



*Working Paper No. 137*

**PERCEPTIONS VERSUS REALITY:  
ASSESSING POPULAR EVALUATIONS  
OF ELECTION QUALITY IN AFRICA**

*by* **Nicholas N. Kerr**

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**November 2011**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I assess the determinants and validity of citizens' perceptions of election quality. First, I suggest that citizens' evaluation of the performance of election-related institutions is the most crucial determinant of their election quality perceptions; however, citizens' personal experience with electoral irregularities, and affiliation with electoral winners also matter. Second, I argue that citizens' election quality perceptions are generally indicative of prevailing trends within different stages of the election process. I expect citizens' perceptions to be correlated with other non-perception-based indicators of election quality. I test these hypotheses in the context of the 2007 Nigerian elections, using survey data from the Afrobarometer and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems along with original data coded from petitions filed in Nigerian Election Tribunals. The findings provide robust support for the hypotheses and underscore the importance of gauging citizens' perceptions of electoral quality. Most important, the results indicate that Nigerians were critical of the quality of the 2007 elections and demand electoral institutions with impartiality and professionalism.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Popular confidence in the conduct of elections is important for the consolidation of democracies. When citizens perceive elections as free and fair they are more satisfied with democracy (Bratton *et al* 2005), more supportive of the ruling government, and more likely to accept the defeat of favored candidates (Moehler 2009).

Despite the importance of popular evaluations of election quality, very little is known about how citizens formulate their opinions of election quality. Do citizens base their assessments on their personal experience during different stages of the election cycle or just on events surrounding election day? Do they examine the performance of the election commissions, or do they simply consider the success of their own parties at the polls? Moreover, to what extent are citizens' perceptions of election quality congruent with other non-perception-based indicators of election quality?

The first purpose of the paper is to assess the determinants of citizens' perceptions of election quality. The emerging literature has offered three competing explanations: the first points to the performance of institutions related to election management (Birch 2008; Hall, Quin, Monson, and Patterson 2009); the second highlights the importance of partisanship — affiliation to the winning or losing party of the electoral contest (Moehler 2009; Rose and Mishler 2009); and the third focuses on citizens' experience with electoral irregularities (Bratton 2008; Lehoucq 2003).

Using survey data from the Afrobarometer (AB) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) on the 2007 Federal and State Elections in Nigeria, I jointly examine the institutional, partisan, and electoral irregularity-based determinants of election quality. I find that citizens rely most on their evaluations of the election-related institutions<sup>2</sup> to gauge election quality, relative to partisanship and experience with electoral irregularities. Not surprisingly, of the five election-related institutions that I examine in the context of Nigeria, citizens' assessment of the electoral commission's<sup>3</sup> performance is most crucial in their judgments of election quality.

Building on these findings, the second purpose of the paper is to investigate how citizens evaluate the performance of electoral commissions. In particular, I concentrate on citizens' evaluations of the *autonomy* and *capacity* of the electoral commission in Nigeria. My analysis reveals that Nigerians rely more upon their assessment of the electoral commission's autonomy relative to its capacity when forming their opinions of election quality. In other words, the extent to which the electoral commission can independently carry out its functions without interference from government and other political or societal actors was more important to Nigerians than whether it had the institutional capacity to effectively manage elections.

The third purpose of the paper is to assess the accuracy of citizens' opinions on election quality. The existing literature often questions the validity of perception-based measures because these measures are often susceptible to information deficits or various sources of bias. I gauge the accuracy of citizen election perceptions, by probing the correlation between Nigerians' perceptions of election quality and other non-perception based indicators of election quality. More specifically, I find that in states where opposition parties filed a high number of post-election petitions, Nigerians had a more negative perception of the quality of the 2007 elections.

My research makes the following contributions to the literature on election quality. First, I expand upon the existing studies by comprehensively testing three competing explanations and underscoring the importance of institutional performance evaluations. Second, by looking closely at various dimensions of election commission performance, I demonstrate the relative importance of institutional

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<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Professor M. Bratton, D. Carter, S. Choi, B. Kennedy, J. Lavery and H. Lee for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Election-related institutions refer to election management bodies (election commissions) and other state non-state institutions involved directly or indirectly in the administration of elections.

<sup>3</sup> I use the terms election commission and electoral management bodies (EMB) interchangeably.

autonomy in emerging democracies. And in so doing, I provide more rigorous empirical support to the existing literature that explores the role of electoral commissions in Africa (Gyimah-Boadi 1999; Debrah 2011). Third, this paper is the first, to my knowledge, to test the validity of perception measures within the context of fraudulent elections.

The following section of the paper examines the literature on the three competing explanations on the determinants of election quality perceptions. Section 2 briefly summarizes the context of the 2007 elections in Nigeria. Section 3 outlines the empirical analysis and discusses the results. Section 4, explores the validity of citizens' perception of election quality, and Section 5 provides a brief conclusion.

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Determinants of Election Quality Perceptions**

Within the emerging literature on perceptions of election quality there are three major explanations on what shapes citizens' views on electoral quality: institutions, partisanship, and electoral irregularities. A main objective of this paper is to jointly evaluate these competing explanations and explore their relative salience.

#### ***Institutions***

Only recently have scholars begun to assess the institutional sources of citizen perceptions of election quality. While there have been important strides, the perception-based literature is deficient in two primary ways. First, the literature has not effectively gauged the influence of electoral commissions (formerly referred to as electoral management bodies (EMBs)) on citizens' evaluation of election quality. Second, the literature does not focus on a wide-range of institutions related to elections, especially within emerging democratic contexts.

In examining the impact of EMBs, the perceptions-based literature can be divided into two main groups. One set of studies fail out rightly to assess the influence of EMB performance in their assessment of perceptions of election quality (Rose and Mishler 2009; Moehler 2009). For instance, Mishler and Rose (2009) assess the sources of citizens' election quality perceptions in the context of Russia, and although they highlight the importance of partisanship and other socio-demographic factors they do not examine the impact of citizens' evaluations of EMB performance.

A second set of studies, while focusing on EMB performance, only examines a single dimension. As a result, these studies are incapable of reflecting the complex relationship between EMB performance and citizens' election quality judgments. Birch provides the most recent cross-national study on the institutional correlates of election quality using data from 28 elections in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (2008). She identifies autonomous election administration along with proportionality of elections, and public financing of political parties as institutional factors which structure confidence in electoral processes. Regarding election administration, her findings indicate that citizens living in countries with autonomous EMBs are more likely to consider elections as *illegitimate*. Birch's findings contradict the existing empirical and theoretical literature that associates autonomous EMBS with a greater likelihood of free and fair elections.<sup>4</sup> She attributes these counterintuitive results to the fact that formal-legal independence might not reflect the actual independence of the institution. Although I accept Birch's justification, there remains a lack of consensus on the impact of EMB autonomy on citizens' election perceptions.

A promising series of studies in the American context has also pursued single dimensional assessment of EMB performance. Hall *et al* (2009) focus on EMB capacity by exploring citizens' assessment of poll worker performance in the 2000 US elections. Interestingly, they find that citizens who rate poll worker performance as excellent had greater confidence in the elections. Similarly, research carried

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<sup>4</sup> Various empirical studies find that electoral management bodies that possess high levels of autonomy, are more likely to provide the context for free and fair elections (Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo 2008; Pastor 1999)

out by Alvarez *et al* (2008) shows how citizens' evaluation of the credibility of voting technology has direct, positive implications for their confidence in elections.

Despite the new attention to electoral management bodies, the inadequate treatment of the multiple dimensions of EMB performance has left gaps in the literature. I distinguish between citizens' evaluations of EMB *capacity* and EMB *autonomy* and probe the impact of these evaluations on citizens' perceptions of election quality. I conceptualize autonomy as an institution's ability to make decisions independent of the control of the executive and other state and society actors. Capacity, on the other hand, connotes an institution's ability to implement its constitutionally mandated function in an effective and efficient manner.<sup>5</sup>

A second shortcoming of the perception-based literature is limited institutional scope. Although electoral management bodies are the main arbiters of elections in many emerging democracies, there are other pivotal election-related institutions, which the existing scholarship has overlooked. These election-related institutions include the police (and other security forces such as the military), the courts and election tribunals, the media, international and domestic observers, and other independent and state-based institutions. In this paper, I assess five election-related institutions that are crucial for understanding elections within the African context: police, military, judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and the media. The selection of these institutions is rooted both in the theoretical and empirical literatures. First, Diamond (2002) regards the impartial treatment of rival candidates and parties by the courts, police, and military as an essential part of electoral fairness in transitional settings. Specifically within Nigeria context, scholars underscore the importance of the police and other security agencies (Bratton 2008; Okoigun 2000) courts and election tribunals (Fall *et al.* 2011, 108-158) as pivotal institutions worthy of focused examination.

