

Public Relations Strategic Mapping and Credible Election Administration in West Africa: Evidence from INEC's Election Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

In this study we assessed the effect of and potentials of public relations (PR) strategic mapping on attitudinal changes of both the electorates and staff of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the areas of voter education, voter participation, acceptance of electoral outcomes as well as building strong internal controls. Anchoring the study on participatory theory, data generated primarily from four hundred respondents selected using multi-staged sampling technique were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The four research questions were answered and the results from the use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics of logistic regression shows that Public Relations Strategic Mapping (PRSM) have made significant influence on voter education, participation, acceptance of outcome, as well as building strong internal control. The study also noted that PRSM have enormous potentials yet to be harnessed, the odd ratios of 9.213 for voter participation, 12.962 for voter education, 7.145 for electoral result acceptance and, 3.133 for internal control showing that, any unit increase in PRSM effort create significant impacts on attitudinal changes among the citizenry. Hence, we concluded that PR strategic mapping remains the magic wand in changing people's perception about INEC and also helping INEC in building strong internal control. Therefore, the study recommended more efficient usage of PR strategic mapping in amending the battered image of INEC before the electorates to improve voter participation and acceptance of election outcomes among other things.

Keywords: Public Relations, Strategic Mapping, Election Management Body, INEC, Election Management, West Africa.

Introduction

Among scholars like, Sulaimon & Sagie (2015), Sesan (2019), Yusufu (2020), Brownlee and Miao (2022), Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), there is almost unanimity that the heart of democratization process is election, such is of utmost importance in every political system

and could be termed an essential key to national development. The significant of electoral process cannot be over emphasized owing that it is all about making a choice of the people's representative for a term (Ekundayo, 2015). To Garnett and James (2021), the process is a competition of which the winner takes all. Unfortunately, according to Olumide (2022), Ugwu and Imukudo (2023), Okolo-obasi et al (2025), in Nigeria, access to the state and its powers and ownership of resource is means of guaranteeing one's economic security. Hence, every contestant is always desperate to win, thereby causing the whole process to be peppered with controversies. The numerous controversies trailing Nigeria election scholars, Ahmend et al (2018), Ezeajughu (2021), Nwagwu et al (2022) Olumide (2022), Olawale (2023) attributes to ethnicity, religious bigotry, corruption, Godfatherism, and power of incumbency which has always twist the arms of the electoral management body (EMB) towards conducting free, fair and credible elections. To this, Mbah et al (2019), Maiduguri (2022), opine that the quest for consolidating democracy in Nigeria has been a tortuous journey with no seeming end.

Nigeria's democratic experiments have created and continues to create history of animosity which in most cases have threatened the country's peaceful existence (Obianyo & Emesibe, 2015; Ifedi and Ezenwankwo, 2023). Since the conduct of Nigeria's first general election in 1964 after colonial administrations, lack of credibility of elections result and outright rejection by sizeable portions of the Nigerian voting public has always trail every election. To Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), Babalola (2020), Adichie (2023), Nigeria's elections have constantly been marred by the contestation of results that often create organized protest and violence. However, regardless of the unpleasant outcomes of elections, Nwanmuoh (2024, 2025) noted that leadership selection through voting is still the last hope of common people to right every wrong perceived in the electoral process if the EMB will uphold the choice of the electorates.

From the first general election, Nigerians' have always had high expectations on the various EMB like, Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN), Federal electoral commission (FEDECO), National electoral commission (NEC) and recently the independent electoral commission (INEC). Such bodies are statutory empowered to organize election at various levels to ensure that the process is free from fraudulent, irregularities and other malpractices. Unfortunately, in all the transformation or metamorphosis, none has ever satisfied the yearning of the people for credible electoral process. To this, scholars Mustafa (2018), Ezugworie et al, (2020), Asongu et al (2021) Nwanmuoh et al (2025), have continue to posit that the inadequate usage of public relations strategic mapping in the electoral process may have been hindering the overall performance of the electoral umpires.

The establishment of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria back in 1998 was based on expectation that the body will be responsible for organizing elections into various political office. The major target of her assignments is to conduct free, fair and credible election. The mandates given to the INEC by Nigeria constitution were detailed in Section 15, part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended). As electoral

umpire INEC can be judged by its performance in the various aspects of election conduction such as voter participation, transparent process, post-election agitation and workers' commitment to fraud-free elections. However, several studies like Obianyo and Emesibe (2015), Uzedhe and Okhaifoh (2016) Ahmend et al (2018), Ugwu and Imukudo (2023), have pointed to the fact that the commitment and transparency of election result from INEC has to a reasonable extent affected how electorates respond to Nigeria electoral process. To Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), a large percentage of the electorates feel unimpressed and uninterested because to them, a whole lot of work is needed to be done by INEC to prove their independency, and unbiasedness. Thus, Maiduguri (2022) posited that, the activities of INEC before, during and at after election period define how electorates, and even politicians are willing to participate in the next electoral process. To Chinweuba & Ezeugwu (2022), it simply points out that public relations strategic mapping remains the compass required by the EMB to navigate the murky water of the countries' electoral process.

The Study Problem

Electoral democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999 after about sixteen consecutive years of authoritarian dictatorship. Like most other part of the world where democracy has spread to, the country could be counted as one of the countries in West Africa that have enjoyed uninterrupted democracy for over twenty years. Since the inception of this democracy experiment, Nigeria has successfully witnessed about seven circles of assumed open and competitive general elections happening every four years. To Ifedi and Ezenwankwo (2023), such is a laudable feat in that only a few persons in the build up to this experimentation gave the country's democracy a chance of survival. However, like in most weak and emerging democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, questions of the integrity of the conducted elections keep popping up at every chance. In the opinion of scholars like Ahmad et al (2019), Ifedi and Ezenwankwo (2023), the way and manner with which both the politicians and electorates talk about election management requires that critical examinations be conducted around the process. According to Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), serious investments have been made in the management of elections in Nigeria that only in 2023, the country spent close to 400 billion naira (about \$ 830 million) in one election cycle. Also, Babalola (2020), noted that INEC the current EMB has never been financially orphaned since its creation in 1998. Yet scholars and even policy makers are still pointing out that there has never been any election conducted by INEC without questionable outcome. Despite the homogenous amount being spent on the electoral management body, the question of transparency, credibility and fairness continues to trail their elections thereby discouraging electorate from taking part in the process they know will always be marred by irregularities (Olubunmi & Folorungo, 2020). To Ezeador (2023), Awotayo et al (2023), Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), irrespective of the commitment of international development partners like the European Union (EU) British Council, USAID, GIZ, and many others to train and equip the manpower of INEC, election management by the body remains miserable.

