible, free, and fair elections.

At the heart of every election are the materials needed for organizing elections which vary from basic stationery to voters’ lists. These materials must be managed responsibly to ensure that all the stakeholders have confidence in the election process. INEC classifies electoral materials into sensitive and non-sensitive. Sensitive materials include validation or security seals, ballot paper, voter lists, ballot paper stamps, indelible ink or indelible marker pen, and ballot box seals. Non-sensitive materials include stationeries, voting compartments or booths, the ballot box, envelopes, scissors, dry cell batteries, election bags, posters, twine rope, masking rope stamp pads, apron vests, stickers, etc.

### 2.3 Key Components of Electoral Logistics

**Procurement** forms a critical link in logistics and supply chain systems with an overwhelming influence on the success of any organization (Rushton et al., 2014). Procurement finds suitable suppliers, negotiates terms and conditions, organizes delivery, arranges insurance and payment, and does everything needed to get materials into the organization (Afanasyeva, 2009). In the electoral process, ensuring that there are sufficient supplies of electoral materials in the required quantity in the right place and at the right time is pivotal to credible elections.

**Storage, Warehousing, and Inventory.** These activities move materials into storage and take care of them until they are needed. Modern logistics and supply chains recognize warehouses as major components involved in various sourcing, production, and distribution stages. Electoral materials are usually produced weeks or months before the election, and these materials need suitable and conducive storage and warehousing facilities to enhance the quality of the electoral process. Warehouses facilitate the movement of electoral materials throughout the logistics chain and ensure that the materials are adequately secured, well-ventilated, and damp-proof. It also ensures that the arrangement of the materials is systematically done to allow for quick access and dispatch. After the election, the materials needed to be sorted appropriately to know which one to destroy, re-use, or keep under strict security (Ace Project, 2021). Inventory management covers elements such as stock control, obsolescence, and replenishment. Other activities include sorting electoral materials into various locations and bringing them together as a unit load (sortation and consolidation) for onward deployment to different locations.

**Transport** is an essential activity in electoral logistics as it is often constituting the largest variable cost (Langley, et al., 2009). Transport involves moving all the electoral materials and equipment from the vendor/manufacturer/producer through the logistics chain to the final points of usage (polling units) and backward movement (reverse logistics). It is the glue (Coyle, et al., 2011) that holds all other electoral logistics activities together. According to Ace Project (2021), there are three major areas where transport needs are concentrated in electoral logistics:

- i. delivery of voting materials and equipment from vendors to central storage for onward sorting, packaging, and delivery to polling units.
- ii. delivery of other voting materials, equipment, and personnel to polling units.

iii. the return of materials equipment and staff from polling units

Therefore, it is necessary to assess the transport system in the areas of road conditions and accessibility, alternative modes of transport, vehicle capacity and reliability, warehousing facilities, international shipping/transport cost and requirements, custom clearance requirements, and emergency transport facilities (Ace project, 2021).

**Information Flow and Control.** Information flow is essential to the proper functioning of logistics operations. All the stakeholders in the system need relevant information to make timely, accurate, and effective operational decisions. Information sharing is critical to election logistics operation because it provides insights and visibility into the activities of all the actors in the electoral process. It also helps build confidence in the electoral process through accurate, relevant, and timely information sharing with the voters and the political parties. Accessible information provides EMBs with the needed knowledge to make situational assessments and develop appropriate responses (Langley, et al., 2009).

### 3.0 Methodology

This study, which is conceptual, exploratory, and descriptive, captures the thoughts, experience, and observation of selected ad hoc staff, political party leaders, private transport companies, and senior officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Lagos through face-to-face and focused group discussions. This was augmented by the researchers' observations and experiences of the electoral process as ad hoc staff of the commission during previous elections. Published peer-reviewed literature, textbooks, case studies, and INEC reports and reviews of the 2019 elections were used. This method avails the researchers of the opportunity to understand the electoral logistics system thoroughly and deeply.

## 4.0 Discussion

### 4.1 Existing Logistics and Distribution Structure for Electoral Materials

This section looks at the existing logistics structure for election materials based on the INEC framework for the 2019 elections as contained in its 2017-2021 Strategic Action Plan (SAP). Iwuoha, et al., (2021) explained that the document recognized major logistics concerns, proposed specific actions within a timeframe, and outlined a national distribution plan for election materials.

Election logistics preparation starts from procurement. This procurement process usually commences with review meetings at all commission levels and an audit of the commission stores to establish the quality and quantity of the existing and reusable materials (INEC, 2020a, 2020b). This is subsequently followed by submitting the list of the materials requirements for the elections by various Units, Departments, and Directorates at the National, State, and Local Government levels for due diligence, evaluation, and approval. After that, the Procurement Department comes up with a comprehensive Procurement Plan and Timeline with a special focus on the minimum period stipulated in the Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2007 (INEC 2020a).