### ***Partisanship***

In addition to the import of institutional factors, other studies have examined the impact of partisanship on perceptions of election quality (Moehler 2009; Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Birch 2008; Rose and Mishler 2009). Partisanship is represented as either an ingrained ideological attachment to a political party (Goren 2005) or an affiliation with the winner or loser of the electoral contest (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Anderson and LoTempio 2002). Regardless of the dominant method through which citizens are affiliated to political parties, this attachment structures their perceptions of election quality. Partisanship provides a perceptual frame for interpreting information regarding the quality of elections: those affiliated with the winning party are more inclined to believe that the success of their party was legitimate, while those affiliated with the losing party search for evidence to show that their favored candidate or party was shortchanged. In a recent cross-national analysis of citizens' perceptions of election quality in Africa, Moehler (2009) considers affiliation with the electoral winner. She finds that, relative to all other factors, "winner status has the largest influence on evaluations of electoral integrity in both substantive and statistical terms." Similar research by Alvarez *et al* (2009) show that, within the American context, partisanship has a significant impact on citizens' confidence in the accuracy of the vote count and tabulation for the US presidential elections in 2000 and 2004. Republicans, compared to Independents and Democrats, were most likely to display confidence in the elections on the grounds that their candidate won the elections.

The main limitation of the political orientations thesis is that it does not effectively test the impact of electoral institutions. The empirical models used in these studies are underspecified and incapable of accurately adjudicating the relative significance of alternative sources of citizens' election perceptions. For instance, Moehler's (2009) assessment of the determinants of electoral integrity in Africa, fails to control for citizens' evaluation of any election-related institutions. To overcome this shortcoming in the literature, I test the relative importance of citizens' partisan status while controlling for other important institutional determinants.

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<sup>5</sup> The theoretical basis for a distinction between EMB autonomy and capacity is informed by Bratton's conceptual separation of political autonomy and political capacity: in which "autonomy refers to the process in which actors set goals for organizations whereas capacity signifies the means of goal realization" (1994: 236).

### ***Electoral Irregularities***

There are two main ways in which the literature approaches the link between electoral irregularities and perceptions of election quality.<sup>6</sup> First, some studies employ indirect measures of electoral irregularities that do not effectively capture the extent of the phenomenon and also make it difficult to understand the causal effect. For example, Birch uses an aggregate measure of corruption perceptions<sup>7</sup> and assumes that in countries where political corruption is pervasive citizens are more likely to consider the administration of elections to be corrupt (2008). While this might be the case, a more direct approach that taps into citizens own experience with and perceptions of electoral irregularities may more clearly highlight how electoral irregularities shape popular opinions on the election.

Another group of studies rely on micro-level data to assess citizens' perceptions of, and experience with, electoral irregularities (Collier and Vicente 2008; Alvarez, Hall, and Hyde 2008; McCann and Dominguez 1998; Schaffer 2007; Schedler 1999; Bratton 2008). Bratton carries out a thorough examination of citizens' perceptions of electoral irregularities in the context of the 2007 Nigerian election campaign period (2008). Nigerians who experience threats of violence are less likely to vote in the upcoming elections or support the ruling party. Those offered material benefits in exchange for their votes exude greater partisan loyalty; but they are no more likely to participate in elections, than those not offered.<sup>8</sup> Although existing studies directly examine citizens' experience with electoral irregularities and deal with the consequences on electoral behavior, surprisingly none of them directly test the effect of these experiences on citizens' perceptions of election quality. Nevertheless, these studies are instructive because they identify various potential causal pathways between experience with election irregularities and evaluations of election quality. For instance, if we build upon Bratton's (2008) findings regarding the impact of intimidation, we would expect that citizens who experience irregularities may score the elections poorly not only because of their experience but because they were also deprived of their constitutional right to participate in the elections.

My main contribution is to see whether citizens believe that the presence of electoral irregularities influences the overall outcome of elections. Undoubtedly, irregularities occur but it is important to see which types matter and to what extent experience or perceptions of electoral irregularities factor in the overall perceptions of election quality.

### **How Do Citizens Assess Election Quality?**

In addition to outlining the main sources of citizens' evaluation of election quality, I propose specific mechanisms through which citizens construct their election quality perceptions. First, I argue that citizens are, for the most part, capable of making informed and relatively accurate assessments of the legitimacy of election processes that take place in their country. Similar assertions have been made in the existing literature (Birch 2008; Pastor 1999; Banducci and Karp 2003).

This research goes a step forward by specifying pathways through which citizens formulate their election judgments.

1. Directly, through experience with various stages of the electoral process such as voter registration, political party campaigns, polling activities (queuing, casting a ballot and observing the poll station count) and experience with EMB staff (permanent and ad hoc), security officials, and members of political parties.

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<sup>6</sup> I define electoral irregularities as the range of illicit activities that political actors employ to alter election outcomes or to undermine the electoral process (Lehoucq 2003). The current literature focuses predominantly on four types of irregularities: vote buying, intimidation, violence, and ballot rigging (Collier and Vicente 2008; Bratton 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Birch uses the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) as a proxy for electoral fraud.

<sup>8</sup> Collier and Vicente (2009) arrive at similar findings in Nigeria using a combination of survey and field experiments. Most notably that experience and perceptions of violent intimidation negatively affect voter-turnout.



2. Indirectly, through information obtained from the media (TV, radio, newspapers, and internet) political parties, civic organizations, as well as popular discourse and face-to-face conversations.

Citizens further combine their assessments from multiple pathways to construct their overall assessments of election quality. When attitudes are formed through direct experience, they are more reliable, but limited in scope. For instance, a voter may assess the impartiality of EMB staff working on election day when she votes, but may not have first-hand knowledge of the impartiality of other EMB staff working in other regions of the country. However even at this level, citizen evaluations can be biased by (1) prior performance evaluations of institutions in previous elections; (2) partisan affiliations; (3) social and demographic attributes, including education, cognition and ethnicity.

Attitudes constructed through indirect information about electoral processes have greater scope and allow citizens a more comprehensive assessment of the elections. Yet, generating a clear picture through this channel depends on (1) the availability of information; (2) the accuracy of information; and, (3) citizens' willingness to seek out information on elections. Availability and reliability of information on elections is usually a function of a free, independent, vibrant media environment that produces high quality information with broad coverage throughout the country. Within such an environment, opposition parties will have more opportunities to publicize fraud and electoral malpractice, while journalists play an active role as watchdogs and whistleblowers during the election. Finally, indirect channels also depend on citizens' willingness to seek out information. Following empirical studies emphasizing the effect that greater access to media has on voting behavior (Conroy-Krutz 2009) and political attitudes (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005), I contended that citizens with greater access to media will be more informed about various aspects of the elections and thereby more likely to develop accurate assessments of the quality of elections.

In sum, I have presented three competing explanations for the sources of citizens' election quality evaluations — election-related institutional performance, partisanship, and experience with electoral irregularities. I also outlined the process through which citizens construct their election quality judgments. The next step is to describe the electoral context in which the study takes place.

## II. 2007 NIGERIA ELECTION CONTEXT

The 2007 Federal and State elections in Nigeria were a watershed that represented the third consecutive election since a democratic transition in 1999. It was also first time that Nigerians would witness civilian turnover in leadership because, at the end of a two-year term in office, President Obasanjo was ineligible to run again (Ibrahim 2007). Nevertheless, commentators regarded the elections as the worst in the country's history: a continuation of a downward spiral in election quality evident in 1999 and 2003 elections. During the 2007 election period, Nigerians witnessed widespread electoral irregularities — such as underage voting, ballot box stuffing, voter and observer intimidation, false announcement of results— and electoral violence including numerous political assassinations and approximately 280 deaths between November 2006 and April 2007 (National Democratic Institute 2007; International Crisis Group 2007). Local and international observers condemned political parties for perpetuating a culture of violence, political assassinations and vote rigging. Security forces, mainly the Nigerian Police Force, were blamed for their blatant support of political candidates and their inability to maintain law and order. Independent Nigerian Electoral Commission (INEC), the main electoral management body in Nigeria, was censured for its lack of independence from executive control, low levels of transparency, and ineffective election administration (European Union 2007).

The incumbent Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) swept the elections winning the presidency, a super-majority in the National Assembly, and most of the state governorship races.<sup>9</sup> However, the conduct

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Umar Musa Yar'Adua of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) received 24.6 million votes and secured the presidency, while Muhammadu

of the elections brought so much international and domestic condemnation that the newly elected president Umaru Yar'Adua in his inauguration speech admitted the illegitimate basis of his election and committed to broad-based electoral reform (National Democratic Institute 2007). Another indication of the woeful conduct of the 2007 elections was seen with the number of petitions filed with the Election Tribunals.<sup>10</sup> In 2007, over 1250 election petitions were filed, relative to 560 in 2003 and 400 in 2011 (Fall *et al.* 2011). The nature of the irregularities was so pronounced that tribunals overturned many of the certified election results. For instance, elections results were vacated in 9 out of 36 gubernatorial elections.

