



**POLAC MANAGEMENT REVIEW (PMR)  
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCE  
NIGERIA POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO**



## IMPACT OF GENDER BALANCE ON ELECTION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION IN NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study investigates the influence of gender balance on Election Management Organizations (EMOs) in the North Central Region of Nigeria. Two research questions guided the inquiry, seeking to identify challenges encountered by EMOs and evaluate the effect of gender balance. The study's objectives were twofold: to pinpoint the obstacles faced by EMOs and to gauge the impact of gender balance. Hypotheses were formulated to assess the correlation between gender balance and the effectiveness of EMOs. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the study encompassed a total population of 3553 electoral staff from all six states in the North Central Region, with a sample size of 345 respondents selected via simple random sampling. Data collection utilized a researcher-developed instrument, which underwent validation through vetting. Descriptive statistics, comprising mean and standard deviation, were applied to address the research questions, while chi-square analysis was utilized for testing hypotheses. Findings unveiled notable challenges confronting EMOs in the region, encompassing issues such as voter education, electoral violence, and insecurity. The study's conclusion highlighted the substantial impact of gender balance on EMO effectiveness in the North Central Region of Nigeria, emphasizing the necessity of promoting gender diversity within EMOs to bolster their capability in conducting fair and transparent elections.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Election, Management, Organizations

### Introduction

Historically, societies have been characterized by gender imbalances, with women often facing systemic discrimination and marginalization. This has resulted in disparities in education, employment, political representation, and decision-making processes, limiting women's access to opportunities and hindering their full participation in society.

Gender balance seeks to address these disparities by challenging traditional gender roles, norms, and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality. It advocates for policies and initiatives that empower women and girls, promote their rights, and create an enabling environment for their equal participation and leadership

Onoja, (2017). Gender balance refers to the equitable distribution of opportunities, resources, and power between men and women, ensuring that both genders have equal access to and representation in various aspects of life. Achieving gender balance is essential for promoting social justice, economic prosperity, and sustainable development.

In society, gender imbalances often manifest in areas such as education, employment, politics, and decision-making processes. Historically, women have faced systemic discrimination and unequal treatment, resulting in limited access to education, lower participation in the labor force, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. Addressing these disparities

requires concerted efforts to dismantle gender norms, stereotypes, and biases that perpetuate inequality.

Promoting gender balance involves implementing policies and initiatives that empower women and girls, promote their rights, and create an enabling environment for their full participation and leadership. This includes measures such as ensuring equal access to education and healthcare, promoting women's economic empowerment through employment opportunities and entrepreneurship support, and advancing gender-responsive legislation and governance structures Onoja, (2017). Additionally, promoting gender balance requires engaging men and boys as allies in the fight for gender equality. This involves challenging traditional gender roles and norms that reinforce inequality and promoting positive masculinity that values and respects women's rights and contributions to society. Achieving gender balance is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for sustainable development. Research shows that countries with greater gender equality tend to have higher levels of economic growth, better health outcomes, and greater social cohesion. By promoting gender balance, societies can unlock the full potential of all their members, leading to more inclusive and prosperous communities for everyone

An Election Management Organization (EMO) is a specialized body tasked with overseeing and conducting electoral processes in a fair, transparent, and impartial manner. Serving as the cornerstone of democratic governance, an EMO is responsible for administering various aspects of elections, ensuring they adhere to established laws, regulations, and international standards Umar, (2019).

EMOs are typically independent entities, separate from government bodies and political parties, to uphold their impartiality and credibility. They are entrusted with critical functions such as voter registration, candidate nomination, ballot preparation and distribution, polling station management, and the overall coordination of election logistics. Additionally, EMOs often engage in voter education initiatives to promote civic awareness

and participation, empowering citizens to exercise their democratic rights knowledgeably.