This poor outcome in election management, many opinion moulders have attributed to deprived public relations strategic mapping by INEC. According to Nwanmuoh et al (2024), in the context of management of elections, public relations strategic mapping entails, having a critical grasp of the various stakeholders, media landscape, and communication channels to efficiently reach the electorates, politicians and the general populace with a target of achieving election-related goals.

Public relations strategic mapping has demonstrated its prowess in other climes and is expected to be of tremendous help in INEC's quest to conduct a generally accepted elections with suspensions. However, the persistent post-election violence that most times lead to loss of life and property; and post-election legal tussle that drains the election losers pocket further entail that the citizenry are still not willing to accept INEC results as the elections are deemed to be fraudulent and biased. This continuous contention of the outcome of electoral process appears to be reinforcing the doubt in the nature of public relations strategies and tools at the disposal of the EMB and the fact that PR strategic mapping may not have helped the umpire. Hence, this study in an attempt to empirically clear some issue asked the following questions:

- What is the effect of public relations strategic mapping on voter education?
- What is the effect of public relations strategic mapping on voter participation?
- What is the effect of public relations strategic mapping on acceptance of electoral outcome?
- What is the effect of public relations strategic mapping on internal control system of INEC?

It is on the basis of this yearning doubt that this study was set out to assess the effectiveness of public relations strategic mapping on credible election management in Nigeria, in line with the international best practice. The study contributes to the debate on public relation strategy and credible election management in West African by assessing four areas that have not received adequate mention in the literature. The four areas form the basis of the objection of the study which are to:

- i. ascertain the effect of public relations strategic mapping on voter education
- ii. ascertain the effect of public relations strategic mapping on voter participation
- iii. ascertain the effect of public relations strategic mapping on acceptance of electoral outcome
- iv. ascertain the effect of public relations strategic mapping on internal control system of INEC

The further contents of the paper can be adumbrated as follows. Section 2 looks at the literature and theoretical perspective. Section 3 describes the materials and method. Section 4 presents the results and corresponding discussion. Section 5 concludes the paper with policy implications and future research directions.

Literature and Theoretical Perspective

Literature Review

Public Relations (PR)

According to Maclean (2023), Nwanmuoh et al (2025), taken in reverse form public relations reads relations with the public, PR refers to stakeholders, it focuses on beneficial relationships for stakeholders. Among numerous definitions arising from the versatility and pervasiveness of the profession, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) defines PR as the planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. To other scholars, Gregory, (2012), Brownlee and Miao (2022), PR is strategic management as it uses the words "planned" and "sustained". Conceptually this study adapts the International Public Relations Association (IPRA)'s to view public relations as an art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders and implementing planned programs for the benefits of the organization and its publics. This to Ngusha and Mngohol (2015), shows that PR is analytical, scientific, predictive, prescriptive, executive, synthetic as well as universally beneficial to the entire society. To Nwanmuoh et al (2023), Uduji et al (2023), the solutions from public relations are usually effective because of the integrative systemic approach it explores and it is a planned process that initiates preliminary analysis with innovative imaginations.

Strategic Mapping

Strategic mapping entails efforts built on strategic themes such as growth or productivity that are put in place by organizations to create value (Wu, 2017; Mustafa, 2018). It is a special tool created by organization to guide all the stakeholders towards performance. Hence to Agbor (2019), the strategy mapping implies all efforts such as statement, documentations, pictorial representations, and other tool that can guide staff toward achieving the set objectives without deviation from routes even with minimal supervisors (Mustafa, 2018). As relating to this study, strategic mapping on the part of the EMB entails five major issues of stakeholder analysis, media landscape mapping, communication channel mapping, strategic messaging and election cycle phases.

To Wu (2017), stakeholder analysis involves identifying key audiences, that is, who are the primary and secondary audiences for election-related messages. Maclean (2023) Okolo-obasi et al (2025) added understanding their needs and interests to ensure that the information the audiences are seeking are fully delivered. Media landscape mapping on the other hand, Asongu et al (2021), opined involves identifying media channels, their reach and influence within the target audience. Assessing media strength and weakness to determine which media channels are most effective for reaching the specific target audiences and their strengths and weaknesses (Uzedhe & Okhaifoh, 2016) and developing media strategy on how to best utilize different media channels to disseminate key messages and build relationships with media outlets (Alamydia & Al Khasawneh (2023). Also, communication channel mapping entails identifying communication platforms (Campion & Jega, 2023)

developing communication plans (Uduji et al, 2020) and establishing media relations (Yusufu, 2020). On the part of strategic messaging, key messages are developed, crafted in clear and concise language that resonate with the target audience and align with the overall election goals. To Ferrer (2022) messages are tailored to the audience based on the needs and interests of different audience groups. and the developed messages are continually tested and refined to ensure that the messages are effective. The fifth is election cycle phases which involves the pre-election focusing on voter education, campaign promotion, and building awareness of the electoral process (Garnett & James, 2021). During election focusing on ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination, address voter concerns, and monitor the election process (Sesan, 2019). And post-election focusing on reporting election results, addressing unbiasedly any disputes, and building trust in the democratic process. Scholars Yusuf (2015), Babalola (2020), Uduji et al (2020), Sahara Reporters (2023), Olawale (2023), are in unity that in acceptable utilization of PR strategic mapping approach in Nigeria, INEC, will proactively manage communication, build trust, and credibility with election stakeholders, and free, fair, transparent conduct of elections assured.

Election Management

Implementation of rules in line with the legislation regarding elections is what election management is all about (James et al, 2023). To Adeniyi (2017), three major stages (pre-election stage, the actual election, and the post-election) are involved in election management with peculiar consequences attached to each as pertain to credibility of an electoral process. To Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), the ultimate aim of election management is to administer elections, organize the ballot, identify registered voters, count results, and announce a winner.