### **Role of the Independent National Electoral Commission**

According to the Nigerian Constitution (1999) and the Electoral Act (2006), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the main electoral management body in Nigeria. INEC is granted powers to organize Federal and State elections, to register voters and political parties, and to monitor party financing and political campaigns (*Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution 1999*).

Since its creation in 1999, INEC has been characterized by a lack of independence, professionalism and administrative efficiency (Fall *et al.* 2011). The appointment process for INEC commissioners at both the federal and state level gives the first indication of the deficiency in INEC's institutional autonomy. The Constitution gives the President authority to appoint all 12 INEC commissioners (and the 36 Resident Electoral Commissioners) with the approval of the Senate. The presidents' monopoly over the appointment process has direct implications for INEC's popular legitimacy and its ability to impartially organize elections. Since 1999, opposition parties, civil society and the general public perceive the commission as being biased in favor of the incumbent government (Report of the Electoral Reform Committee 2008).<sup>11</sup> In fact, when asked to describe the relationship between the President and the Chairman of INEC, political elites often repeat a familiar phrase: "he who pays the piper calls the tune".<sup>12</sup> In other words, stakeholders consider the INEC chairman to be beholden to the president because the president is responsible for his appointment.

Another source of concern has been INEC's lack of financial independence. The Electoral Act (2006) established the INEC Fund to increase the institution's financial autonomy. However, this fund was not implemented during the 2007 election period. Instead, President Obasanjo was accused of using his control over the commission's purse strings to frustrate the effective and timely execution of key aspects of electoral administration (European Union 2007; National Democratic Institute 2007). Although INEC did not publicize its funding difficulties with the executive, other civil society organizations and political parties frequently highlighted these problems in the media.

Along with deficiencies in INEC autonomy, the organization also lacked the operational and professional capacity to effectively organize the 2007 elections. Voter registration, which is considered the hallmark of any successful election, was an abysmal failure (Herskovits 2007; Omotola 2009; Fall *et al.* 2011, 149). The registration process was constantly delayed and a highly anticipated direct data capture method of registration was only partially implemented. As a result, many Nigerians were systematically disenfranchised. Furthermore politicians hijacked the process and inflated the voters' roll with fictitious names. Although INEC was able to register approximately 60 million Nigerians, many stakeholders questioned the accuracy and reliability of the voters' roll.

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Buhari of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) received 6.6 million and Vice President Atiku Abubakar, candidate of Action Congress (AC) followed with 2.6 million.

<sup>10</sup> The 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Section 285) and 2006 Electoral Act (Part IX) empowers the Electoral Tribunal to hear petitions brought forward by candidates and political parties.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, one common interpretation of the Electoral Act of 2006 and 2002 was that membership on the commission was restricted to card carry members of political parties, as electoral commissioners should meet the same qualifications as those seeking to serve as members of the House of Representatives (Kew 2007).

<sup>12</sup> These views were conveyed during interviews with various election stakeholders conducted throughout Nigeria in June 2010.

Deficits in INEC's professionalism and administrative capacity were brought into full public view on election day. Voters witnessed the late arrival and non-arrival of election materials. In some states of the South West, there was deliberate cancellation of elections and collusion between INEC staff and political officials in the stuffing of ballot boxes with pre-marked ballots (International Crisis Group 2007 :207). During counting and tabulation, citizens also observed the falsification of election results and declaration of elections in favor of candidates who failed to receive a majority of votes. One prominent example of the manipulation of results was seen with the Gubernatorial elections in Anambra state: allegedly, the Resident Electoral Commissioner of Anambra state shaved 900,000 votes off one candidate's vote totals because it exceeded the possible number of votes cast in the elections (International Crisis Group 2007 ).

### **Role of the Police and Security Agencies**

The Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies (including the Nigerian Military, Civil Defense, and State Security Services) have historically played a pivotal role in elections in Nigeria. According to the Electoral Act (2006), police are legally mandated to provide security during election campaigns, and they fulfill various functions during elections. For instance, on election day it is common to see security officials mounting roadblocks, guarding individual polling stations, and escorting ballot boxes from polling stations to collation centers. Despite their centrality to the election process, Nigerians question the neutrality and professionalism of the security forces. During 2007 elections, there was a widespread view that the president, sitting governors, and politicians affiliated with the PDP manipulated members of security agencies for electoral gain (National Democratic Institute 2007, 27). Various organizations alleged that policemen turned a blind eye to electoral irregularities, while other members of the police force were actively engaged in stealing ballot boxes, transporting political thugs, and denying opposition voters access to polling stations (International Crisis Group 2007 :4).

### **Role of the Judiciary**

The Nigerian judiciary has been called upon in pre- and post-election periods to adjudicate on election-related cases. During the pre-election period, fractious disputes over political party primaries and a culture of candidate imposition prompted many aggrieved candidates to seek redress with the courts. In the post-election period, losing parties and candidates filed petitions with the Election Tribunals. Public confidence in the judiciary increased significantly during and after the 2007 elections, because of the judiciary's apparent autonomy in decision-making. Many of its rulings undermined the electoral position of the incumbent PDP (Joseph and Kew 2008; Omotola 2010; Fall et al. 2011, 137). As noted, Election Tribunals and Supreme Court overturned the election results in 9 out of 36 gubernatorial elections in the post-election period. Although some commentators describe the court interventions as a perversion of democracy, citizens in states where elections were manipulated saw the court actions as a democratic safeguard. To them, the courts provided democratic justice where the incumbent, INEC and the security forces had fallen short.

## **III. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: DETERMINANTS OF ELECTION QUALITY**

### **Hypotheses**

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the determinants of citizens' perceptions of election quality. To this end, I present the following hypotheses that highlight three explanations:

Institutional Explanations:

**H1:** *Citizens with positive evaluations of the performance of election-related institutions are more likely to perceive elections as being free and fair.*

Partisanship Explanations:

**H2:** *Citizens affiliated with the party of the electoral winner are more likely to perceive elections as free and fair.*

Election Irregularities Explanations:

**H3:** *Citizens who experience electoral irregularities are less likely to perceive elections as free and fair.*

I test these hypotheses in the context of the April 2007 Presidential, National Assembly and State elections using data from Round 4 of the Afrobarometer survey on Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

## **Data and Methods**

### ***Perceptions of Election Quality***

The main dependent variable, perceived election quality, captures respondents' perceptions of the quality of the 2007 elections.<sup>14</sup> Respondents were asked "On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election held in 2007?" Potential responses included, "Not Free and Fair, Free and Fair with Major Problems, Free and Fair with Minor Problems, Completely Free and Fair". The original variable is re-scaled into a dichotomous variable with 1 indicating that citizens perceived the elections as "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems", while 0 denotes the elections as "free or fair with major problems" or "not free and fair."<sup>15</sup>

### ***Institutional Performance***

Moving to the potential explanatory factors, I assess the institutional hypothesis by examining the performance of five institutions responsible for election management in Nigeria: (1) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); (2) Nigerian Police Force; (3) Nigerian Military; (4) Election Tribunals; and (5) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).<sup>16</sup> The basic expectation is that citizens who view the performance of these institutions in favorable terms will more likely to consider the conduct of the elections to be free and fair. As mentioned previously, the literature has focused disproportionately on the effect of electoral commissions on election quality; here I expand the scope of the institutional focus to include a range of institutions that are related to election management, including security agencies and the courts.

### ***Institutional Trust***

In addition to assessing the influence of institutional performance on citizens' election judgments, I incorporate measures of institutional trust for the five institutions mentioned above. I am interested in gauging whether institutional trust has a distinct association with perceptions of election quality relative to the direct questions on institutional performance evaluations. I expect institutional trust to be positively associated with perceptions of election quality.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Afrobarometer (AB) conducted the survey in Nigeria in May 2008 with a nationally representative sample of 2408 Nigerians that allows for inferences to the national population based on +2 margin of error. For more information see: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

<sup>14</sup> Information on the coding of all variables are included in Appendix A

<sup>15</sup> Birch (2008) employs a similar binary measure using CSES data while Moehler (2009) and Bratton (2007) used the original ordinal measure with AB data. Although, re-scaling election quality as a binary variable may limit the variability in citizens' evaluations, I employ the use of the measure because it provides better interpretation of the results. As will be further highlighted, all empirical models using perceptions of election quality as the DV have been estimated using both the dichotomous and ordinal measures and there are no significant substantive differences in the results. Another potential concern is the reliability of using a single item indicator as the dependent variable, however as pointed out by Anderson *et al* (2005) the main problem associated with using a single item is lower significance levels, importantly however this will not bias the regression estimates.

<sup>16</sup> The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a Nigerian law enforcement agency responsible for investigating financial crimes. Established in 2003, the agency became very influential during the 2007 elections as it prosecuted numerous political candidates.

