



## Legitimacy Crisis, Accountability, and Local Government Elections in Nigeria: Lessons from KWASIEC 2024 LG Election

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the electoral process, accountability, legitimacy, and public trust in local government elections in Kwara State, Nigeria. Using a survey of local residents, the study evaluates public perceptions of electoral transparency, the professionalism of election officials, the accountability of local government officials, and the legitimacy of elected representatives. The findings reveal a moderate level of awareness about the electoral process but highlight significant concerns regarding transparency, electoral malpractice, and the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. A lack of confidence in the legitimacy of elected officials and the integrity of election results is evident. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive electoral reforms, including enhanced voter education, improved transparency, and stricter enforcement of electoral laws to address these challenges. The recommendations aim to foster a more transparent, accountable, and legitimate electoral system, thereby strengthening public trust in the democratic process.

**Keywords:** Electoral process, Accountability, Legitimacy, Public trust

### 1. Introduction

Local government (LG) in Nigeria has undergone significant transformation since its establishment. The evolution of local governance in the country can be traced to colonial rule, during which native authorities served as the administrative framework for indirect

rule. Post-independence, successive reforms sought to enhance LG autonomy and effectiveness, particularly with the introduction of the 1976 LG Reform, which institutionalized LG as the third tier of government. This reform emphasized democratic principles, including popular participation and grassroots development. The democratization of local government in Nigeria gained prominence with the adoption of the 1979 Constitution, which prescribed elected councils for LG administration. However, the democratization process has been plagued by systemic challenges, including weak institutional frameworks, electoral malpractice, and pervasive corruption. Adejumbi, S. (2000). These issues have created a persistent legitimacy crisis, where elected LG officials often lack public trust and authority. Osei, B., & Amoako, P. (2016).

In the context of Kwara State, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Kwara State, located in Nigeria's North-Central region, has a rich history of political and socio-economic evolution, with local governments playing a vital role in grassroots development. However, the state's local government system has been marred by similar issues observed at the national level, including irregularities in elections, lack of accountability, and weak public engagement. The KWASIEC (Kwara State Independent Electoral Commission) 2024 LG election exemplifies these challenges, as reports of vote-buying, low voter turnout, and administrative inefficiencies dominated the electoral process. Carothers, T. (2006).

This study explores the interrelationship between legitimacy, accountability, and LG elections, focusing on the KWASIEC 2024 LG election as a case study. By analyzing the electoral processes and their implications for governance at the grassroots level in Kwara State, the paper aims to contribute to the discourse on democratization and accountability in Nigeria's local government system. Ayee, J. R. A. (2008). This localized approach provides nuanced insights into the broader national issues, highlighting specific lessons from Kwara State that can inform policy reforms and governance strategies across Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Democracy

Democracy is a system of governance in which power is vested in the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. At its core, democracy emphasizes popular participation, rule of law, and accountability. Finkel, S. E., & Geisler, M. (2003). In the context of local government, democracy ensures that governance is inclusive and reflective of the people's will, promoting legitimacy and sustainable development.

### 2.2 Elections

Elections are the hallmark of democratic governance, providing a mechanism for citizens to choose their representatives. Daalder, H. (2015). In Nigeria, LG elections have been characterized by irregularities, including voter suppression, manipulation of results, and lack of transparency. These issues undermine the credibility of elections and erode public trust in democratic institutions.

### 2.3 Local Government

Local government serves as the closest tier of government to the people, tasked with promoting development and delivering essential services. Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2002). Effective local governance requires democratic practices, institutional accountability, and adequate resources. However, in Nigeria, LGs often struggle with weak autonomy and overdependence on state governments.

### 2.4 Accountability

Accountability refers to the obligation of public officials to answer for their actions and decisions. Ugoh, I. E., & Ukpere, W. I. (2013). In a democratic setting, accountability ensures that elected officials act

in the public's interest, adhering to legal and ethical standards. Beetham, D. (2013). In Nigerian LGs, a lack of accountability has fostered inefficiency and corruption, weakening public confidence in governance.