Adeniyi (2017), Piccolino(2019), noted that while pre-election stage entails preparation for the actual election with activities like delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters, registration of political parties, monitoring party primaries, screening of candidates for election, production of voter cards, production and publication of election guidelines, and monitoring of campaigns to ensure compliance with the electoral laws, Mustafa (2018), Okafor et al (2025), confirmed that post-election stage certifying and announcing the result conducted election, issuing certificate of return to winners and managing the post-election litigation. While the longest costliest of the stage is the pre-election stage that may take up to four years, actual election is the shortest that may not last more than one week.

Metamorphosis of Nigerian's Election Management Body – Independent Electoral Commission (INEC)

Generally, the organ of government that is charged with all responsibilities of ensuring that electoral processes are smoothly carried out from pre to post election stages is the election management body (Cheng & Humphreys, 2012; Olumide, 2022). To Alberd et al (2020), James et al (2023), the election management body mainly ensures that the laws and rules

set out to guide electoral processes are strictly followed. Sesan (2019) Ugwu and Imukudo (2023), added that as umpires, the EMB must be none partisan, unbiased and totally committed to serving all equally.

In Nigeria, since the conduct of the first general election, the EMB, has metamorphosed along the four republics so far recorded. Analysis (Table 1) shows the transmutation in both nomenclature and leadership has taken place in the Nigerians EMB from independence of 1960 till date.

Table 1: Metamorphoses of EMB in Nigeria

Republic	Electoral Commission	Chairman	Tenure
First Republic	Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN)	1. Sir Kofo Abayomi 2. Chief E.E. Esua	1960-1964 1964-1966
Second Republic	Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)	3. Chief Michael Ani 4. Justice Ovie-whiskey	1979-1983 1983-1983
Third Republic	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	5. Prof. Eme Awa 6. Prof. Humphrey Nwosu 7. Prof. Okon Uya 8. Chief Sumner Dagogo-Jack	1987-1989 1989-1993 1993-1994 1994-1998
Fourth Republic	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	9. Justice Ephraim Akpata 10. Dr. Abel Guobadia 11. Prof Maurice Iwu 12. Prof. Attahiru Jega 13. Prof. Mahmood Yakubu	1998-2000 2000-2005 2005-2010 2010-2015 2015-till date

Source: adopted with modification from Ekundayo, (2015) and Ifedi and Ezenwankwo (2023)

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established in Nigeria back in 1998 and has been the longest EMB in Nigeria's checkered democratic history. INEC was charged with the sole mandate of conducting free, fair and credible election (Babalola, 2020; Adichie, 2023). This mandate is backed up by Section 15, part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended). Uzedhe and Okaifoh (2016), expressed that the expectation on INEC since then has been to become fully independent and unbiased umpire. To Okocha (2019), on the basis of Nigeria's position in Africa, INEC has huge responsibility as whatever happens in Nigeria is expected to replicated in other sub-Saharan Africa countries. Yet, down the line, scholars, Yusufu (2020), Ugwu and Imukudo (2023) and

many others, are still struggle to prove if INEC have lived up to expectation or not. While Olubunmi and Folorungo (2020) noted that INEC depict systemic irregularity engineered by her official and representatives, others Okocha (2019), Olawale (2023), are making excuses that the EMB is evolving and the political class has always hijacked their activities. In all, the results of elections conducted by INEC so far especially the 2023 general elections have not painted the picture of INEC as an independent, free and credible organization to be trusted (Obianyo & Emesibe, 2015).

Voter Participation

The voter participation simply entails a proportion of an eligible population that turnout to participate in electoral process especially voting in a given election (Nwagwu et al, 2022). To scholars, voter participation can be measured by considering the percentage of the voting age population that willing register for voting (Garnett & James, 2021; Brownlee & Miao, 2022), ratio of voter turned out to vote in a given election period (Ferrer, 2022; Ezeador, 2023). This voter turnout has been a recurring issue in successive Nigerian election and such occurrence has continued to generate questions like: is the voter register is real Ezugworie et al, (2020)? Is the statistics generated and paraded by INEC real (Campion & Jega, 2023)? And did election actually hold? For instance, the eagerness showed by the youth population to participate in the Nigeria 2023 general election was met with a disappointing statistic showing that only about 29% voter turnout was registered. Ironically, according to Center for Public Policy Alternatives (2015), in the buildup to 2015 general election in Nigeria, the report was that most voters in the north-east has been displaced by insurgencies, yet, the statistics the followed the result of the general election depicted that the same north-east recorded more voter turnout (about than 45.22%) than North Central (about 43.47), South East (about 40.52%) and even South West (about 40.26). This level of statistic has been the reason for so much mistrust on the capacity and credibility of the EMB – INEC. To Ugwu and Imukudo (2023) voter turnout or the entire participation is directly related to the integrity of the EMB, hence, Uduji and Okolo-obasi (2021), added that the continues decline in voter participation is a testament of the trustworthiness of the election management body.

Voters Education

Voter's education means providing citizens the necessary information to make an informed decision on participating in an electoral process (Wu, 2017). It is the duty of EMBs carryout voter education through the media, town hall meetings and other public relation tools (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022). To Nwanmuoh et al (2024), elections cannot be said to be unaffectedly democratic if voters are not made to understand the differences among the contestants so that they can cast an informed vote. Hence, to Adeniyi (2017), voter education becomes so paramount in a democratic election because, voters must understand how to vote on election day, or risk missing having their ballot disqualified for either multiple voting, mutilation or the likes

While Akagun (2018), express voter education must be highly scrutinized often by a third party; Abdulganiyyu (2014), Mustafa (2018), Sule et al (2020), lamented that despite huge investment by the government and various non-governmental organization on voter education, many voters still cast their ballots incorrectly.

Internal Control System

Sulyman (2020) opined that internal control system can be viewed as the established measures, polices procedures and principle by management of organizations operate in order to meet its stated objectives. Thus, to Sulaimon & Sagie (2015), Olubunmi and Folorungo (2020), internal control system is the whole system of control activities, workers conduct and otherwise, established by the management in order to carry on the business of the organization in an orderly and efficient manner. Adherence to management policies, safeguard the assets and secure, as far as possible, the completeness and accuracy of the records as well as sustaining the employee within boundaries of professional ethics (Suleiman, 2023). This presents the organization as either good or bad to the outside world. Sensitive bodies like INEC as electoral umpire in Nigeria supposed to work tenaciously to earn trust of people through proving their integrity. However, proving outside integrity is seriously intertwined with building internal integrity (Awotayo et al (2023).