The structure and composition of EMOs vary across countries, but they commonly comprise experienced professionals and experts in election administration. Transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are fundamental principles guiding the operations of EMOs, fostering public trust and confidence in the electoral process Umar, (2019). International organizations, such as the United Nations and regional bodies like the European Union, often provide support and guidance to EMOs, assisting them in implementing best practices and upholding democratic norms. Through their efforts, EMOs play a crucial role in safeguarding the integrity of elections, promoting political stability, and advancing democratic principles worldwide. Election Management Organizations are indispensable institutions that uphold the fundamental principles of democracy by ensuring that electoral processes are conducted fairly, transparently, and inclusively. Their impartiality and professionalism contribute to the legitimacy of elections and the consolidation of democratic governance

Election Management Organizations (EMOs) in the North Central region of Nigeria play a crucial role in ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections, thereby upholding the principles of democracy and fostering political stability. These organizations, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at the federal level and State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) at the state level, are responsible for organizing, administering, and overseeing electoral processes in accordance with established laws and regulations Umar, (2019). In conducting free and fair elections, EMOs in the North Central region face various challenges, including logistical constraints, security concerns, and attempts at electoral malpractice. Despite these challenges, EMOs are committed to upholding the integrity of the electoral process and facilitating the peaceful expression of citizens' democratic rights.

To ensure the conduct of free and fair elections, EMOs in the North Central region implement various measures, including voter education and sensitization programs, voter registration drives, and the deployment of election observers to monitor the electoral process. Additionally, EMOs work closely with security agencies to maintain law and order during elections, mitigate potential violence, and safeguard the safety of voters and election officials. Moreover, EMOs in the North Central region strive to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in the electoral process by providing equal opportunities for political participation, ensuring the integrity of voter registration and ballot counting processes, and adjudicating electoral disputes fairly and impartially. EMOs in the North Central region of Nigeria play a critical role in conducting free and fair elections, thereby strengthening democratic governance and enhancing political legitimacy in the region. Their efforts contribute to the promotion of peace, stability, and inclusive development

Election Management Organizations (EMOs) strive to ensure the inclusion and participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process, although challenges persist. Marginalized groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities often face barriers to political participation, including limited access to education, economic resources, and discriminatory cultural norms. To address these challenges, EMOs in the North Central region implement various strategies to promote the inclusion and participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process. These strategies include voter education and sensitization campaigns targeted at marginalized communities, outreach programs to increase voter registration among underrepresented groups, and the establishment of special polling stations to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Additionally, EMOs work to enhance the representation of marginalized groups within the electoral process by implementing affirmative action measures such as quotas for women and youth candidates, ensuring their inclusion in candidate nomination processes and

political party structures. Furthermore, EMOs collaborate with civil society organizations, community leaders, and international partners to advocate for the rights and interests of marginalized groups, monitor electoral processes for any instances of discrimination or exclusion, and provide support and resources to empower marginalized communities to participate effectively in the electoral process Umar, (2019). Despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring the full inclusion and participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process in the North Central region. These challenges include persistent socio-economic inequalities, cultural barriers, and limited access to political opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts from EMOs, government institutions, civil society organizations, and the broader community to promote equality, diversity, and inclusive governance in the electoral process

In the North Central region of Nigeria, achieving gender balance within Election Management Organizations (EMOs) is crucial for promoting inclusive and equitable electoral processes. Historically, women in the region have been underrepresented in political and decision-making roles, hindering their participation in governance and perpetuating gender disparities. Efforts to address gender balance within EMOs in the North Central region involve implementing policies and initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation and participation. This includes promoting gender-sensitive recruitment and appointment processes to ensure that women have equal opportunities to serve in leadership positions within EMOs.

