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Financial Accountability and Public Trust in Electoral Processes in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines Financial Accountability and Public Trust in Electoral Processes in Nigeria. It essentially relies on four aspects of financial accountability: cost-effectiveness, audit and financial reporting quality, budget transparency, and procurement accountability. It then examines how each of these aspects affects public trust. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with data collected from 372 respondents and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that all dimensions of financial accountability significantly influence public confidence in electoral processes. Among these dimensions, the quality of auditing and financial reporting emerged as the most influential factor. The study further indicates that, although financial accountability within the electoral system is perceived to be at a moderate level, public trust in election outcomes remains relatively low. The results, therefore, underscore the importance of strengthening financial accountability mechanisms to enhance the credibility of elections in Nigeria. The study also recommends improving audit practices, reinforcing procurement systems, promoting greater transparency, and ensuring more effective management of election-related expenditures.

Keywords: Budget Transparency; Electoral Integrity; Electoral Processes; Financial Accountability; Public Trust

Word Counts: 168

1.1 Introduction

Electoral processes are the foundation of democratic governance because they allow citizens to choose who leads them and later hold those officials accountable. In Nigeria and other rapidly developing democracies, the entire election concept remains untrustworthy, not only due to electoral violence, vote buying, and logistical issues, but also due to concerns about financial accountability in the management of electoral resources (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). Therefore, financial responsibility has quietly become one of the most important factors influencing how

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"real" elections seem, as well as the public's trust in democratic institutions (Peter & Inokoba, 2023; Onuorah & Ejima, 2024; Ochi et al., 2023).

Also, in electoral administration, financial accountability refers to the transparent, orderly, and accountable utilization of electoral funds. It describes how electoral bodies, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), plan funds, release or distribute them, purchase or contract for election items and services, and then report on what was spent during election operations. Elections in Nigeria are particularly capital-intensive, including the procurement of sensitive materials, the movement of logistics, the implementation of technology, and the management of large numbers of staff. Despite this, many people continue to point out the secrecy in how budgets are executed, procurement is handled, and financial reporting occurs after elections. For example, some studies and policy documents have noted that weak transparency during budget execution and low public inclusion in electoral financial matters can reduce accountability and open space for distrust toward government institutions (Azoro et al.,2021; Weldone & Prince, 2025).

Budget transparency in election spending is a visible aspect of financial accountability. Even while electoral budgets are authorized each year, the public does not always have easy access to a full item-by-item summary of expenditures. This inhibits citizens' ability to assess how election resources are actually utilized. Evidence from Nigerian fiscal governance talks suggests that transparency in budget processes increases citizens' trust since open information allows for inspection and reduces fears of mismanagement (Inah et al., 2025). Nonetheless, despite some improvements in reporting standards in specific sectors, public engagement and access to precise budget information in the electoral environment appear to be very limited in Nigeria (Akinleye & Yunus, 2025).

Procurement accountability is also another serious issue when it comes to election finance. Procurement for election materials like biometric devices, ballot papers, and logistics services usually involves large contracts. It has been reported that public procurement in Nigeria is often criticized for poor transparency and weak enforcement of accountability standards, even though some reforms have led to procurement laws and e-procurement systems in select areas (Ama et al.,2023; Okoro et al., 2023). In elections, these flaws may raise questions about how fair the process is, how efficient it is, and whether resources are used legitimately.

Audits and the general quality of financial reporting are important because they help tighten accountability mechanisms. Good auditing should ensure that electoral spending is correctly reported and meets any legal standards. However, difficulties remain in Nigeria's election environment, including the consistency of audit conclusions and their public availability. When audit recommendations are not strictly executed, trust in institutional integrity suffers, which might influence how individuals perceive the fairness of elections.

Another factor that keeps showing up is the cost efficiency of elections. Nigeria’s electoral cycle is widely viewed as expensive, and there are recurring worries about election costs increasing

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without an equal improvement in electoral quality or outcomes. On several occasions, INEC has communicated financial constraints and requested more budgetary allocation in order to meet operational needs (INEC, 2025). Of course, funding is necessary for credible elections. But if resources are used inefficiently, it can negatively affect public impressions and also increase skepticism about how election money is managed.