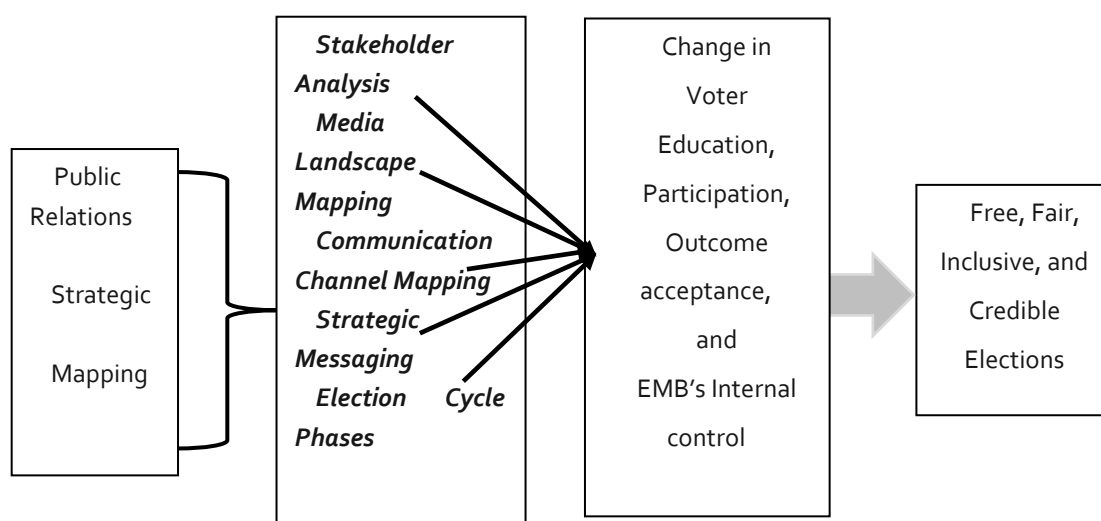


Figure 1 Public Relations Strategic Mapping Conceptual Model

Source: Authors' concept

No doubt, the Nigerians electoral management body – INEC must have been working tirelessly to ensuring that its integrity is not compromised internally. However, many scholars, Yusuf (2015), James et al (2023) Maclean (2023) Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), have pointed out that, manifestation of internal control which is the system of internal administrative checks and balances designed by management, and supported by collective

actions, to ensure that the goals and responsibilities of the organization are achieved is not visibly reflecting in her outward integrity.

Acceptance of Election Outcome

It is almost a generally agree by t scholars that the electorate's reaction to an election outcome has important systemic consequences. This is because, according to Olumide (2022), in every election cycle there is an inherent test and potential threat to the existing democracy. The election cycle has the capacity to establish support for the political regime. Mustafa (2018) Okafor et al (2025), noted that electoral conflicts has the capacity to strain public acceptance of legal and institutional processes, hence, acceptance of election outcome is seriously linked with how the electorates perceives the fairness of the umpire (EMB). To Adeniyi (2017), an administration or a government's support by the electorate in the aftermath of an election is a function of the widespread belief that the electoral contest has been done in a legitimate free fair and credible fashion.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is hinged on participatory theory propounded by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1802), According to Goethe, participatory epistemology is a function of individual's knowledge of world around them. Thus, meaning exist in potential in the cosmos, but must be articulated by human consciousness before it exists in actuality. This theory proves that irrespective of people education and training, their minds need to be appealed to for fully participation especially in political processes. The participatory theory in this case suggests that EMBs be none partisan in discharge of their duties which include educating the minds of voters and potential voters. Such voter education seriously requires strategic public relations mapping.

Materials and Method

Research Design

In this study, we adopted descriptive research designs to describe the influence of the explanatory variables on the dependent variables. The design is well suited for a cross-sectional study where data used is a one-off data in which respondents expresses their opinion on how the phenomenon under study is related.

Sample Size

Using the formula developed by Taro Yamane (1967), we computed the sample size for this study as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)} \quad \text{Equation 1}$$

In this equation, while N is total or finite population of the study, e stands for level of significance (Limit of tolerable error) and 1 is unity (constant)

$$n = \frac{10,907,606}{1 + 10,907,606(5^2)} = n = \frac{10,907,606}{27269.02} = n = 400$$

Sampling Procedure

In respondents' selection, multi-stage sampling technique was adopted as we used both quota and simple random samplings techniques. In stage one, we recognized that data must be collected from both the voters and the staff of the EMB, hence, 10% of the sample size about 40 respondents was allocated to the EMBS staff. In stage two, we recognized the partitioning of Nigeria into six geopolitical zone, hence, we followed the zoning to select one state (FCT, Borno, Kaduna, Enugu, Rivers and Lagos States; from North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-South, and South-West respectively) from each zone for study. In stage three two local government areas (LGAs) each were selected from the six selected states. In stage four, we purposefully selected the first two wards with the highest voting populations in each of the LGA. Finally, in the last stage, we selected 15 respondents from each of the wards with the help of community gatekeepers to make up the remaining 90% (about 360 respondents) of the sample size.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected for used in this work, and the primary data was collected using participatory appraisal while the secondary data was generated from previous publication and used to substantiate the findings from the primary data. We used participatory technique in primary data collection knowing that the view of the electorates is vital in assessing and designing management of electoral processes. Structured questionnaire was the main instrument used in gathering the primary data and it was directly-administered to the respondents as a suitable tool to assess qualitative issues by quantitative information. We engaged the services of local research assistants to administer the questionnaire for the reasons that the coverage of the study is very vast and multiple languages of over 250 dialects will make it almost impossible for all the research to carry out the work. In the use of the instrument, scores were distributed according to the objectives of the study.

Validation and Reliability Test of the Instrument

This study sees validity of an instrument from the lens of the degree to which it can capture in right qualification whatever it is meant to measure. Reliability of such instrument on the other hand according to Okolo-obasi et al (2024, 2025), is determined by the level of consistency of result obtained in using the instrument repeatedly. Therefore, we established the instrument's content validity by engaging the services of experts (scholars and policymakers) to make input both before the instrument pilot-testing and after we pilot tested it. Reliability on the other hand was confirmed after the pilot testing using 50 respondents from north central and south west with a response which was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha index of reliability that produced 93% result.