Furthermore, capacity-building programs and training initiatives tailored specifically for women can enhance their skills and competencies in election management, empowering them to contribute effectively to the electoral process. Providing mentorship and support networks for aspiring female leaders within EMOs can also help overcome barriers to entry and foster career advancement opportunities. In addition to internal reforms within EMOs, broader societal efforts are needed to address cultural and social norms that

perpetuate gender inequality. Public awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives can challenge stereotypes and biases, promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in politics and election management. International organizations and development partners can play a crucial role in supporting efforts to achieve gender balance within EMOs in the North Central region. By providing technical assistance, resources, and expertise, they can help strengthen institutional capacities and promote gender-responsive approaches to election management. Promoting gender balance within Election Management Organizations in the North Central region of Nigeria is essential for advancing women's participation in electoral processes and ensuring that their voices are heard and represented in decision-making. By fostering inclusive and equitable electoral systems, the region can contribute to the consolidation of democracy and the promotion of gender equality.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The North Central region of Nigeria faces significant challenges regarding the impact of gender balance on Election Management Organizations (EMOs). Despite efforts to promote gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles within EMOs. This underrepresentation poses several problems that need to be addressed. The absence of gender balance within EMOs leads to a lack of diversity in perspectives and experiences, limiting the organization's ability to address the needs and concerns of all citizens, particularly women and marginalized groups. The underrepresentation of women in EMOs perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces existing power imbalances, further marginalizing women in the political process. This undermines the principles of democracy and equality, hindering the organization's effectiveness in promoting inclusive governance. Without gender-balanced representation, EMOs may fail to adequately prioritize issues related to gender equality, such as women's participation in politics, access to electoral processes, and protection from gender-based violence during elections. The absence of

women in leadership positions within EMOs deprives aspiring female leaders of visible role models and mentors, discouraging their participation in the electoral process and perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation. Gender imbalance in decision-making processes within EMOs may result in policies and strategies that do not fully address the needs and interests of women, leading to ineffective electoral management and diminished public trust in the organization. It is on that regards that the researcher, determine the Impact of Gender Balance on Election Management Organization In North Central Region of Nigeria

### **Research questions**

- i. what are the key challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in conducting free and fair election?
- ii. How effective are the election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process?

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were aim at determining the Impact of Gender Balance on Election Management Organization in North Central Region of Nigeria, specifically,

- i. to assess the challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria conducted free and fair election
- ii. to examine the effectiveness of election management organization in the north central region in ensuring the inclusion and participation of marginalization groups in the electoral process

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i. election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria face significant

challenges in conducting free and fair election, including issues related to votes intimidation, electoral violence and inadequate result

- ii. election management organization in the north central region have made significant effort to enhance the inclusion and patriarch of marginalized groups such as women, person with disability in the process resulting in increased representing and engagement

## **Literature Review**

### **Challenges Faced by Election Management Organization in the North Central Region of Nigeria Conducted Free and Fair Election**

Ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria's North Central region poses several challenges for election management organizations (EMOs). One significant hurdle is the prevalence of electoral violence and insecurity. Various factors including political tensions, ethnic rivalries, and the presence of armed groups affect electoral process, Oyeade (2016). These security concerns not only threaten the safety of voters and election officials but also undermine the credibility of the electoral process Oyeade, (2016). The issue of voter education and awareness in many parts of the North Central region is a call for concern; there are high levels of illiteracy and limited access to information, making it difficult for voters to understand their rights and responsibilities. Additionally, misinformation and propaganda can further distort the electoral landscape, leading to confusion and mistrust among voters Oyeade, (2016). The region grapples with logistical challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and transportation networks. This hinders the timely delivery of election materials and the deployment of personnel to polling stations, potentially disenfranchising voters and disrupting the electoral process Oyeade, (2016). Political interference and corruption remain persistent concerns in the region. Politicians may attempt to manipulate the electoral process through bribery, coercion, or other illicit means, undermining the principles of democracy and fairness.