Financial accountability is also tied closely to public trust in electoral processes. Public trust can be understood as citizens' confidence in the fairness, transparency, and legitimacy of electoral bodies and the results they produce. When financial management is seen as unclear or inefficient, confidence in the whole system drops. Empirical work suggests that transparency in public finance strongly improves trust in government, while a lack of openness brings skepticism and even disengagement (Ramil, 2025; Bassey, 2025).

In Nigeria, electoral integrity concerns are reinforced through repeated allegations about limited financial disclosure, weak oversight, and low transparency regarding election-related expenses (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). Together, these issues shape public views and help determine how much trust citizens eventually place in election outcomes.

Based on this context, the study examines the relationship between financial accountability (as measured by budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit quality, and cost efficiency) and public trust in Nigerian election procedures. It intends to contribute to ongoing conversations about electoral governance by providing empirical evidence on how financial management methods affect democratic legitimacy and citizens' trust in Nigeria's electoral system.

1.2 l Statement of the problem

Despite numerous electoral reforms in Nigeria aiming at increasing legitimacy, openness, and election efficiency, public trust in the entire political process remains low. Elections are sometimes referred to as the foundation of democratic governance, but in Nigeria, individuals, political actors, and even civil society organizations remain skeptical. Therefore, there has been a lot of focus on election violence, vote buying, and logistical issues, but there has been less attention paid to financial responsibility and how it affects people's trust in democratic institutions.

Electoral administration in Nigeria is exceedingly capital-demanding. Each year, large sums of public money are released to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2025) for election purposes. These funds are intended to be managed with transparency, efficiency, and accountability as guiding principles. People are still concerned about the opacity surrounding electoral budgeting, procurement, audit follow-ups, and cost effectiveness. According to research, insufficient fiscal transparency, along with limited public access to budget data, might reduce citizens' faith in governmental institutions (Krah & Mertens, 2023; World Bank, 2025). This type of secrecy fuels doubts about how election funds are dispersed and used.

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Furthermore, the acquisition of electoral materials, including biometric equipment, ballot papers, and logistics services, is frequently criticized for a lack of transparency and inadequate control. According to Transparency International (2024), when procurement is unclear in public institutions, the chances of inefficiency and the "corruption perception" problem increase, which undermines institutional credibility. In Nigeria, similar issues continue to surface in public discussions about how elections are conducted and if the process is fair.

Audit and financial reporting concerns exacerbate the accountability problem. Even if audit bodies exist, it appears that the execution of audit recommendations and the public availability of financial reports are constrained. According to the International Budget Partnership (2026), strong audit procedures and transparent financial reporting are critical for increasing public trust in governance. However, in Nigeria, flaws in how audits are actually performed continue to undermine the accountability framework utilized in election management.

Furthermore, the expense of conducting elections in Nigeria has steadily increased year after year, with no discernible gain in public satisfaction or perceived electoral quality. INEC (2025) has regularly cited budgetary constraints and rising operational costs, emphasizing the importance of efficiency and "value for money" in election spending. Inefficiencies in resource utilization exacerbate public distrust, especially when people are already skeptical of financial control in elections.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that financial transparency and accountability are important drivers of public trust in governance systems. However, there is still a lack of Nigeria-specific information that directly assesses how financial accountability characteristics, such as budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit quality, and cost efficiency, affect public faith in election processes. As a result, there is a significant information vacuum, particularly about how financial governance relates to election credibility.

Therefore, the main issue that this study addresses is the continual decline in public trust in Nigeria's election procedures, which may be linked to flaws in financial accountability measures. Without a good empirical understanding of that relationship, attempts to promote voting integrity may remain partial and less effective than they should be.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does budget transparency in electoral spending influence public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of procurement accountability on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria?
3. To what extent does audit and financial reporting quality affect public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria?
4. How does the cost efficiency of electoral expenditure influence public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria?