Ethics Observation

This study acknowledged that ethical research anchored on 'informed consent'. Hence, we did not toy with informed consent as every participant in the survey was fully in the picture, well-informed of the questions and how the data were expected to be utilized. We issue guarantees to the participant that there will be no implications before, during or after the study and that the research will be strictly analyzed anonymously.

Methods of Data Analysis

Analyzing the effect of public relations strategic mapping on election management in Nigeria, we treated the generated with utmost caution and applied rigours using the combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. The outcome of the descriptive statistics is presented with the aid of tables, figures and charts. We also estimated, inferential statistic of multiple logistic model of estimating attitudinal change as a dependent variable depending on PR strategic mapping and other selected socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondent. Following Uduji and Okolo-obasi (2023), Okolo-obasi et al 2024, 2025a, 2025b with the necessary modifications, we state that for binominal response variables, the logistic link is the natural logarithm of the odds ratios generally represented as follows:

$$Y = \log \frac{P_i}{1-P_i} = \log 0_i = \alpha + \beta_1 I_i \dots + \gamma_i H_i \dots + \pi_i C_i \dots + \mu \quad \text{Equation 2}$$

With equation 2, we estimated the effect of public relations strategic mapping on attitudinal changes as it concerns voter participation, acceptance of election outcome, voter education, and the EMB's internal control as thus:

$$\text{Logit(VEPIO)} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 \text{PRSM} + \beta_2 I_2 \dots + \gamma_3 H_3 \dots + \pi_4 C_4 \dots + \mu \quad \text{Equation 3}$$

Where:

α - Vector of coefficient of independent variation,

β = Vector coefficient of variables, which shows individual characteristics,

γ = Vector coefficient of variables, which reveals household characteristics,

π = Vector coefficient of variables, which shows community level characteristics,

Y = whether the individual is self-employed or not i.e. 1= self-employed 0= not self-employed, P_i = probability of $Y=1$

I = Vector of variables, which shows individual characteristics,

H = Vector of variables, which reveals household characteristics,

C = Vector of variables, which shows community characteristics and

μ = Error term

VEPIO = The dependent variable – attitudinal change in voter participation, voter education, acceptance of election outcome and internal control management.

PRSM = Public relations strategic mapping (proxies of stakeholder analysis, media landscape mapping, communication channel mapping, strategic messaging, election cycle phases).

*In this model, the main parameter of interest is β_1 in terms of sign and significance.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics

We began the analysis of response with a description of social (education etc.), demographic (age, marital status etc.), and economic (occupation) characteristic of respondents for both the voters and the staff of INEC. These characteristics are important in understanding the differences in the socio-economic and demographic status of the voters across the federation so as to be able to structure PR strategic mapping with peculiarity of respondents.

Table 2: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents (Voters)

Socio- economic Characteristics (Voters)				Socio- economic Characteristics (EMB staff)			
Variables	Freq	%	Cum	Variables	Freq	%	Cum
Sex				Sex			
Male	215	60	60	Male	23	42.5	57.5
Female	145	40	100	Female	17	57.5	100
	360	100			40	100	
Age of Respondents				Age of Respondents			
18 ≤ 20Yrs	18	5	5	18 ≤ 20Yrs	0	0	0
21-30Yrs	60	17	22	21-30Yrs	3	7.5	7.5
31-40Yrs	76	21	43	31-40Yrs	12	30	37.5
41-50Yrs	96	27	69	41-50Yrs	16	40	77.5
51-60Yrs	56	16	85	51-60Yrs	7	17.5	95
61 -70 Yrs	39	11	96	61 -70 Yrs	2	5	100
> 70 Yrs	15	4	100	> 70 Yrs	0	0	100
	360	100			40	100	
Level of Education				Level of Education			
None	37	10	10	None	0	0	0
Primary	143	40	50	Primary	3	7.5	7.5
Secondary	102	28	78	Secondary	12	30	37.5
Tertiary	61	17	95	Tertiary	24	60	97.5
Others	17	5	100	Others	1	2.5	100
	360	100			40	100	
Religion				Position in office			
Christians	124	34	34	Senior cadre	7	17.5	17.5
Moslems	161	45	79	Medium cadre	11	27.5	45
ATR	57	16	95	Junior cadre	14	35	80
None	18	5	100	Low cadre	8	20	100
	360	100			40	100	

Primary Occupation				Years of Experience			
Farming	85	24	24	< 1 Year	1	2.5	2.5
Trading	144	40	64	1 - 5 Yrs	4	10.0	12.5
Fishing	15	4	68	6 - 10 Yrs	9	22.5	35
Paid Employment	38	11	78	11 - 15 Yrs	15	37.5	72.5
Handicraft	61	17	95	16 - 20Yrs	5	12.5	85
Others	17	5	100	> 20 Yrs	6	15.0	100
	360	100			40	100	

Source: Authors' Computation

Analysis (Table 2) indicates that for the 360 voters, while about 60% are males, 40% are female, and on the part of the staff while 57.5% are females, 42.5% are males. This shows that both sexes are represented in the two divides of respondents. For the EMB staff, further analysis show that, though the number of female staff are more but the number of male staff at the management cadre is reasonably higher than the women.

On the age of voters, while only 5% are between 18 to 20 years of age, about 15% are more than 60 years and the rest are between 21 to 60 years of age. This show that the right population is captured to make informed judgment on election matters in the country. While on the side of staff, only 7.5% are 30 years or below, the bulk of respondents (about 70%) are between 31 to 50 years while the rest 17.5 are between 51 to 60Yeras and only 5% are more than 60 years.

On the education level of the voters, only about 10% of the respondent are not educated formally while about 90 have at least basic primary education. This shows that literacy level is increasing in Nigeria. The analysis also shows that, while bulk of the respondents (about 45%) are of the Islamic faith, 16% believe in the African traditional religion, 34% are of Christian faith and only about 5% did not indicate their religion. This implies that about 95% are religious, manning that in carrying out PR strategic mapping, religious factors should not be forgotten in designing messages. We also analyzed the primary occupation of the respondents and it shows that which shows that while 24% are farmers about 40% are trader and 17% artisan (Handiwork). The implication is that about 89% are self-employed indicating that serious efforts are needed to convince such number in as much as they are not earning directly from the government coffers.