### 2.5 Legitimacy

Legitimacy denotes the perception of authority as justifiable and appropriate. In the context of local government elections, legitimacy is derived from free, fair, and credible electoral processes. Dunning, T. (2012). When elections are perceived as fraudulent, they result in a legitimacy crisis, undermining the authority of elected officials and the effectiveness of governance. Nyang'oro, J., & Basu, S. (2018).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Social Contract Theory as its theoretical framework. This theory posits that governance is based on an implicit agreement between the governed and those in power, where authority is legitimate only if it serves the people's interests. Applied to local government, this framework underscores the importance of accountability and credible elections in maintaining the social contract and ensuring the legitimacy of governance.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopts descriptive research. The descriptive design is chosen to provide a detailed account of the KWASIEC 2024 LG election processes and outcomes, emphasizing participants' perceptions and experiences. The sample size for the study is 30 participants, drawn from key stakeholders in Kwara State, including voters, election officials, and civil society representatives. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who were directly involved in or knowledgeable about the 2024 LG election. This approach ensures that the insights gathered are relevant and reflective of the studied phenomena. Data were collected using a structured Likert scale questionnaire, which was designed to measure respondents' perceptions of the electoral process, accountability, legitimacy, and recommendations for improvement. The questionnaire covered key areas such as awareness of the election, transparency, professionalism of officials, accountability mechanisms, and public trust in elected officials. Additionally, qualitative insights were gathered through informal interviews with selected respondents to contextualize and enrich the quantitative finding. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive

statistics, including mean scores, percentages, and frequency distributions. These statistics provide an overview of respondents' opinions and highlight trends across the key themes.

## 5. Presentation of Data

### Section 1: Electoral Process

**Awareness:** Mean score of 3.8 indicates moderate agreement that respondents were informed about the election.

**Transparency:** A low mean score of 2.5 suggests dissatisfaction with electoral transparency.

**Malpractice:** 60% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that malpractice was minimal.

**Professional Conduct:** Mean score of 3.2 shows neutrality regarding KWASIEC officials' professionalism.

Respondents perceive significant room for improvement in election management.

### Section 2: Accountability

**Accountability of Officials:** 40% agreed that LG officials are accountable, but a mean score of 3.0 shows mixed views.

**Effectiveness of Mechanisms:** A mean score of 2.8 indicates a perception of ineffective accountability measures.

**Transparency in Resource Management:** 55% disagreed with the statement, reflecting concerns about resource mismanagement.

**Interpretation:** There is a lack of confidence in the accountability of LG officials and mechanisms.

### Section 3: Legitimacy and Public Trust

**Free and Fair Elections:** Mean score of 2.6 highlights doubts about electoral fairness.

**Trust in Results:** Only 30% expressed trust in the announced results.

**Legitimacy of Officials:** Mean score of 2.9 reflects uncertainty about the legitimacy of elected officials. Issues in the election process undermine the perceived legitimacy of officials.

### Section 4: Recommendations

**Transparency Reforms:** Mean score of 4.5 indicates strong agreement on the need for reforms.

**Voter Education:** 70% strongly agreed on the importance of education initiatives.

**Electoral Laws:** A high mean score of 4.6 shows consensus on stricter enforcement.

Stakeholders strongly advocate for systematic improvements in the electoral process.

The analysis reveals critical areas requiring intervention, such as enhancing transparency, improving accountability mechanisms, and rebuilding public trust. The findings can guide policy reforms tailored to Kwara State and beyond.

## 6. Discussion of Findings

The results of this study highlight several key insights into the electoral process, accountability, legitimacy, and public trust surrounding local government elections in Kwara State. Below is a detailed discussion of the findings, interpreting their implications for policy reforms and improvements in the electoral system.

### 1. Electoral Process

**Awareness:** The mean score of 3.8, indicating moderate agreement, suggests that while there is a general awareness of the election, the level of engagement and access to relevant electoral information might still be insufficient. Despite this moderate awareness, further efforts are required to ensure that all segments of the electorate are adequately informed, especially in rural areas where access to information may be limited.