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1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of budget transparency in electoral spending on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
2. To assess the effect of procurement accountability on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
3. To determine the extent to which audit and financial reporting quality affect public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
4. To evaluate the influence of the cost efficiency of electoral expenditure on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: Budget transparency in electoral spending has no significant influence on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
H_{02}: Procurement accountability has no significant effect on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
H_{03}: Audit and financial reporting quality have no significant effect on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.
H_{04}: Cost efficiency of electoral expenditure has no significant influence on public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Financial Accountability in Electoral Processes

Financial responsibility in electoral processes entails the rigorous management, control, and disclosure of the funds used to organize elections. It emphasizes transparency, accountability, and conformity to standard financial regulations that govern how election funds are dispersed and then spent. In democratic government, this type of financial accountability helps ensure that public resources are used effectively and for the right purposes, which can reduce the likelihood of corruption, mismanagement, and waste (Agbaje & Oladutire, 2023; Omemgbeoji & Onuora, 2024).

In Nigeria's electoral setup, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is mostly the one charged with financial accountability. INEC gets major budgetary allocations for election preparation and implementation. These resources are meant for logistics, electoral technology, voter education, and even security arrangements. Still, people have questioned how clear the electoral spending is, and also how limited public access is to actual financial information. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2023) notes that financial accountability, when done properly, supports institutional credibility because public funds become traceable and open to oversight.

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In electoral settings, when financial accountability is weak, it can easily lead to public skepticism about whether elections are truly fair. When citizens feel that electoral funds are not managed well, confidence in election results drops fast. So basically, financial accountability becomes the base, on top of which transparency and public trust in electoral systems can be built.

2.1.2 Budget Transparency in Electoral Spending

Budget transparency in electoral spending refers to how transparent and available information is regarding how election funds are allocated, assigned, and finally used. It typically entails presenting election budgets in a transparent manner, displaying expenditure breakdowns, and then adding financial reports that allow citizens and oversight agencies to thoroughly examine where public funds are spent.

Even when election budgets in Nigeria are authorized by formal legislative procedures, the public is frequently not given access to the whole, detailed expenditure information. People find it more difficult to participate in financial monitoring as a result of this decreased transparency, which also raises questions about the actual use of electoral funds. Higher budget openness is typically associated with higher levels of public trust in governance institutions, as noted by the International Budget Partnership (2026).

Budget transparency is especially crucial in electoral administration because elections include significant, visible public spending on sensitive tasks such as purchasing voting materials and moving and supporting electoral technology (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). When that financial data becomes public, it reduces uncertainty and can boost institutional credibility. On the other side, if budget execution is kept ambiguous or difficult to track, the public may believe that corruption is taking place or that inefficiency is widespread, eroding trust in the democratic process itself.

2.1.3 Procurement Accountability in Electoral Administration

Procurement accountability is concerned with how transparent, fair, and rule-compliant practices are used when obtaining goods and services for electoral purposes. It discusses election-related preparations and contracts, such as ballot papers, biometric devices, logistics assistance, and the digital or technological backbone (Ntangeki et al., 2023; Khartoum, 2023). Sometimes it feels like all of those moving elements should work together, but the accountability question is what keeps it on track.

In Nigeria, election procurement is governed by public procurement laws that aim to keep things competitive, provide value for money, and remain transparent enough for examination. Even with these restrictions in place, people continue to raise concerns about contract inflation, weak competition, and inadequate supervision during the procurement process. Transparency International (2024) also emphasizes that when procurement mechanisms within public institutions are weak, it might silently open the door to corruption threats, which tend to diminish public trust in the overall governance approach.

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Procurement accountability is especially important in political circumstances because the election's credibility is not based solely on emotions. It is critically important to ensure that the materials and technologies employed are genuine and handled with integrity. If stakeholders perceive prejudice or manipulation in how procurement decisions are made, their belief in the election outcomes may quickly erode. Improving procurement accountability through open contracting, proper competitive bidding, and tight regulatory compliance can boost efficiency while also increasing public trust. Finally, procurement accountability is a key driver of both electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy.

2.1.4 Audit and Financial Reporting Quality

Audit and financial reporting quality are primarily concerned with the dependability, accuracy, and transparency of financial records, as well as the effectiveness of internal and external audits in verifying electoral spending. Auditing ensures that money is spent in accordance with approved budgets and legal duties, whereas financial reporting provides organized proof of how resources were managed (Darmawan, 2023).