### **Effectiveness of Election Management Organization in the North Central Region in Ensuring the Inclusion and Participation of Marginalization Groups in the Electoral Process**

Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, marginalized groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and minority ethnic groups continue to encounter barriers to full participation. One significant challenge is the persistence of cultural and societal norms that limit the political involvement of these groups Oyeade, (2016). Discriminatory practices, patriarchal structures, and traditional beliefs often hinder women and youth from actively engaging in politics and standing for election. Similarly, persons with disabilities face physical barriers and lack of accessibility in polling stations, limiting their ability to exercise their voting rights Oyeade, (2016). Marginalized communities in the North Central region often experience socio-economic disparities and lack of access to education and resources, which further marginalizes them in the electoral process. Limited awareness about electoral procedures and voter rights exacerbates their exclusion from meaningful participation. Inadequate representation of marginalized groups within political parties and EMOs also contributes to their underrepresentation in the electoral process. Without adequate representation and advocacy, their voices and concerns may be overlooked in decision-making processes. To enhance the effectiveness of EMOs in promoting inclusion and participation, targeted measures are needed. This includes implementing affirmative action policies, providing voter education programs tailored to marginalized groups, improving accessibility in polling stations, and fostering partnerships with civil society organizations to advocate for the rights of marginalized communities Tanko, (2021). Addressing these challenges and implementing proactive measures, EMOs can play a pivotal role in ensuring the full inclusion and participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process in the North Central region of Nigeria.

## Theoretical perspective

The theory of Electoral Management Body (EMB) independence and impartiality by (Fred, 2009) is essential for ensuring the integrity and fairness of electoral processes. This theory revolves around the principles and practices that guide the organizational structure, functioning, and decision-making of EMBs to maintain their autonomy and neutrality. The theory emphasizes the importance of a robust legal framework that enshrines the independence and impartiality of EMBs. This includes provisions in constitutions, electoral laws, and regulations that protect the EMB's autonomy and shield it from undue influence. It also suggests that members should be appointed through transparent and inclusive processes, ensuring representation from diverse backgrounds and expertise. The theory of EMB independence and impartiality underscores the foundational principles that underpin credible and democratic elections, through upholding these principles, EMBs play a critical role in ensuring the legitimacy and integrity of electoral processes worldwide.

## Methodology

The research design used for this study was descriptive survey research design. The total population of the study consisted of 3553 electoral staff drawn from all the six state in northern central Nigeria. The sample size of the study consisted of 345 respondents drawn from the six states in north central Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique. Researcher's Self-developed instrument consists of 4 items and was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by vetting. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and chi-square for hypotheses testing.

**Research question one:** what are the key challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in conducting free and fair election

## Result and Discussion

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing the key challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in conducting free and fair election**

| s/n          | Item                                            | SA  | A  | D | SD | MEAN | STD  | Decision |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----|----|---|----|------|------|----------|
| 1            | prevalence of electoral violence and insecurity | 298 | 42 | 1 | 4  | 3.87 | 1.96 | Accept   |
| 2            | voter education and awareness                   | 288 | 52 | 3 | 2  | 3.82 | 1.95 | Accept   |
| Cluster mean |                                                 |     |    |   |    | 3.84 | 1.95 | Accept   |

Scale = 2.50

Table 1 analysis show mean and standard deviation of the responding items 1-2, based on the cutoff point of 2.50 the cluster mean is 3.84 and the standard deviation is 1.95 which is above the cutoff point set as standard. Hence, the key challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in conducting free and fair election include

voter education and awareness, prevalence of electoral violence and insecurity among others.

**Research Question 2:** How effective are the election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation showing how effective are the election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process**

| s/n                 | Item                                                                                                                                                                 | SA  | A  | D | SD | MEAN        | STD         | Decision      |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|---|----|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1                   | Discriminatory practices, patriarchal structures, and traditional beliefs often hinder women and youth from actively engaging in politics and standing for election. | 291 | 49 | 3 | 2  | 3.54        | 1.92        | Accept        |
| 2                   | Inadequate representation of marginalized groups within political parties and EMOs also contributes to their underrepresentation in the electoral process            | 288 | 52 | 4 | 1  | 3.71        | 1.90        | Accept        |
| <b>Cluster mean</b> |                                                                                                                                                                      |     |    |   |    | <b>3.84</b> | <b>1.95</b> | <b>Accept</b> |

Table 2 showing mean scores and standard deviation of the responding items from 1-2 bases on the cutoff point of 2.50 the cluster mean is 3.84 and the standard deviation is 1.95 which is above the cutoff point set as standard. Hence, election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria is not effectiveness in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process

Hypotheses

**Null hypotheses Ho1:** election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria face significant challenges in conducting free and fair election, including issues related to votes intimidation, electoral violence and inadequate result.