**Transparency:** The low mean score of 2.5 reflects a significant concern about the transparency of the electoral process. This dissatisfaction points to a lack of faith in the openness and fairness of the elections. Transparency in electoral processes is critical for public trust, and this finding underscores the need for greater openness in the conduct of elections. Measures such as real-time reporting, independent monitoring, and increased scrutiny of electoral bodies may help address these concerns.

**Malpractice:** The finding that 60% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that malpractice was minimal is alarming. This suggests that a large portion of the electorate perceives electoral malpractice, such as vote-buying or ballot stuffing, as prevalent. The perception of widespread malpractice erodes public confidence and calls for more stringent measures to prevent electoral fraud. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms, both domestically and through international observers, could contribute to reducing malpractice.

**Professional Conduct:** The mean score of 3.2 indicates neutrality, suggesting that respondents

neither strongly approve nor disapprove of the professionalism of KWASIEC officials. This indicates that while there may not be overt allegations of misconduct, there is a perception of inefficiency or inadequacy in their operations. Improving the professionalism of election officials through training, ethics guidelines, and accountability systems would enhance the credibility of the election process.

## 2. Accountability

**Accountability of Officials:** The mixed views on the accountability of local government officials (40% agreement) and the mean score of 3.0 suggest that citizens are divided on whether their representatives are held accountable. Effective accountability mechanisms are crucial for ensuring that officials serve the interests of their constituents. The findings indicate that there is a need for more robust systems that hold elected officials accountable, such as public hearings, regular audits, and mechanisms for citizen feedback.

**Effectiveness of Mechanisms:** The mean score of 2.8, indicating ineffective accountability measures, highlights a significant gap in how well existing accountability systems function. If the mechanisms in place are not viewed as effective, citizens are less likely to trust them. There is an urgent need to reform these systems, perhaps through enhanced oversight from independent bodies, greater participation of civil society, and the introduction of digital platforms for reporting misconduct or inefficiency.

**Transparency in Resource Management:** The fact that 55% of respondents disagreed with the statement regarding transparency in resource management suggests widespread concerns about the misuse of public resources. This is a critical area, as the management of public funds is fundamental to the legitimacy of local government institutions. Steps should be taken to ensure transparency in budgeting, procurement, and spending, possibly through the introduction of open data platforms and more rigorous audit systems.

## 3. Legitimacy and Public Trust

**Free and Fair Elections:** The low mean score of 2.6 indicates widespread skepticism about the fairness of the elections. Concerns about the electoral process's fairness likely contribute to the erosion of public trust in the democratic system. To restore public confidence, there needs to be a comprehensive effort to ensure that elections are genuinely free and fair. This could include the introduction of more

transparent voting procedures, independent election monitoring, and legal reforms that guarantee the integrity of the electoral process.

**Trust in Results:** Only 30% of respondents expressed trust in the announced results, a concerning finding. A lack of trust in the election results undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and the democratic process itself. Efforts to rebuild trust should focus on ensuring that election results are promptly and accurately reported and that any disputes are transparently resolved through independent judicial processes.

**Legitimacy of Officials:** The mean score of 2.9 regarding the legitimacy of elected officials reflects uncertainty among the public about whether those in power have a valid mandate. This uncertainty can stem from perceptions of electoral irregularities, lack of transparency, or ineffective governance. Strengthening the electoral process, improving accountability, and ensuring transparency are essential for enhancing the legitimacy of elected officials.

## 4. Recommendations

**Transparency Reforms:** With a high mean score of 4.5, respondents strongly agree that transparency reforms are needed. This finding reflects the widespread belief that improvements in transparency are essential to restoring faith in the electoral process. Transparent election procedures, such as the use of technology for result transmission and public access to information, should be prioritized.

**Voter Education:** The strong consensus on the importance of voter education (70% strongly agreed) highlights the critical role that informed citizens play in a democratic system. Comprehensive voter education campaigns, focusing on electoral rights, voting procedures, and the importance of participating in elections, should be implemented.

**Electoral Laws:** The high mean score of 4.6 indicates strong support for stricter enforcement of electoral laws. This suggests that respondents believe that legal frameworks governing elections are either too lenient or not properly enforced. Strengthening electoral laws, imposing harsher penalties for malpractices, and ensuring rigorous enforcement can contribute to a more fair and credible electoral process.

