

Electoral Institution and the Management of the Democratization Process: The Nigeria Experience

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ABSTRACT That election is at the heart of democracy and democratization process has become widely acknowledged. Election performs indispensable roles and thereby remains central to the whole essence of democratic process. However, experience has shown that democratic process in Africa and the developing states in general collapse on the altar of bungled elections and electoral processes. Such failure can be easily traced to the doorstep of the institution saddled with the responsibility of managing the electoral process. This is because of the direct linkages that exist between electoral process and the managing institution. Indeed, it has been widely asserted that more than anything the quality and credibility of elections depend greatly on the extent of competency and viability of the electoral institutions. No state shows better the strong relationship between elections and managing agency than Nigeria. Looking back at the Nation's history it is glaring that past efforts at democratization collapsed due to the failure of electoral commissions to conduct credible elections. It is however, saddening that election managers in Nigeria have failed to learn from history. The problem faced by past commissions, continues to beset present electoral institution, while past shortcomings continue to manifest. That past history is being re-enacted, was vividly shown by the way the Independent National Electoral Commission fumbled in the 2003 general elections. This paper argues that rather than learn from past mistakes, INEC is preparing to fail again in the coming 2007 elections. The writing on the wall are numerous, but paramount among these is INEC's inability to prepare a comprehensive, up to date and credible voters' register list. Though the commission argued that it is frantically doing all that is necessary for peaceful elections come 2007, the position of this paper will be that INEC's efforts as at now are grossly inadequate if the commission intends to conduct a competitive, free and fair elections by April, 2007.