Effective audit procedures are critical in election administration because they ensure accountability while also detecting anomalies or irregularities in financial management. Still, in Nigeria, there are rising concerns about how audit recommendations are executed, as well as how people can obtain audit findings in the first place. According to the World Bank (2025), good audit systems strengthen institutional accountability and contribute to public trust in government; hence, it is not a minor issue.

High-quality financial reporting promotes visibility and allows stakeholders to understand more clearly how successfully electoral spending is managed. On the other side, poor audit practice and reporting standards undermine confidence and can generate opportunities for mismanagement. In election contexts where legitimacy is extremely important, the quality of both audits and reporting influences what individuals believe about fairness and integrity (Akinninyi, 2025). To summarize, if trust in electoral processes is to be achieved, audit independence must be improved, as well as financial disclosure strengthened.

2.1.5 Cost Efficiency of Electoral Expenditure

Cost efficiency in election spending is primarily concerned with how well financial resources are used, allowing parties and administrations to achieve solid electoral results while minimizing waste. It focuses on value for money, proper resource management, and avoiding needless or exaggerated expenditures during election administration.

In Nigeria, the cost of organizing elections continues to rise year after year, raising new concerns about efficiency and sustainability. INEC has often stated that operating expenses are rising, particularly in logistics, technological rollouts, and security measures. Even while adequate funding is required for fair elections, it appears that inefficiencies in budget distribution might

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nevertheless harm public perceptions of financial stewardship (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025; Omemgbeoji & Onuora, 2024).

OECD (2023) also argues that when public spending is done efficiently, it helps build trust in government institutions because citizens see that public funds are handled responsibly. In an electoral setting, cost efficiency can be read as administrative dexterity, and it may lower the level of suspicion about corruption or general financial mismanagement. On the other hand, if election costs become too high or are not properly explained, citizens might start doubting the overall honesty of the whole process. Therefore, keeping cost efficiency in electoral expenditure is important, not just for fiscal durability, but also for strengthening public confidence in democratic procedures.

2.1.6 Public Trust in Electoral Processes

Public trust in electoral processes refers to citizens' belief in how fair, transparent, and credible elections and associated institutions are. It demonstrates how much voters believe the results accurately reflect the desire of the people (Ejalonibu, 2021; Prakasha, 2025).

In Nigeria, trust has been eroded by previous experiences of electoral irregularities, violence, vote buying, and administrative inefficiency. Beyond that, people respond to how money is managed. So, when individuals believe electoral money is not administered in accordance with defined norms, they frequently raise concerns about neutrality and even the overall integrity of political institutions.

Some research implies that trust in public institutions is linked to openness and accountability in governance (OECD, 2023). Financial responsibility, in particular, tends to boost confidence since it makes the entire process more visible, balanced, and monitorable. However, when trust levels remain low, the implications can be far-reaching, including voter indifference, lower turnout, and political disengagement (Birch, 2008).

Therefore, public trust is not solely based on electoral performance. It also indicates the overall effectiveness of financial governance inside the election system. As a result, better accountability systems are required if Nigeria wants stronger democratic legitimacy and increased citizen trust in elections.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Agency Theory

Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling formally created agency theory in 1976 with their key work "Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behaviour, Agency Costs, and Ownership Structure." In a nutshell, it attempts to describe how two parties interact: a principal who grants authority, and an agent who is trusted to act on behalf of that person. Citizens frequently serve as principals in public governance situations, while government organizations and public officials act as agents tasked with managing public resources and providing services.

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The basic idea of Agency Theory is that agents may not always behave in the best interests of their principals. This can occur due to variances in goals, differing incentives, and unequal access to information. As a result, you have what is known as information asymmetry, in which the agent knows more than the principal does. When that gap exists, agents may engage in opportunistic behaviour such as mismanagement, inefficiency, or even corruption, particularly if appropriate monitoring tools are not available. To mitigate these risks, several controls are implemented, including monitoring systems, performance appraisals, transparency rules, and accountability frameworks. The goal is to keep the interests closer together while also reducing "agency costs," or the additional economic burden caused by the mismatch.

Agency Theory is important in this study because electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) act as agents for citizens, handling public funds on their behalf. Financial accountability techniques, such as budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit quality, and cost efficiency, can be viewed as control tools that help close information gaps and prevent the misuse of electoral resources. When these systems are poor, citizens are unable to verify how election funds are spent, which leads to increased mistrust, decreased confidence, and a fall in public trust in political processes.