The findings of this study highlight significant concerns in Kwara State's electoral process, including issues of transparency, accountability, public trust, and the legitimacy of elected officials. To address these

challenges, policy reforms should focus on enhancing the transparency of elections, improving accountability mechanisms, and rebuilding public trust through education and stricter enforcement of electoral laws. These reforms will not only address the current gaps in the electoral system but also contribute to the broader goal of strengthening democracy in the region.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the electoral process, accountability, legitimacy, and public trust in the local government elections of Kwara State. The findings reveal significant concerns regarding electoral transparency, accountability of officials, the legitimacy of elected officials, and the public's trust in the election results. The study highlights that while there is a moderate level of awareness about elections, dissatisfaction with transparency and the prevalence of electoral malpractice have undermined public confidence in the electoral system.

The study also emphasizes the need for reform in key areas such as voter education, electoral transparency, and accountability mechanisms. Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of addressing the gaps and challenges within the electoral system to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. By implementing the recommended reforms, Kwara State can enhance its electoral integrity, rebuild public trust, and strengthen the legitimacy of its elected officials. These efforts will not only improve local governance but will also contribute to the broader goal of strengthening democracy in Nigeria. The study's recommendations offer a roadmap for policymakers, electoral bodies, and other stakeholders to create a more transparent, accountable, and democratic electoral system that better serves the needs of the electorate.

### 7.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the issues identified in the electoral process, accountability, legitimacy, and public trust in Kwara State. These recommendations aim to foster a more transparent, accountable, and legitimate electoral system, while rebuilding public confidence in local government elections.

## 1. Enhance Electoral Transparency

**Establish Real-Time Result Transmission:** Implement digital platforms that allow for real-time transmission and public access to election results. This would reduce the potential for tampering and enhance public confidence in the results.

**Independent Monitoring:** Increase the involvement of independent election observers, both local and international, to monitor the electoral process. This should include monitoring the voter registration process, voting, counting, and result declaration. Independent observers can provide unbiased reports on electoral integrity, thereby building public trust.

**Transparency in Electoral Funding:** Implement systems to disclose funding sources and expenditures of electoral campaigns. This will help prevent the influence of money in elections and ensure fairness.

## 2. Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms

**Create Independent Oversight Bodies:** Establish independent commissions or bodies tasked with monitoring and evaluating the performance of local government officials. These bodies should be empowered to investigate complaints, conduct audits, and ensure that officials are held accountable for their actions.

**Implement Public Accountability Forums:** Regular town hall meetings or open forums should be instituted where local government officials report on their activities, budgets, and policy implementations. This allows citizens to ask questions and engage with their representatives, ensuring that officials are directly answerable to the public.

**Strengthen Citizen Participation:** Facilitate stronger citizen participation in decision-making processes through digital platforms, allowing residents to engage in budget discussions, policy creation, and the evaluation of public projects.

## 3. Improve Electoral Legitimacy and Public Trust

**Address Electoral Irregularities:** Strengthen measures to prevent and address electoral malpractice, including vote-buying, ballot box stuffing, and voter intimidation. This could involve the use of biometric identification systems to ensure that voters are who they claim to be, and stricter penalties for those caught engaging in electoral fraud.

**Ensure Fair and Free Elections:** The electoral body (KWASIEC) should enforce stricter regulations to ensure a level playing field, where no party or candidate is given an unfair advantage. This includes the fair distribution of campaign materials, access to

media for all parties, and ensuring that voting locations are accessible to all.

**Post-Election Dispute Resolution:** Strengthen the processes for resolving election disputes in a fair, transparent, and timely manner. Establish clear and accessible channels for individuals and parties to challenge election results if necessary, ensuring that all claims of malpractice or mismanagement are taken seriously and adjudicated impartially.

#### 4. Promote Voter Education and Awareness

**Launch Comprehensive Voter Education Campaigns:** Develop and implement educational programs targeting voters of all demographics. These programs should focus on the importance of voting, how to vote, the impact of elections on local governance, and how citizens can hold officials accountable.