Analysis of the level of education of the staff of the EMB shows that while 17.5% are at the senior cadre, about 20% are in the lowest cadre, 35% in the junior cadre and 27.5% in the medium cadre. This is a good representation of the ranks and files of the EMB and such combination hardly miss any vital information. However, while the level is important, the experience of staff is crucial to reveal the happenings in the body. Analysis shows that while only 2.5% of respondent has less than one years of experience, about 10% has between 1 to 5 years of experience while about 22.5% have between 6 to 10 years. This shows that while only 35% of the respondents have 10 years or less experience, about 65% have more than 10yeras of experience.

Rating of the EMB – Independent National Electoral

We asked the respondents to rate the performance of the electoral management body. This was done to ascertain the feeling of the voters on how INEC have fared in the discharge of her statutory duties and determine the integrity level of the body in the eyes of the electorates.

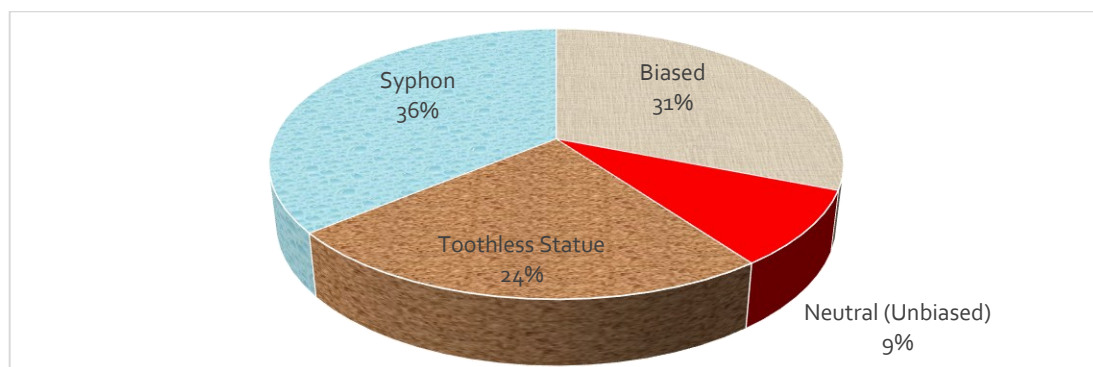


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of respondents in rating of the EMB

Sources: Authors' Computation

Analysis of Figure 1 indicates that while 91% rated INEC as having failed in her duties, only 9% believe that INEC is on course and is doing well. This agrees with the findings of Obianyo & Emesibe (2015), Okocha (2019), Odionye et al (2023), in that owing that INEC seldom conduct election where the loser congratulate the winner. The analysis shows that about 24% of the respondents see INEC as toothless statue, a body that is just existing but doing nothing. This confirm the finding of Olawale (2023), in a publication I declared the result under duress in that most often government in power decided who wins and not INEC. Also, about 35% described it as a body just established for the purpose of syphoning public fund and never to conduct free or fair election. This opinion is justified by the fact the according to Madueke and Enyiazu (2025), INEC took about 400 billion Nigerian naira (over 820 million US dollar) to conduct the 2023 general election which its results have not been accepted by majority up till date. Another 31% described INC as biased and a tool in the hands of government in power. This finding agrees with Olubunmi and Folorungo (2020), Odionye et al (2023), in that the term "power of incumbency" is a big and highly significant variable in the equation of Nigeria election. general election.

Rate and Reasons for Participating or not Participating in Nigeria's General Election

The electorates were asked to confirm if they will participate in the next general election just to find out about their commitment to democracy. We also attempted to know how long they have been participating or not participating and what informs their action towards elections.

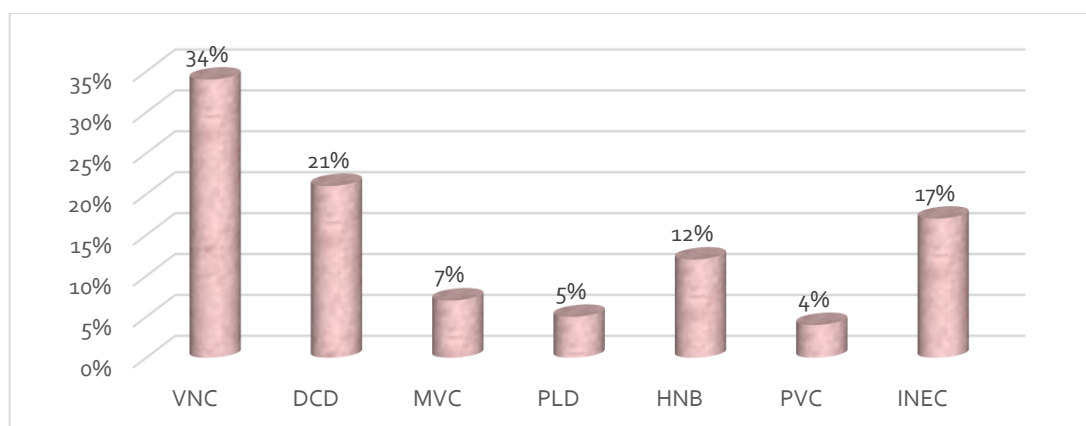


Figure 2 Percentage distribution of respondents on if they will participate in the next election⁴

Sources: Computed from the field data by Authors

Analysis (Figure 2) shows that while only 35% of the respondents are willing to participate in the next general election, about 66% are not willing to participate. Out of those willing to participate, only about 7% will because they believe their vote will count, about 21% will because they believe it is their civic duty, yet they are not expecting anything positive, and about 5% others will because election days are always a public lockdown that does not allow space for any other business. This simply means that only about 7% will effectively participate because they believe in the process. This aligns with the position of scholars like Nwagwu et al (2022), Olawale (2023), in that factors behind voter apathy are complex. About those not willing to participate, while about 34% of them will not because they believe their votes will not count, about 12% will not because they have never participated in their lives, this fraction belongs to those who believe Nigeria electoral process is a joke and does not worth their time. Also about 4% will not participate because they do not have permanent voter card (PVC), and about 17% will not participate because of their distrust in INEC. this category never believes that anything good can come out of INEC, their participation depends on only if there is a change that will ensure them of the integrity of INEC. This goes to buttress the level to which the electorate despise the EMB, and have been disenchanted about electoral process in Nigeria. This finding confirms the position of Babalola (2020), Olawale (2023), Adichie (2023), that undue inference of the ruling party on the EMBs is the reason most electorate will never believe in the electoral process of the country.