<sup>17</sup> The focus on institutional trust is informed both by the extant literature and fieldwork experience. Following the work by Mishler and Rose (2001), institutional trust can reflect both citizens' most recent evaluation of the institution's performance as well as historical evaluations. While we expect citizens' trust in the EMB to be closely related to their performance evaluations, there are instances in which the two attitudes may deviate, in that citizens might not trust an institution given its long history of producing unfavorable outputs, but yet believe that it currently performed well or above expectations.

### ***Partisanship***

I develop two measures of partisanship. Citizens affiliated with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the winner of the 2007 presidential election are coded as 2; those not affiliated with any political party coded as 1; and citizens affiliated with any of the opposition parties coded as 0. I also include a measure for voting intentions. Respondents were asked which presidential party they would vote for if elections were held tomorrow. The indicator is coded in a similar fashion (0=opposition party, 1=undecided, 2= PDP). My expectation is that citizens affiliated with the PDP and those who would vote for the PDP are more likely to consider elections free and fair, relative to opposition supporters or those who are undecided or non-partisans.

### ***Perceptions of Electoral Irregularities***

I examine perceptions of electoral irregularities using three indicators: (1) fear of intimidation and violence, (2) freedom to vote, and (3) ballot secrecy. I use an indicator for fear of intimidation and violence that asks respondents the extent to which they personally fear becoming a victim. A second indicator assesses citizens' perceived ability to vote "without feeling pressured". Although this question has normally been used as a measure of procedural liberty, I believe that it provides another proxy for the extent of intimidation voters may experience. The third indicator gauges whether citizens believe that their voting decisions are private. Ballot secrecy is a core requirement of Nigerian legal framework and regional and international electoral law. The violation of this principle represents an electoral irregularity, for example if influential individuals circumvent electoral safeguards in order to monitor citizens' voting decisions. The main expectation is that citizens, who fear intimidation and violence, worry about being pressured, and doubt the secrecy of the ballot, are less likely to have confidence in the quality of elections.

### ***Controls***

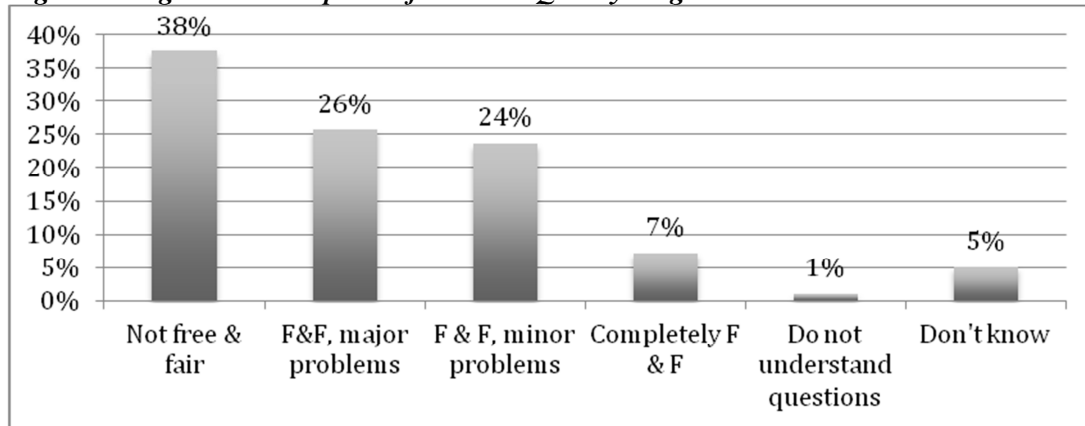
Along with the main independent variables, I also include a series of controls that the literature highlights as being correlated with perceptions of election quality. We include two indicators of citizens' level of political engagement, whether a respondent was registered to vote and whether the respondent voted in the 2007 elections. I propose that voters are more likely to consider elections credible relative to non-voters; moreover, the experience of registering and actually voting will help citizens develop more accurate assessment of election quality. I also control for citizens' level of political sophistication through two indices. First is political interest, which includes two items weighted on a scale from 0-1: citizens' interest in public affairs and frequency of discussing politics. Second is media exposure, which includes three items weighted on a scale from 0-1: frequency of obtaining news from radio, TV, and newspaper. I expect that access to information will enhance citizens' ability to accurately evaluate election quality. Controls are included for evaluations of government performance which includes five items on a scale from 0-1, and economic performance, which includes two items that examine present egotropic and sociotropic evaluations. Lastly, I control for various dimensions of social structure: age, gender, level of education, urban/rural location, co-ethnicity with the president, and experience with ethnic discrimination.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

### ***Nigerians' Perceptions of the Quality of the 2007 Elections***

Almost a year after the 2007 elections, the Afrobarometer asked Nigerians to assess the quality of the 2007 elections (AB R4). According to Figure 1, a plurality of respondents rated the elections as "Not free and fair" (37%), while one-quarter of respondents saw the elections as "Free and fair with major problems" (26%). When these two categories are combined almost two-thirds of Nigerians (63%) offered a negative evaluation of the electoral process. Not surprisingly, only seven percent of those interviewed were convinced of the absolute legitimacy of the elections.

**Figure 1: Nigerians Perception of Election Quality: Nigeria AB 2008**

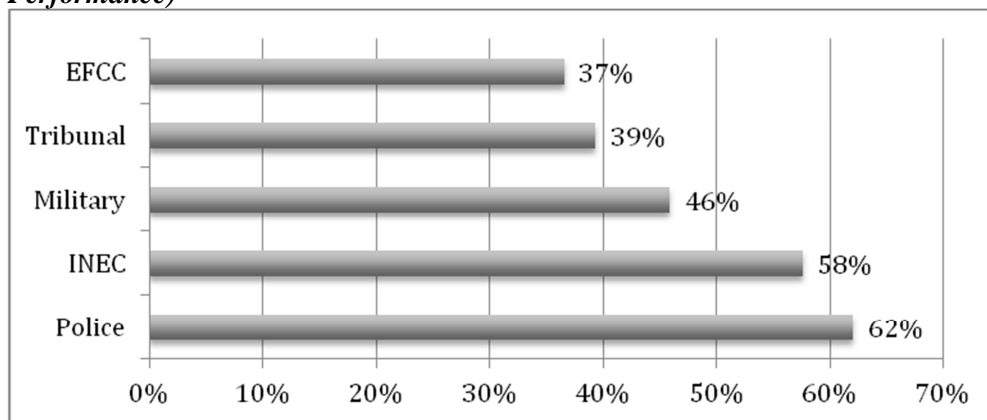


Source: Nigeria Afrobarometer Round 4 (2008)

### **Nigerians' Evaluations of Election-related Institutions**

We now switch our focus to citizens' performance evaluations of INEC, Police, Military, Election tribunals and the EFCC during the 2007 elections. As highlighted in Figure 2, of the five institutions, Nigerians were most critical of the performance of the police with 62 percent expressing dissatisfaction. INEC followed a close second as a majority of Nigerians (58%) graded the election commission as either "very poor" or "fairly poor". Nigerians were almost split on the performance of the military (46% dissatisfied versus 44% satisfied); while a minority of Nigerians were unimpressed with the performance of the Election Tribunals (39%) and the EFCC (37%).<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 2: Nigerians' Evaluations of Election-related Institutions (Percentage Dissatisfied with Performance)**



Source: Nigeria Afrobarometer Round 4 (2008)

Note: The percentage of dissatisfied include respondents who indicated they were "not at all satisfied" or not very satisfied" with the Police, EFCC, and Military, and respondents who indicated that the performance of INEC and Election Tribunal was "poor" or "very poor".

### **Nigerians' Partisan Attachments**

Next, I examine citizens' affiliation to the winning and losing parties in the 2007 elections. Almost half of the respondents (48%) classified themselves as non-partisans. The remaining respondents were split in their allegiances: 28 percent said they were affiliated with the opposition, while 24 percent reported being close to the ruling PDP. As for voting intentions, I find that if election were held tomorrow, a plurality (40%) of Nigerians would have voted for the opposition, while there was a split between undecided and those who would have supported the PDP (29% and 30% respectively).

<sup>18</sup> Of all the agencies Nigerians were least knowledgeable about the EFCC (18%); this is compared to INEC (6%) Police (4%) and Military (9%)

### ***Perceptions of Electoral Irregularities***

Finally I examine perceptions of election irregularities. In Nigeria over four in ten respondents were significantly fearful of intimidation and violence. While an overwhelming majority of Nigerians (71%) believed that they were free to choose whom to vote, the results were starkly different for ballot secrecy. Over 40 percent of Nigerians felt that powerful individuals were either “somewhat” or “very likely” to find out how they voted.

### **Statistical Analysis**

I begin the analysis by estimating the influence of institutional performance, partisanship, and electoral irregularities on citizens’ perceptions of election quality (coded as a dichotomous variable) while controlling for other election-related and demographic factors.