As stated earlier, electoral materials are divided into two: sensitive and non-sensitive materials. These materials have different procurement and acquisition processes as stipulated in the Public Procurement Act (2007) and other extant regulations. In line with the provisions of PPA 2007, non-sensitive materials, works and services were sourced through open competitive bidding. The process involves the invitation of prequalified companies to submit bid documents, analysis of the documents, consideration, and approval, award of contracts, and sign-off. This is followed by the materials' delivery to zonal warehouses of the commission and subsequently to INEC state headquarters and local government offices (INEC, 2017). All these activities were carried out within 208 days during the 2019 general election.

The procurement of sensitive materials follows restricted and direct methods in line with PPA 2007. The process will request for application for the printing of sensitive materials, followed by assessing the submitted application through a selective tendering method and inspection of the shortlisted companies' facilities locally and internationally. Other activities include Request for Quotation (RFQ), bids evaluation

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and report by Tenders Board, presidential approval to procure, final printing and delivery to Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) headquarters, and subsequently to CBN state and INEC local government offices. These activities took 356 days during the 2019 general elections.

Adequate arrangement for transportation is crucial to the distribution and delivery of election materials (sensitive and non-sensitive) and staff on election day. Some of the transportation strategies adopted by the commission to resolve election logistics challenges include the delivery and storage of sensitive voting materials procured internationally at the CBN. In contrast, non-sensitive materials were sent to zonal stores and states for subsequent delivery to Registration Area Camp and polling units to facilitate seamless voting on election day (INEC, 2017). Other strategies adopted include developing a standard transportation template for materials and personnel movement and arranging smooth reverse logistics (INEC 2020b).

In preparation for the 2019 general elections, the commission constituted a Committee on Electoral logistics with membership from the Nigeria Airforce, Nigerian Army, Central Bank of Nigeria, and private transportation companies to ensure efficient delivery of election materials and personnel to different designated locations, especially on election day when the polling units are expected to open by 8 am prompt (EU-SDGN, 2018). A conference on electoral logistics was also organized to discuss how to ensure seamless deployment and timely delivery of election materials and personnel. According to the Commission, one of the recommendations of the Electoral Logistics Committee led to the review of the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and signed another set of MOUs with the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), and National Association of Road Transport Owners for the provision of vehicles to transport election materials nationwide. These MOUs were signed because they control a massive fleet of vehicles and possess the capacity to deliver election logistics because of their understanding of local geographical terrain and road network. The roadworthiness of the vehicles was certified by the men of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and equipped with a vehicle tracking device to monitor their movements.

Iwuoha et al. (2021) noted that the involvement of NURTW and other transport unions in the electoral logistics provided the politician with the opportunity to meddle with the process and compromise the integrity of the election. The authors also observed that INEC did not prepare adequately for return logistics which undermined the safety and security of the election materials and officials during their transportation back to the commission office.

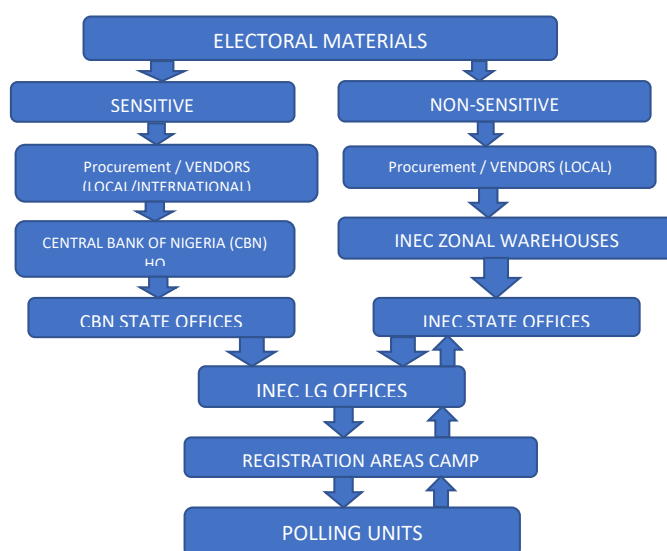
Packaging and distribution of election materials are usually carried out based on State, LGA, and headquarters and by the delimitation data and the requirements of each electoral constituency nationwide. The provision of adequate storage facilities was seen as an essential activity that can enhance the quality of the electoral process.