⁴ VNC = I will not because my vote will not count, DCD = I will discharge my civic duty but not expecting anything, MVC = I will vote because my vote will count, = PLD = I will because it is a public lockdown, HNB = I will not because I have never, PVC = I will not because I don't have PVC, INEC = I will not unless there is a change in INEC.

Table 3: Opinion of Respondents on Public Relations Strategic Mapping and Attitudinal Change

Statements	A	U	D	Mean	Std	Remark
In strategic mapping, stakeholder analysis helps to identify key audiences, understand their needs, and interests and map the landscape, unless this is done voter education cannot be effective, and voters will hardly participate and INEC will not have strong internal control, hence electoral outcome will be contested.	68.4	8.9	22.7	3.01	1.02	Agreed
In strategic mapping media landscape mapping help to Identify media channels, assess media strength and weakness and be able to develop media strategy for effective voter education, internal control building that will enhance voter participation and acceptance of outcome	64.8	10.6	24.5	2.92	0.96	Agreed
In strategic mapping, communication channel mapping helps to identify communication platforms, develop communication plan, and establish media relations that will easily reach the target audience for effective mobilization	67.1	6.3	26.5	2.84	1.21	Agreed
In strategic mapping, strategic messaging helps to educate voters because key messages are developed, well-tailored to the right audience, tested and refined to ensure voter participation and acceptance of election out come	74.2	11.3	14.3	3.13	0.89	Agreed
During the election cycle phases, voter education awareness of the electoral process is done in the pre-election while during election timely and accurate information are dissemination to address voter concerns and in the post-election proper results are announced and grievances well-managed	59.5	16.4	23.9	3.06	1.01	Agreed
Summary	66.8	10.7	22.4	2.99	1.02	Agreed

Source: Authors' compilation.

Analysis (Table 3) depicts that on average, while about 66.8% of the respondent agreed with the five statements raised on the influence of public relations strategic mapping on attitudinal changes (voter education, participation, acceptance of electoral results and internal control of EMB), about 22.4% disagreed and 10.7% undecided. The mean score is 2.99 while the 1.02 is the standard deviation. This result shows that, public relations strategic mapping has capacity to influence attitudinal changes among both the electorate and INEC staff. This contradicts Uduji (2012), Nwanmuoh et al (2022), Nabuko and

Okonkwo (2021), who opined that PR strategies seems to have no influence on electoral participation. It agrees with Ude-Akpeh et al (2019), Mbah et al (2019), Adichie (2023), Ifedi and Ezenwankwo (2023), in that, properly executed PR strategic mapping ensures that stakeholder analysis identifies key audiences (Ozioko & Abubakar, 2019), understand their needs and interests (Abitbol, 2017), as well as map the landscape, to aid comprehensive voter education, participation, and acceptance of electoral outcome (Alberd et al, 2020). Such mapping also helps in helping the EMB shape and reshape a strong internal control.

Econometric analysis

We estimated the effect of public relations strategic mapping on the four attitudinal change factors (voter participation, education acceptance of electoral outcome and internal control) using the logit model proposed in equation 2 and 3. The hypotheses were tested at 5% significant level.

A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set reliably distinguished between the "Yes" and "No" impact of PRSM (chi square = 45.210, $p < .000$ with $df = 8$). Nagelkerke's R^2 of .843 indicated a strong relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 90 percent. (94 percent for yes and 86 percent for the No).

On the influence on voter participation, the model result is thus:

$$\text{Logit (VP)} = 1.929 + 1.125 \text{ PRSM} + 0.017\text{Age} + 0.039 \text{ PriOcc} + 0.834\text{Edu} + 0.049\text{AFY} + 0.016\text{Sex} + 0.317\text{Rel} + 0.211\text{Polaff}$$

The Z- value for PRSM is 4.5, with an associated p-value of .0043. Based on the set 5% significant level, the study concluded that public relations strategic mapping makes significant influence on voter participation. On the other hand, the EXP (B) value of the Predictor – PRSM is 9.213, which implies that if INEC raises its effort in strategic mapping by one unit, the odds ratio is 9.213 times as large and therefore the electorate will be about 9 more times likely to participate in the electoral process.

On the influence on voter education, the model result is thus:

$$\text{Logit (VE)} = 2.173 + 2.004\text{PRSM} + (0.017) \text{ Age} + 0.073\text{PriOcc} + 1.015\text{Edu} + 0.030\text{AFY} + 0.230\text{Sex} + 0.404\text{Rel} + 0.717\text{Polaff}$$

The EXP (B) value of the Predictor – PRSM is 12.96, which implies that if INEC raises its effort in strategic mapping by one unit, the odds ratio is 12.96 times as large and therefore the electorate will be about 13 more times likely to be educated on the best way to be involved.

On the influence on acceptance of electoral outcome, the model result is thus:

$$\text{Logit (OA)} = 2.173 + 1.436\text{PRSM} + 0.021\text{Age} + 0.352\text{PriOcc} + 0.033\text{Edu} + 0.036\text{AFY} + 0.187\text{Sex} + 0.801\text{Rel} + 0.045\text{Polaff}$$

The EXP (B) value of the Predictor – PRSM is 7.145, which implies that if INEC raises its effort in strategic mapping by one unit, the odds ratio is 7.145 times as large and therefore the electorate will be about 7 more times likely to accept outcome of election outcomes.