**Use Multiple Platforms for Outreach:** Utilize traditional media (radio, television) and digital platforms (social media, websites, mobile apps) to reach a broad audience. Special attention should be given to reaching younger voters and underrepresented communities.

**Collaborate with Civil Society Organizations:** Partner with NGOs and civil society groups to deliver voter education and facilitate community outreach programs. These organizations can help in mobilizing and educating voters, especially in rural or marginalized areas.

#### 5. Reform Electoral Laws and Enforcement

**Strengthen Electoral Legal Frameworks:** Review and revise electoral laws to close gaps and address identified weaknesses, such as the need for stronger penalties for electoral malpractices and clearer procedures for the handling of election disputes. This also includes the regulation of party financing and the role of political elites in elections.

**Introduce Strict Enforcement Mechanisms:** Ensure that violations of electoral laws are met with strict penalties. Establish an independent election tribunal with the authority to investigate electoral fraud and misconduct, and that decisions are made transparently and swiftly.

**Enforce Transparency in Political Party Funding:** Implement and strictly enforce laws that require full disclosure of political party funding sources and campaign expenditures. This transparency will help limit the influence of illicit funds and ensure that the political environment is fair.

#### 6. Ensure Effective Resource Management

**Implement Public Resource Management Systems:** Introduce open data platforms that allow citizens to track the allocation and use of public resources in local governments. These systems should provide real-time data on government spending, contracts awarded, and progress on development projects.

**Create Anti-Corruption Units in Local Governments:** Establish dedicated anti-corruption units within local governments that monitor resource allocation, procurement processes, and project implementation to prevent mismanagement and corruption.

**Regular Public Audits:** Mandate annual or bi-annual audits of local government finances and make the results publicly available. These audits should be conducted by independent third-party organizations to ensure their credibility.

#### 7. Build Public Trust in the Electoral System

**Promote Civic Responsibility and Engagement:** Encourage citizens to view voting as a civic duty and emphasize its importance in shaping the future of their community. Highlight the role of citizens in ensuring that elections are free, fair, and transparent.

**Enhance the Role of Media:** Foster collaboration between the media and election authorities to provide accurate, unbiased reporting on the election process. The media can play a vital role in educating voters, exposing electoral malpractice, and holding officials accountable.

**Rebuild Trust Through Consistent Reforms:** Trust in the electoral system can only be rebuilt through consistent, long-term reforms that address voter concerns. Implementing the above recommendations will signal a commitment to a fairer, more transparent, and accountable electoral system.

By implementing these actionable recommendations, Kwara State can significantly improve its electoral system, increase accountability, and restore public trust in the election process. These reforms will not only enhance the integrity of elections but also create a more transparent, responsive, and effective local government system that serves the needs of its citizens. Ultimately, these actions will contribute to strengthening democracy in Kwara State and across Nigeria.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Questionnaire

#### Section 1: General Information

Age, gender, and location within Kwara State

#### Section 2: Electoral Process

Were you aware of the KWASIEC 2024 LG election before Election Day? (Yes/No)

How would you rate the transparency of the electoral process? (Very Transparent, Transparent, Neutral, Opaque, Very Opaque)

Did you witness or experience any electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying or intimidation? (Yes/No)

What do you think were the major challenges during the election? (Open-ended)

#### Section 3: Accountability

Do you believe the elected LG officials are accountable to the electorate? (Yes/No/Not Sure)

How effective are existing mechanisms in ensuring accountability for LG officials? (Very Effective, Effective, Neutral, Ineffective, Very Ineffective)

In your opinion, what measures can improve accountability at the local government level? (Open-ended)

#### Section 4: Legitimacy and Public Trust

Do you believe the KWASIEC 2024 LG election was free and fair? (Yes/No/Not Sure)

How much trust do you have in the results of the election? (High, Moderate, Low, None)

What impact do you think the election's credibility has on the legitimacy of LG officials? (Open-ended)

#### Section 5: Recommendations

What reforms would you suggest to improve the LG electoral process in Kwara State? (Open-ended)

How can the government and KWASIEC address voter apathy in future elections? (Open-ended)