#### **4.2 Electoral Logistics Challenges in Nigeria.**

Despite the robust logistics preparations by the Commission, the following issues were still identified as logistics challenges affecting the electoral system in Nigeria:

- i. Delay in procurement process due to late budgetary approval and release of funds. According to PPA 2007, there must be a guarantee of funds availability before a contract could be awarded. Consequently, the Commission must wait for the election budget approval before awarding contracts for the materials.
- ii. Myriads of petitions from political parties on pre-election matters, acrimonious nature of party primaries, conflicting orders from the judiciary, and refusal of parties to follow constitutional provisions affect the procurement schedule of sensitive materials. Before the general election in 2019, INEC was involved in more than 396 pre-election cases (This Day, 3 December 2018).
- iii. Short production period for sensitive election materials. The provisions of the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended), which require political parties to submit the list of candidates 60 days before the date of election and 45 days for substitution of candidates, have made it difficult for the

- Commission to conclude production, inspection, transportation, distribution, and delivery of election materials to 176,996 voting locations nationwide (INEC 2020a).
- iv. Poor quality control in the procurement process. This caused a supply of low-quality materials, especially consumables (e.g., pens, ink, cello tape, and twine rope).
  - v. Inadequate and deplorable conditions of the storage and warehousing facilities for the electoral materials at the zonal, state, and local government levels.
  - vi. Inefficient inventory control and stock-keeping practice of available and reusable materials can pressure the procurement process.
  - vii. Distribution delays caused by a mix-up of some sensitive materials during sorting, consolidation, packaging, and labelling by the vendors. This caused delivery to the wrong destination and subsequent delay or rescheduling of elections.
  - viii. Inappropriate location of zonal warehouses using the existing geo-political zones hinders the prompt delivery of election materials.
  - ix. Deliberate obstruction and subversion of due process by various political actors and stakeholders across the logistics chain.
  - x. Lack of technical and resource capability in logistics planning by the Commission and non-engagement of critical stakeholders, especially experts and professionals in transport, logistics, and supply chain in designing the electoral logistics framework.
  - xi. Political interference in the transport industry. This has a profound effect on electoral logistics because the delivery and return of voting materials and personnel are placed in the hands of local transport unions. Many of them are highly partisan.
  - xii. Lack of quality national infrastructure to support the huge logistics involved in the electoral process. According to the Commission, this was evidenced in the airport's ground handling facilities and road conditions and network.
  - xiii. Problems with reverse logistics especially in the areas of transportation and storage of sensitive and usable materials. This undermined the electoral integrity.
  - xiv. Inadequate logistics capacity to handle the movement of electoral personnel and materials nationwide. For instance, up to 900,000 vehicles were required nationwide for the 2019 general elections.
  - xv. Poor security planning for the movement of electoral materials and personnel to and from the polling units.
  - xvi. The restrictive, complicated, and cumbersome nature of the Public Procurement Act 2007 without provisions and consideration for special agencies like INEC.
  - xvii. Lack of internal communication mechanism for adequate, reliable, and timely information flow across the Commission's office at all levels compounds the logistics challenges.
  - xviii. The large number of political parties that participated in the 2019 elections increased the quantities of electoral materials in general.



**Fig 1: Electoral Logistics and Distribution Structure (Developed from INEC Report and Review of 2019 General Election.**

### 5.0 Sustainable Strategies for Improving Electoral Logistics in Nigeria

Some of the proposed strategies include:

- i. Amendment of the Electoral Act and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to address the time shortage between submission and replacement of candidates should be addressed. Election materials should get to INEC state offices at least 30 days before the election for proper inspection, audit, accountability, and timely deployment.
- ii. Public Procurement Act 2007 should be reviewed to accommodate special status for the Commission to facilitate the procurement process.
- iii. The zonal stores should be upgraded to full-fledged warehouses, and adequate facilities and equipment should be provided. The existing geo-political zones should not be used to create zonal stores; instead, the proximity of states and other geographical considerations should be adopted.
- iv. Decentralization of the procurement of non-sensitive materials or consumables would reduce pressure on the procurement process.
- v. Development and institutionalization of a training program in logistics planning and management, procurement process, and distribution management online or physically to enhance the capacity of both ad hoc and permanent staff of the Commission in charge of logistics operations.
- vi. Enforcement of quality control in the procurement process to ensure value for money from procured goods and services.
- vii. Deployment of technology in the election logistic activities and operations should be highly encouraged. The activities may include warehousing management, inventory system, distribution system, and ballot tracking.



- viii. Development of adequate national and state security plan to cover forward and reverse election logistics.
- ix. Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) signed with the transport unions should be reviewed to accommodate sanctions and penalties for defaulters and vehicle standardization. Other transport unions should be allowed to participate in encouraging healthy competition and improved service delivery.
- x. Improvement of the existing logistics infrastructure nationwide should be pursued aggressively by the government to promote inclusiveness and credible elections.
- xi. Regulation of the registration of political parties through proper scrutiny of new requests for registration

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### 5.1 Conclusion

This paper examined the electoral logistics in Nigeria and proposed some strategies to improve the existing logistics system of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). This conceptual and exploratory study captures the thoughts, experiences, and observations of selected ad hoc staff, political party leaders, private transport companies, and senior officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Lagos through face-to-face and focused group discussions. This approach limits the generalizability of the findings; therefore, future research can study this with a quantitative approach to provide empirically robust results.

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