The results of a logistic regression model are shown in Table 1. First, the results indicate that the performance of INEC, Military and the EFCC matter for perceptions of electoral fairness (as demonstrated by the significant coefficients). Citizens who express dissatisfaction with the performance of these three institutions were likely to see the election quality as unfavorable. Citizens’ evaluations of the Police and Election Tribunals did not have a statically significant effect on citizens’ election judgments when all other institutions were controlled for.<sup>19</sup>

The results also indicate that trust in INEC is positively associated with perceptions of election quality. Importantly, this correlation suggests that Nigerians’ assessment of election quality is influenced not only by the immediate evaluations of the institutions’ performance during 2007 elections, but also by the level of trust that has developed with the institution over time. However, citizens’ distrust of other institutions has no meaningful impact on their election quality evaluations.<sup>20</sup>

The partisanship hypothesis is not confirmed, at least in terms of a standard measure of party identification. Although the sign of the coefficient is consistent with prior expectations, the coefficient is insignificant (results not shown). I find this result to be puzzling given the import in the literature of the status of elections “winners” and “losers.” Thus, as a second option, I used an alternative indicator: voting intentions. As demonstrated in the Model, respondents who intend to vote for the incumbent PDP in 2008 were more likely to consider the 2007 elections legitimate.

Regarding perceptions of election irregularities, citizens who express concern about being victimized during elections are less likely to consider elections free and fair. However, secrecy of the ballot and freedom to vote fail to gain significance in the model.<sup>21</sup>

As hypothesized, sophisticated and well-informed voters were more likely to see elections as legitimate. Although, interest in politics did not affect citizen judgments, their degree of media exposure did. Nigerians with greater exposure to media were more critical of the quality of elections and likely to see them as unacceptable. This finding underscores the important role that mass media outlets play in disseminating information about elections, and the role that media exposure plays in increasing citizens’ ability to critically assess various democratic processes. Furthermore, citizens with positive evaluations of government performance expectantly view election conduct more legitimately. Finally, urban respondents are more likely to consider elections free and fair, while females were more critical of election quality.

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<sup>19</sup> Given the prominence of the police in elections, the absence of a significant effect on perceptions of elections quality is puzzling. In an attempt to understand the finding, we ran subsequent models without the military, and found that citizens’ evaluations of police performance had a meaningful impact election quality.

<sup>20</sup> This result holds even in models in which trust in INEC is not included.

<sup>21</sup> To ensure that the effects of Fear of Intimidation did not overshadow the results regarding secrecy of the ballot and freedom to vote, I estimated another model without fear of intimidation and both variables remained insignificant.

**Table 1: Determinants of Citizens' Perceptions of Election Quality - Logistic Regression**

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standard errors
<b>Institutional Performance Evaluations</b>		
INEC	.604***	.085
Police	.17	.095
Military	.277***	.103
EFCC	.344***	.095
Election Tribunal	.069	.097
<b>Institutional Trust</b>		
INEC	.191**	.093
Police	.012	.081
EFCC	-.001	.093
Election Tribunal	.024	.096
<b>Partisanship</b>		
Vote Choice (support Ruling Party)	.264***	.08
<b>Electoral Irregularities</b>		
Fear of Intimidation	-.241***	.068
Freedom to Vote	.105	.075
Ballot Secrecy	.017	.073
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>		
Registered to vote in 2007 Elections	-.296	.403
Voted in 2007 Elections	.296*	.078
<b>Political Sophistication</b>		
Index of Political Interests	.224	.268
Index of Media Exposure	-.941***	.355
<b>Evaluations of Government Performance</b>		
Government	.637	.457
Economic	.331	.349
<b>Social Structure</b>		
Age	-.003	.006
Female	-.385***	.145
Urban Resident	.408***	.115
Education	-.002	.0416
Ethnic Discrimination	-.256	.249
<b>Constant</b>	-3.896	.653
Observations	1271	1271
Pseudo R2	0.245	0.245

*Note: DV Perceptions of Election Quality (0=Not Free and Fair 1= Free and Fair)*

*Nigeria Afrobarometer Round 4 (2008)*

*All tests are two tailed. \*\*\* p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1; Model also included controls for the six geo-political zones.*

### **What Matters Most: Institutions, Political Orientations, or Perceptions of Electoral Irregularities?**

Given that I find empirical support for all conjectures regarding the effects of institutions, partisanship and electoral irregularities, I use predicted probabilities to highlight the relative substantive effects of the main variables.<sup>22</sup> Figure 3 illustrates the change in predicted probability of a respondent perceiving election quality to be free and fair given a minimum to maximum change of a specific independent variable.<sup>23</sup>

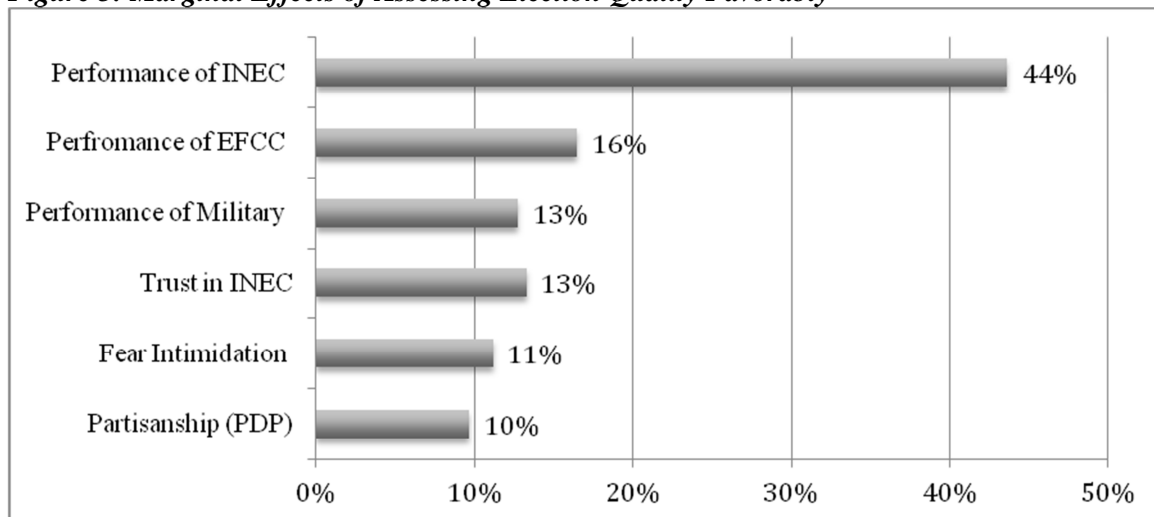
<sup>22</sup> All predicted probability estimates were calculated on Model 1 in Table 1 using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). When all variables in the model are held at their mean the predicted probability that a respondent will have positive evaluations of election quality is 0.3.

<sup>23</sup> For the marginal effects calculations, all non-binary independent variables are held at their mean, while Gender is set at female and residential location set to urban.



The strongest predictor is the performance of INEC. For instance, when citizens are highly satisfied with the performance of INEC, they are 41 percent more likely to consider the 2007 election free and fair. Furthermore, performance evaluations of election-related institutions —INEC, EFCC and the military — have a greater substantive influence on election quality evaluations compared to partisanship and experience with electoral irregularities. Those who fear intimidation are fifteen percent less likely to assess elections quality favorably, while Nigerians who would vote for opposition parties are eleven percent less likely to consider elections free and fair. These findings suggest that Nigerians place more emphasis on the performance of election-related institutions than on political affiliations and experience with election irregularities when forming opinions about the quality of elections.

**Figure 3: Marginal Effects of Assessing Election Quality Favorably**



### **Citizens' Evaluation of INEC Autonomy and Capacity**

Results of the statistical analysis confirm many findings in the theoretical and empirical literature on the import of election management bodies to election quality. However, the results also present opportunities for further inquiry. Given an electoral context characterized by widespread irregularities, what dimensions of EMB institutional performance do citizens regard as most important? Are citizens able to distinguish between EMB autonomy and EMB capacity?

To address these questions, I utilize data from International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) post-election survey conducted in Nigeria immediately after the 2007 elections.<sup>24</sup> I incorporate this survey because it includes a battery of questions that probe citizens' evaluations of different aspects of the election process, specifically examining dimensions of INEC capacity and autonomy.

The main variable of interest is perceptions of election quality. IFES ask respondents: "In your opinion, how free and fair were the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections? Were the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections completely free and fair, somewhat free and fair, not too free and fair or not at all free and fair?" As done in the previous analysis with Afrobarometer data, I rescale this indicator into a dichotomous variable.

Moving to the main explanatory variables, I separate INEC performance into two dimensions: (1) autonomy; and (2) capacity, and examine both aspects separately but simultaneously. First, I utilize an index of three questions to operationalize Nigerians' perceptions of the INEC's autonomy in the 2007 elections. The IFES survey investigates respondents' evaluations of (1) the overall neutrality of INEC;

<sup>24</sup> IFES conducted the survey between May 3 and 10 with a nationally representative sample of 2,416 Nigerians that allows for national inferences based on +2 margin of error.