Table 4: Projected Effects of PR Strategic Mapping on Attitudinal Changes of both Voters and INEC Staff

Y	X	Coefficients	Std Error	Significant	Odd Ration
Voter Participation	PRSM	1.125	0.041	0.062*	9.213
	Age	0.017	0.009	0.233**	.983
	PriOcc	0.039	0.022	0.16**	.962
	Edu	0.834	0.001	0.072*	.986
	AY	0.491	0.018	0.074**	.996
	Rel	0.317	0.201	0.0013	1.017
	Sex	0.016	0.114	0.058**	.908
	Polaff	0.211	0.115	0.006	.954
	Constant	1.929	0.667	0.164**	2.533
Voter Education	PRSM	2.004.	0.212	0.0081	12.962
	Age	-0.047	0.124	1.029**	1.810
	PriOcc	0.073	0.135	0.00328	1.930
	Edu	0.015	0.021	0.060*	1.217
	AY	0.030	0.010	0.092**	1.000
	Rel	0.404	0.021	0.083**	0.996
	Sex	0.230	0.116	0.074**	0.795
	Polaff	0.717	0.024	0.083**	1.017
	Constant	2.173	0.951	1.022**	8.785
Electoral Result Acceptance	PRSM	1.436	0.054	0.051*	7.145
	Age	0.021	0.012	0.081**	0.980
	PriOcc	0.352	0.275	0.202	0.703
	Edu	0.033	0.024	0.065*	0.967
	AY	0.036	0.028	0.091***	1.036
	Rel	0.001	0.026	0.962	1.001
	Sex	0.187	0.135	0.052*	.830
	Polaff	0.045	0.155	0.771	1.046
	Constant	1.645	0.829	1.164*	2.533
Internal Control	PRSM	0.925	0.041	0.053*	3.133
	Age	0.025	0.010	0.062*	0.976
	PriOcc	0.024	0.225	0.914	1.025
	Edu	0.032	0.022	0.142	0.969
	Exp	0.304	0.010	0.065*	0.996
	PiO	0.024	0.022	0.268	1.025
	Sex	0.241	0.119	0.051**	1.786
	Constant	2.173	0.951	1.022**	8.785

* a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age, PriOcc, Edu, AY, Rel, Polaff, Sex, PRSM.

* significant at 1%; * * significant at 5%; ***significant at 10%.

Source: Authors' Computation

On the influence on internal control mechanism of INEC, the model result is thus:

Logit (IC) = 2.173 + 0.925PRSM + 0.025Age + 0.032Edu + 0.304 Exp + 0.187Sex + 0.224 PiO

The EXP (B) value of the Predictor – PRSM is 3.133, which implies that if INEC raises its effort in strategic mapping by one unit, the odds ratio is 3.133 times as large and therefore the EMB will be about 3 more times likely to solidify its internal control with the outcome of the PR strategic mapping.

Generally, this study has shown that as it pertains to electoral process, nothing actually is wrong with the Nigeria population; the age is relatively young and active, educational exposure is not too bad, the sex combination is not odd, it is highly religious and should have the fear of God, yet participation in the electoral process of the country is very poor. With over 66% not willing to participate in the next election cycle and about 28% participating for fun and sense of obligation, not because they are expecting anything good, there is a serious challenge in the relationship of INEC and the general public, that we traced to poor PR management. Therefore, the contention of this study is that either INEC has not adopted the best PR strategic mapping or that the PR practitioners working with and for the body have not been efficient in discharging their duties. That they may not have properly handled either of the above is why the electorates will easily refer to the body as toothless statue, a syphon or conduit pipe for embezzling public fund and or biased agency for intimidating those discontented with the leadership of incumbent.

Such references made about the election management body is an indication that the electorate have serious lost interest and they doubt the integrity of the body. This confirms the assertion of Yusuf (2015), Achor et al (2017) and Ezeador (2023), who maintained that for integrity sake in Nigeria's electoral process, 'Caesar's wife must live above suspicion'. Buttressing this, Yusufu (2020), Olawale (2023), confirmed the breakdown the public relations machinery of the body when they asserted that most electorate in Nigeria are youth whose future is hanging in the balance, yet they chose to play football on the day of decision because, to them the result is already known as the old generation has just shared power to themselves again with instrument of EMB.

This study avers that changing this mindset of these youth and other electorate is squarely on the shoulder of PR strategic mapping with the odd ratio of 9.213, 12.96, 7.145, and 3.133, respectively for voter participation, voter education, acceptance of electoral outcomes, and internal control. PR strategic mapping is the wand that can change the blurred image of INEC which most electorate are seeing. This confirms the positions of Mbah et al (2019) Asongu et al (2021) Ugwu and Imukudo (2023), Nwanmuoh et al (2025) who noted that it can only be cogent PR strategic mapping that will boost genuine stakeholder analysis that will helps to identify key audiences, understand their needs and interests so as to design functional voter education that will be effective. Also, the study aligns with Ahmad et al (2019), Uduji and Okolo-obasi (2021) and Nwagwu et al (2022) in that with a proper PR strategic mapping, the media landscape is mapped to identify media channels, assess media strength and weakness and be able to develop media strategy for effective voter education. This Awotayo et al (2023) believe will help INEC develop strong internal control that will enhance voter participation and acceptance of outcome. Also strengthening this finding is Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022), Sahara Reporters

(2023), who all stressed that it is only with proper public relations strategic mapping that the right communication channel mapping is done to identify communication platforms, develop communication plan, and establish media relations that will easily reach the target audience for effective mobilization. Also giving credence to the finding, Achor et al (2017), Ezugworie et al (2020) Uduji et al (2020) and Wahab (2023) believe that passable PR strategic mapping is the strongest root in developing strategic messaging in the process of helps to educating both voters and even staff of INEC as each dived needs to play pivotal roles in ensuring that voter participate and acceptance of election outcome guaranteed.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This study examines the influence and potential influence of public relations strategic mapping on changing attitude in the area of voter education, voter participation, acceptance of electoral outcome and building stronger internal control. The validity of this study is high in that it surveyed a real-world election setting to notice that apathy especially among the young people is very high, the electorate loathes the INEC as they perceived its integrity as very low. However, the result of this study shows that PR strategic mapping has a high capacity in mending the strained relationship between the electoral management body and the citizenry. Backed by the participatory theory propounded by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the study therefore concludes that public relations strategic mapping if well harnessed remains most useful tool needed to enhance participation of the citizenry and acceptance of electoral outcome.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that the EMB – INEC carries out a critical examination of its PR organ, strategy and tools to ensure that in every pre-election period proper strategic mapping is done and used in all the preparation and during election. Such will definitely minimize major post-election activities that if not well-managed can lead to violence, loss of lives and properties. This strategic mapping will also help in developing a stronger internal control by the body to counter every internal and external influences that have always paint a bad picture of the election management body.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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