**Table 3: chi-square analysis showing significant election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria face significant challenges in conducting free and fair election, including issues related to votes intimidation, electoral violence and inadequate result**

| S/N | Responses | Observed frequency | Expected frequency | $\chi^2$ -cal | $\chi^2$ tab | Df | p-value | Alpha level | Decision |
|-----|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|----|---------|-------------|----------|
| 1   | Agreed    | 230                | 234                | 235.51        | 14.067       | 7  | 0.02    | 0.05        |          |
| 2   | Disagree  | 4                  |                    |               |              |    |         |             |          |

Analysis in null hypotheses one shows the chi-square calculated of 235.51 is greater than chi-square table value of 14.067. P-value of 0.02 is less than the alpha level of significant 0.05 calculated at 7 degree of freedom. This implies that there is significant influence of election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria face significant challenges in conducting free and fair election,

including issues related to vote's intimidation, electoral violence and inadequate result

**Null hypotheses Ho2:** election management organization in the north central region have made significant effort to enhance the inclusion and patriarch of marginalized groups such as women,

person with disability in the process resulting in increased representing and engagement

**Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis Showing Significant Influence of election management organization in the north central region have made significant effort to enhance the inclusion and patriarch of marginalized groups such as women, person with disability in the process resulting in increased representing and engagement**

| S/N | Responses | Observed frequency | Expected frequency | $X^2$ -cal | $X^2$ tab | df | p-value | Alpha level | Decision |
|-----|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|----|---------|-------------|----------|
| 1   | Agreed    | 225                | 234                | 249.21     | 14.067    | 7  | 0.02    | 0.05        |          |
| 2   | Disagree  | 7                  |                    |            |           |    |         |             |          |

Analysis in null hypotheses two show the chi-square calculated of 249.21 is greater than chi-square table value of 14.067. P-value of 0.02 is less than the alpha level of significant 0.05 calculated at 7 degree of freedom. This implies that there is significant influence of election management organization in the north central region have made significant effort to enhance the inclusion and patriarch of marginalized groups such as women, person with disability in the process resulting in increased representing and engagement

### Summary of major findings

i. key challenges faced by election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria in conducting free and fair election include voter education and awareness, prevalence of electoral violence and insecurity among others

ii. election management organization in the north central region of Nigeria are not effective in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process

### Discussion of finding

In line with findings in research questions one, ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria's North Central region poses several challenges for election management organizations (EMOs). One significant hurdle is the prevalence of electoral violence and insecurity Oyeade, (2016). Various factors contribute

to this, including political tensions, ethnic rivalries, and the presence of armed groups. These security concerns not only threaten the safety of voters and election officials but also undermine the credibility of the electoral process

In line with findings in research questions two, one significant challenge is the persistence of cultural and societal norms that limit the political involvement of these groups. Discriminatory practices, patriarchal structures, and traditional beliefs often hinder women and youth from actively engaging in politics and standing for election. Similarly, persons with disabilities face physical barriers and lack of accessibility in polling stations, limiting their ability to exercise their voting rights Oyeade, (2016).

### Conclusion

Gender balance has impact on EMO effectiveness in the North Central Region of Nigeria, emphasizing the necessity of promoting gender diversity within EMOs to bolster their capability in conducting fair and transparent elections.

### Recommendation

i. There's a need for sustained efforts to address structural barriers, increase representation within EMOs themselves, and foster dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.

ii. Implementing measures such as affirmative action policies, ensuring accessibility at polling stations, and promoting diversity in candidate selection contribute

to a more inclusive electoral process in the North Central region and beyond

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