(2) the impartiality of poll workers; and (3) the impartiality of the counting and tabulation processes. The *Autonomy Index* ranges from 0 to 1 with increasing levels of perceived autonomy.<sup>25</sup>

The other main causal variable represents the perceived capacity of INEC. I gauge perceived capacity through a composite index constructed from four questions that gauge respondents' opinions about aspects of the administration of elections. These include citizens' satisfaction with the voter registration process, their evaluation of the adequacy of information regarding the poll location and voting procedures, and their judgments about competence of poll workers and the adequacy of poll facilities. The *Capacity Index* ranges from 0 to 1 with increasing levels of perceived capacity.

Additionally, I examine the performance of the police and include an indicator for the performance of the media. The IFES survey, however, does not include questions examining the performance of the EFCC, or Election Tribunals. In terms of institutional trust, we also include measures of institutional trust for INEC, Police, EFCC, and the media. The IFES survey asks slightly different questions regarding electoral irregularities. The item on ballot secrecy is similar to the Afrobarometer survey, but IFES adds three additional questions that gauge experience with intimidation, vote buying, and violence. I expect that experience with intimidation should reduce perceptions of election quality, while the effect of experience with vote buying may be ambiguous given the acceptability of the practice in Nigeria. I also include controls for political engagement, political sophistication, performance evaluations, and social structure.

Again, I estimate the determinants of perceptions of election quality using a logistic regression model. The findings bear many similarities to the previous analysis with Afrobarometer data. The results in Model 1 of Table 3 reveal that Nigerians evaluations of INEC autonomy and capacity are both positively correlated with perceptions of election quality. That is, the more Nigerians believe that INEC is autonomous from the control of political elite and the more it has the capacity to effectively administer elections the more citizens regard elections as credible. The predicted probabilities in Figure 4 provide further insight on the dimensions of INEC capacity and autonomy. The more positive Nigerians' evaluations of INEC capacity and autonomy, the more favorable their judgment of election quality is. Importantly, citizen evaluations of INEC autonomy have a greater impact on their judgments of election quality, than do their perceptions of administrative capacity. That is, Nigerians who believe that INEC has a degree of autonomy are 48 percent more likely to consider the 2007 elections favorable, while Nigerians who think that INEC has a high degree of capacity are 32 percent more likely to consider the elections favorably.<sup>26</sup> Based on these findings we can infer that, while both dimensions of institutional performance matter, citizens pay more attention to an EMB's institutional autonomy than to its capacity.

In Model 2, I examine the individual items of the EMB capacity and autonomy indices. First, of the three items in the *Autonomy Index*, impartiality of counting and tabulation and INEC neutrality both have significant and positive associations with perceived election quality. This result may signify that Nigerians place more importance on overall neutrality of INEC and its conduct of the counting process than on the impartiality of temporary INEC staff. Next we turn to *Capacity Index*. The only significant predictor is the adequacy of polling facilities. The absence of an effect from the other capacity variables is surprising. One potential reason why Nigerians may have placed so much importance on the infrastructural dimension of INEC capacity is that poor poll facilities affect the secrecy of the ballot and prevent voters from feeling secure during the voting exercise.

Finally, Models 1 and 2 both indicate that trust in INEC is positively correlated with perceptions of election quality. But citizens' performance evaluations or degree of trust in other institutions fail to record any significant association with perceived election quality. As hypothesized, citizens affiliated

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B for coding criteria of the variables used in this analysis.

<sup>26</sup> Predicted probability estimates are based on Model 1 in Table 3 and calculated with Clarify (Tomz *et al* 2003). For the predicted probability analysis, all non-binary independent variables are held at their mean, while Gender is set at Female and Residential Location set to Urban

with the PDP were more likely to view the elections in a favorable light, while citizens who experienced intimidation and those who were affected by violence held more negative evaluations. However, experience with vote buying had no impact on popular election quality judgments. Finally, media savvy respondents were more critical of the quality of elections, while voter participation had positive effects on perceived election quality.

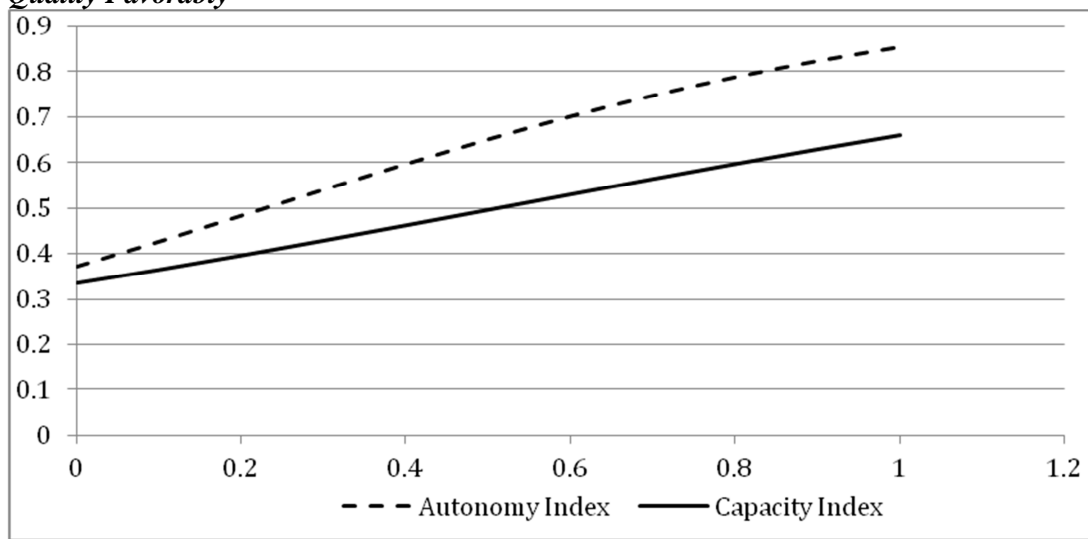
**Table 2: Determinants of Citizens' Perceptions of Election Quality**

	Model 1 Unstand. Coefficients [Standard errors]	Model 2 Unstand. Coefficients [Standard errors]
<b>Institutional Performance Evaluations</b>		
<b>EMB Autonomy Index</b>	<b>2.418***</b> [.341]	--
Impartiality of poll workers	--	-.005 [.130]
Impartiality in counting result	--	<b>.672***</b> [.111]
Extent of INEC Neutrality	--	<b>.954 ***</b> [.126]
<b>EMB Capacity Index</b>	<b>1.446***</b> [.495]	
Voter registration	--	0.054 [.130]
Info on voting	--	.242 [.149]
Competence of Poll Staff	--	-0.139 [.135]
Adequacy of Facilities	--	<b>.245**</b> [.122]
<b>Institutional Trust</b>	--	
EMB Trust	<b>0.389***</b> [.111]	<b>0.418***</b> [.114]
Police Election Perform	0.141 [.113]	0.005 [.127]
Police Trust	0.005 [.102]	-0.005 [.105]
Media Performance	0.054 [.122]	0.033 [.125]
Media Trust	0.036 [.105]	0.056 [.107]
<b>Partisanship</b>		
Support Ruling Party	<b>0.690 ***</b> [0.098]	<b>0.689 ***</b> [0.101]
<b>Electoral Irregularities</b>		
Experience w/ Intimidation	<b>-0.633**</b> [.239]	<b>-0.70**</b> [.244]
Experience w/ Vote Buying	-0.037 [.222]	-0.037 [.230]
Experience w/ Violence	<b>-0.602***</b> [.120]	<b>-0.567***</b> [.122]
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>		
Voted in Last Election	<b>0.399*</b> [.227]	<b>0.435*</b> [.233]
<b>Political Sophistication</b>		
Index of Political Interests	0.091 [.097]	0.077 [.104]
Index of Media Exposure	<b>-1.057**</b> [0.434]	<b>-1.156**</b> [0.444]
<b>Government Performance</b>	.335*** [.096]	.292*** [.101]
<b>Social Structure</b>		
Education	.068 [.039]	.058 [.039]
Age	.001 [.007]	.001 [.854]
Female	-.05 [.181]	-.167 [.368]
Urban Resident	.235 [.190]	.229 [.240]
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-4.462***</b> [.605]	<b>-4.315***</b> [.624]
Observations	1327	1315
Pseudo R2	0.487	0.5003

*DV: Perceptions of Election Quality: (IFES) Nigeria 2007 Post Election Survey.*

*All tests are two tailed. \*\*\* p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1 \*\* Model also included controls for six regions as well as other expected social structure controls none were significant.*

**Figure 4: Impact of INEC Autonomy and Capacity on Predicted Probability of Assessing Election Quality Favorably**



#### IV. PERCEPTIONS VERSUS REALITY

Empirical analyses provide robust support for the importance of election-related institutions, partisanship, and experience with electoral irregularities in shaping citizens’ understandings of free and fair elections. Yet one potential criticism of perception-based measures of election quality is that they may be incongruent with other non-perception-based indicators of election quality.

How much confidence should we have in the validity of citizens’ perceptions?<sup>27</sup> The empirical and theoretical literature on perceptions-based measures of election quality is contested in this regard. Some studies assert the accuracy and representativeness of perception-based assessments derived from survey data (Birch 2008; Pastor 1999; Banducci and Karp 2003; Schedler 1999; Rose and Mishler 2009). Other studies have been more cautious in pointing out the limitations and potential sources of bias (Moehler 2009; Mozaffar and Schedler 2002).

I explore this debate by seeing how well survey-based perceptions correlate with the number of election petitions filed by candidates and political parties to the Election Tribunal after the 2007 Nigerian elections. In Nigeria candidates and political parties have the right to challenge the outcome of elections by submitting petitions to special courts called Election Tribunals. According to the Electoral Act (2006), there are four conditions under which candidates or political parties can question the outcome of the elections:

1. An accused candidate is unqualified to contest the elections;
2. The election was invalid as a result of election irregularities or contravention with articles of the electoral act;
3. An accused candidate did not receive the majority of votes;
4. A petitioner was duly nominated but unlawfully excluded from the elections.

Most of the petitions during the 2007 elections arose out of disputes over election irregularities (2) and the improper declaration of results (3) (Fall *et al.* 2011).

I suggest that the number of petitions may provide a reliable indication of the quality of elections in a specific region. In regions where political candidates challenge election results through the courts, it is

<sup>27</sup> Here I use the term validity not in the strict statistical sense. Instead, validity represents the degree to which citizens’ perceptions of election quality are congruent with other non-perceptions-based measures of election quality.

very likely that citizens had first-hand experience with, or gained information about, the circumstances that brought the election into disrepute. We can, therefore, have greater confidence in the accuracy of citizens' perception of election quality if these perceptions are negatively correlated with the number of election petitions.

There is a general tendency for losing candidates and parties to challenge election results regardless of the overall quality of the election. However, I think that the use of election petitions as a measure of election quality is appropriate for the following reasons. First, existing studies have employed the number of post-election court cases as an indicator of the quality of election, or more specifically the magnitude of fraud that occurs during elections (Lehoucq 2003). Second, as it pertains to Nigeria, the legal framework for elections sets explicit guidelines for the grounds under which petitions can be made. In court, petitioners usually present credible evidence to substantiate their challenges. Thirdly, a significant proportion of petitions in the 2007 elections resulted in cases and a significant proportion of these cases led to the overturn of the election results (Fall 2007).

The number of election tribunal petitions filed by candidates and political parties in the State (State Assembly and Governorship) and Federal (House of Representatives and Senate) elections for each of the 36 states in Nigeria varies from a high of 134 in Anambra to a low of 5 in Jigawa with a mean of 34.<sup>28</sup> Because the number of representatives elected to the State Assembly and the National Assembly varies by each states' population, I control for this variation by weighting the number of petitions by the number of Federal House of Representative members allotted to each state. I then calculate the mean value of citizens' perception of election quality for respondents surveyed in each state using Afrobarometer data. As noted, the Afrobarometer survey asks respondents to rate "the freeness and fairness of the last election in 2007", respondents could rate the election "Not Free and Fair, Free and Fair with Major Problems, Free and Fair with Minor Problems, Completely Free and Fair." Citizen perceptions of election quality aggregated at the state level ranges from a low of 0.46 in Anambra to a high of 1.71 in Taraba, with a mean of 1.0.

I find a modest negative correlation between citizens' perceptions of election quality aggregated at the state level and the number of election petitions filed by candidates and parties within each state.<sup>29</sup> The negative relationship is consistent with expectations and gives support to the idea that citizens in states where candidates submitted a high number of petitions to the election tribunal were also likely to adjudge elections as illegitimate.<sup>30</sup> I can infer from this finding that during the 2007 Nigerian elections popular evaluations of election quality were largely in line with the actual conduct of elections in various parts of the country.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have probed the determinants of Africans perceptions of election quality. Using two rounds of election surveys on the 2007 Nigerian Federal and State elections, I find citizens' performance evaluations of electoral-related institutions matter more than their experience with

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix C for a table of the Electoral Tribunal Petitions for each state.

<sup>29</sup> The Pearson's correlation coefficient is -0.37, significant at the 0.05 level.

<sup>30</sup> To ensure the robustness of the results, I also conducted the correlation using IFES-post election data and the results were similar to those presented in the paper (Pearson's correlation coefficient of -0.45: significant at the 0.01 level). The survey was collected immediately after the elections in 2007, before the election petitions were publicized. This allows us to control for the effect that knowledge about the tribunal petitions may have on citizens' perceptions of election quality. As a second robustness check, I also aggregate the number of petitions and respondents election quality perceptions to the zonal level. Nigeria is divided into 6 geo-political zones, comprised of 5-6 states: South West, South East, South South, North West, North East, North Central. By aggregating to the zonal level, I have a sufficiently larger sample sizes to make more meaningful inferences. The results of the correlation are expectedly higher than the previous results based on aggregation at the state level (Pearson correlation of -0.891 for the Afrobarometer survey and -0.92 for the IFES survey, both significant at the .01 level).

electoral irregularities or their political party affiliations. Of the five election-related institutions I examine, Nigerians rely significantly on their perceptions of the performance of Independent National Electoral Commission (the main election management body) when forming their opinions on the credibility of the elections. I also probe two important dimensions of institutional performance: autonomy and capacity. Interestingly, the results indicate that Nigerians are more concerned with the political autonomy of INEC and more forgiving of procedural irregularities that stem from deficiencies in INEC administrative capacity.

These findings from Nigeria underscore the centrality of electoral management bodies in elections in emerging democracies. The autonomy of electoral management body is an important pre-requisite for elections to be considered credible. This is not to say that EMB capacity is not important; but citizens are more critical of EMB capacity when the autonomy of the body has been well established. For instance, in South Africa, citizens have considered the main EMB, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), autonomous for a series of national elections. South Africans therefore currently focus their criticisms on the problems related to IEC institutional capacity such as the poor quality of voting facilities, long lines during voting, and unavailability of electronic voting. Either way, it is clear that citizens base their assessment primarily on their own experiences with election-related institutions. From a policy perspective, African governments and development partners should therefore devote more resources to enhancing the impartiality and competence of election management bodies, as well as security agencies and the judiciary.

A second purpose of the paper was to empirically assess the validity of citizens' perceptions of election quality. The results are encouraging. Perceptions of election quality aggregated for each of Nigeria's 36 states are consistent with the number of post-election petitions submitted to Election Tribunals. Importantly, these findings show that although there may be gaps between perception-based and non-perception-based measures of election quality, scholars should embrace the use perception-based data on election quality and devise better methods of recognizing and accounting for potential sources of bias.

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**Appendix A: Nigeria Afrobarometer Round 4 (2008) Survey: Variable Coding**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Question Wording</b>	<b>Variable Coding</b>
Perceived Election Quality	Q71R: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election	1= completely free and fair/ Free and fair with minor problems, 0=Free and Fair with major problems/Not free and fair).
INEC Performance [Election Tribunal]	Q76B_NIG_R: How would you evaluate the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC's) performance in conducting the April 2007 national elections?	0=Very poor, 1= Fairly poor, 2=Fairly good, 3=Very good,
INEC Trust [Police, Military, EFCC, Electoral Tribunal]	Q49C_R2: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)?	0=Not at all, 1=Just a little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A lot,
Police Election Performance [Military, EFCC]	Q75A_NIG_R: How satisfied were you with the performance of the following security forces during the April 2007 elections,	0=Not at all satisfied, 1=Not very satisfied, 2=Fairly satisfied, 3=Very satisfied,
Partisanship	Q86_R2: Do you feel close to any political party	0= other party, 1= Neutral 2= incumbent
Vote choice	Q97_R2: Which presidential party would you vote for if elections were held tomorrow	0= other party 1= Neutral 2= incumbent
Fear of intimidation	Q47_R: During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?	0=A lot, 1=Somewhat, 2=A little bit, 3=Not at all
Freedom to vote	Q15C_R: In this country, how free are you: To choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?	1=Not at all free, 2=Not very free, 3=Somewhat free, 4=Completely free
Ballot Secrecy	Q48A_R: How likely do you think it is: That powerful people can find out how you voted, even though there is supposed to be a secret ballot in this country?	0=Not at all likely, 1=Not very likely, 2=Somewhat likely, 3=Very likely
Voted in last election	Q23D_R2: With regard to the most recent, 2007 national elections, which statement is true for you?	1=Voted in elections; 0= Did not vote in elections
Registered to Vote	Q23D_R: With regard to the most recent, 2007 national elections, which statement is true for you?	0=Did not Register; 1=Registered
Political Interest	Q13_14sum: How interested would you say you are in public affairs? When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters (weighted sum)	0=low interest; 1= high interest
Media Exposure	Q12ACsum: How often do you get news from the following sources: Radio, TV, and Newspapers.	0=low sophistication; 1=high sophistication
Government Performance	Q57ADsum: Now let's speak about the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the economy, Improving the living standards of the poor. Creating jobs, Keeping prices down?	0= very badly; 1=very well
Economic Performance	Q4ADsum: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country// Your own present living conditions?	0=very bad; 1=very good
Age recoded	Q1_R	18-101
Female Respondent	Q110_R	0=Male; 1=Female
Level of education	Q101_R	0 No formal schooling; 9 Post-graduate
Region		1 "NC" 2 "NE" 3 "NW" 4 "SE" 5 "SS" 6 "SW" 634 "FCT"

Geo-political Zones	North Central Zone=1 North East Zone= 2 North West Zones=3 South East Zone=4 South South Zone=5 South West Zone= 6	North Central Zone=1 North East Zone= 2 North West Zones=3 South East Zone=4 South South Zone=5 South West Zone= 6
Urban	Urban or Rural sampling unit	1=urban; 0=rural

**Appendix B: IFES-Post Election Survey: Variable Coding**

Variable Name	Question Wording	Variable Coding
Overall Election Quality	Q32_R :In your opinion, how free and fair were the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections? Were the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections completely free and fair, somewhat free and fair, not too free and fair or not at all free and fair?	1= completely free and fair/ Free and fair with minor problems, 0=Free and Fair with major problems/Not free and fair).
EMB Performance	Q23F_R: In your opinion, how effective are each of these institutions and leaders in carrying out the duties that are their responsibility? Are these institutions and leaders very effective, somewhat effective, not too effective, or not at all effective	0=Very poor, 1= Fairly poor, 2=Fairly good, 3=Very good,
Voter Registration	Q34A_R: Please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with the following aspects of the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections: Voter Registration Process	(0= Very dissatisfied;1= Somewhat dissatisfied; 2= Somewhat satisfied; 3= Very satisfied).
Info on voting	Q34B_R : Information on voting procedures and how to mark the ballots	
Competency Poll staff	Q34D_R : Competency of the polling station staff	
Adequacy of Facilities	Q34E_R : Adequacy of facilities and equipment at the polling station	
Capacity Index	Weighted average of the 4 items rescaled from 0-1 (Chronbach's alpha: 0.829)	0= low autonomy; 1=high autonomy
EMB Trust	Q10N_R: And how much confidence do you have in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)?	(0 "Not at all effective") (1 "Not too effective") (2 "somewhat effective") (3= "Very Effective")
Police Election Performance	Q34G_R: Performance of the police and security officials in keeping these elections peaceful and conflict free	(1= Very dissatisfied; 2= Somewhat dissatisfied; 3= Somewhat satisfied; 4= Very satisfied).
Police Trust	Q10B_R: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Police?	(1= "None at all"; 2= "Not too much"; 3= "Fair amount"; 4= "Great Deal")
Media Performance	Q23G: In your opinion, how effective are each of these institutions and leaders in carrying out the duties that are their responsibility?	
Impartiality of Poll Workers Q34F_R	Please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with the following aspects of the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections: Impartiality of polling station staff	(1= Very dissatisfied; 2= Somewhat dissatisfied; 3= Somewhat satisfied; 4= Very satisfied).
Impartiality in Counting and Tabulation Q34H_R	Impartiality in the counting, tabulation and announcement of results	
INEC Neutrality Q20_R	First of all, thinking about the performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), with which of the following statements do you agree more: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) performs its duty as a neutral body guided in its work only by the law, OR INEC makes decisions which favor particular people or interests?	(1= INEC performs its duty as neutral body guided in its work only by the law; 2= INEC makes decisions which favor particular people or interests).
Autonomy Index	Weighted average of the 3 items rescaled from 0-1	0= low capacity; 1=high capacity

	(Chronbach's alpha: 0.752)	
Partisanship	Q19_R: Can you tell me which political party best represents aspirations of people like you?	(2= support PDP; 1= Neutral; 0= support opposition)
Fear of intimidation/ Experience with intimidation	Q44A_R: On or before the presidential and parliamentary elections, did anyone try to pressure YOU to vote for a certain candidate in the election?	Yes= 1; No=2
Freedom to vote	** Not asked	
Ballot Secrecy	Q39_R: Even though the vote is secret, do you believe that someone can find out how a person voted in these recent parliamentary and Presidential elections	1=Yes, 2= No, 3=Maybe
Vote buying Experience	Q43_R: On or before the presidential and parliamentary elections, did anyone try to pressure YOU to vote for a certain candidate in the election?	1= No; 0=Yes
Violence Experience	Q50_R: Did you see or hear of any violence related to the Presidential or Parliamentary elections	0= Saw violence;1= Heard violence; 2=No experience w/ violence
Voted in last election	Q56_R: Did you vote in the April Presidential Elections or Not	1=voted in elections; 0= Did not vote
Registered to Vote	Q52A_R: Were you registered to vote in the most recent elections?	0=Did not Register; 1=Register
Political Interest	Please tell me how interested you are in matters of politics and government Q1_R	(0= Not at all interested; 1=Not too interested; 2=Somewhat interested; 3=Very interested).
Interest in Elections	Q29_R: Would you describe your interest in the recent presidential elections as high medium or low	
Info Exposure	Q4ACsum: Please tell me how often you ... Watch television for news on politics and government--- every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month or less OR never? (0= Never; 2= Once a month or less; 3=A few times a week; 4=A few times a month) Radio, TV, Newspapers. (Chronbach's alpha: 0.713)	0=low sophistication;1=high sophistication
<b>Performance Evaluations</b>		
General	Q3_R: Could you tell me if you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied or not satisfied at the overall situation in Nigeria today	(4=0 "Very dissatisfied") (3=1 "Somewhat dissatisfied") (2=2 "somewhat satisfied") (1=3 "Very satisfied")
<b>Social Structure</b>		
D2_R	Age of respondent	18-101
D1_R	Female Respondent	0=Male; 1=Female
D9_R	Level of education	0 No formal schooling; 9 Post-graduate
Geo-political Zones	ZONES_NC ZONES_NE ZONES_NW ZONES_SS ZONES_SE ZONES_SW	1 "NC" 2 "NE" 3 "NW" 4 "SE" 5 "SS" 6 "SW" 634 "FCT"
PSU/EA	Urban sampling unit	1=urban; 0=rural

**Appendix C: 2007 Nigerian Election Tribunal Petitions by State**

State	Electoral Tribunal Petitions <sup>1</sup>	Number of Members House of Representatives	Number of Electoral Tribunal Petitions Weighted by Number of House of Representative Members	Mean Perceptions of Election Quality (Afrobarometer Round 4 Nigeria)
Abia	53	8	6.6	0.60
Adamawa	19	8	2.4	0.87
Akwa-Ibom	11	10	1.1	1.23
Anambra	148	11	13.5	0.46
Bauchi	25	12	2.1	1.51
Bayelsa	29	5	5.8	1.23
Benue	30	11	2.7	1.18
Borno	8	10	0.8	0.99
Cross River	19	8	2.4	0.73
Delta	54	10	5.4	0.91
Ebonyi	17	6	2.8	1.09
Edo	32	11	2.9	0.77
Ekiti	32	6	5.3	1.19
Enugu	67	8	8.4	0.60
FCT	6	2	3.0	0.44
Gombe	12	6	2.0	1.13
Imo	48	10	4.8	0.35
Jigawa	5	11	0.5	0.75
Kaduna	21	15	1.4	1.51
Kano	43	24	1.8	1.56
Katsina	44	14	3.1	1.28
Kebbi	27	8	3.4	1.13
Kogi	46	9	5.1	0.96
Kwara	21	6	3.5	1.75
Lagos	12	24	0.5	1.07
Nasarawa	24	5	4.8	0.75
Niger	48	10	4.8	1.23
Ogun	54	9	6.0	0.85
Ondo	64	9	7.1	1.14
Osun	38	9	4.2	0.33
Oyo	40	15	2.7	0.46
Plateau	28	7	4.0	1.26
Rivers	68	13	5.2	0.50
Sokoto	20	11	1.8	1.44
Taraba	22	6	3.7	1.71
Yobe	6	6	1.0	1.31
Zamfara	24	7	3.4	1.24
<b>Mean</b>	34.19	9.7		1.01

Note: <sup>1</sup> Number of Election Tribunal petitions filed by candidates and political parties in the State (State Assembly and Governorship) and Federal (House of Representatives and Senate) elections for each state.

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