Also, Agency Theory provides a strong explanation for how financial accountability is linked to public trust in democratic systems. It suggests that increasing transparency and monitoring can reduce agency difficulties, hence increasing voters' trust in the authenticity of Nigerian elections.

2.2.2 Institutional Theory

Scholars such as John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977) helped shape Institutional Theory, which was then expanded upon by Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (1983). The idea aims to explain how the institutional framework in which organizations operate shapes their structures, routines, and choices, institutions are official and informal rules, regulations, shared standards, and cultural ideas that. In this view both guide and regulate organizational conduct.
Institutional Theory emphasizes that organizations do not function alone. Instead, they tend to respond to external influences such as legal frameworks, societal standards, professional benchmarks, and regulatory systems in order to maintain legitimacy. When companies meet these institutional norms, they are more likely to be perceived as respectable, genuine, and even trustworthy. On the other side, if institutional enforcement is insufficient or firms fail to comply, it can result in inefficiencies, poor governance, and a loss of public trust.

Institutional Theory is relevant to this study since Nigeria's electoral procedures are governed by formal institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Assembly, procurement regulating authorities, and audit institutions. These bodies are responsible for ensuring financial responsibility through regulations governing budgeting, procurement, auditing, and expenditure management. However, when institutional structures are fragile or inadequately implemented, financial accountability suffers as well. This reinforces impressions of mismanagement and can erode trust in the voting process.

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This theory is also valuable in demonstrating how structural and systemic variables influence financial accountability during elections. It implies that public trust is generated not just by the actions of individual election officials, but also by the strength, clarity, and effectiveness of institutional structures governing electoral funding. When institutions are transparent, well-coordinated, and consistently enforced, financial accountability improves, boosting public trust in elections. In contrast, inadequate institutional structures frequently result in opacity, poor performance, and eroding democratic legitimacy. Overall, Institutional Theory provides a macro-level explanation of how governance structures impact financial responsibility and public trust in Nigeria's electoral system.

2.3 Empirical Review

Madueke and Enyiazu (2025) examined the organizational attributes of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and their impact on electoral integrity in Nigeria, focusing on the 2023 presidential election. The study aimed to assess how institutional weaknesses affect the credibility of elections in the country. A qualitative methodology was adopted using interviews, internet sources, and documentary materials to evaluate INEC's operational efficiency. Findings showed that corruption, political interference, lack of independence, and poor adherence to electoral rules weaken INEC's ability to conduct credible elections. Despite the introduction of the 2022 Electoral Act to strengthen the Commission, political influence still affects its performance. The study recommended strengthening INEC's institutional independence, ensuring strict compliance with electoral laws, and minimizing political interference to enhance free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria.

Prakasha (2025) examined public trust in government as a key determinant of democratic stability and effective governance.

The study aimed to identify the factors influencing citizens' confidence in political leadership and institutional performance. It employed a conceptual and analytical approach, drawing on existing literature on governance, accountability, and political communication. Findings revealed that public trust is shaped by transparency and accountability, integrity and corruption control, quality of governance outcomes, citizen participation, and media influence. Transparency strengthens perceptions of openness, while integrity reduces suspicion of corruption. Effective service delivery enhances confidence in leadership. The study recommends strengthening accountability systems, promoting ethical leadership, improving citizen engagement, and ensuring responsible media communication to rebuild and sustain public trust in government institutions.

Bassey (2025) examined the relationship between public financial management (PFM) and development outcomes in Nigeria. The study aimed to determine how effective PFM practices influence service delivery and socio-economic development. It adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data from public finance officials and service users with administrative data from budget reports, audit records, and development indicators. Anchored on Institutional, Principal–Agent, and Public Finance theories, PFM was measured through budget

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credibility, transparency, accountability, fiscal discipline, and expenditure control, while development outcomes included infrastructure and social service performance. Findings revealed that improved PFM significantly enhances development outcomes, especially in budget implementation and service delivery. The study recommends strengthening institutional capacity, accountability systems, and fiscal discipline to maximize development impact in Nigeria.

Weldone and Prince (2025) investigated how institutional weakness and systemic corruption affect democratic legitimacy in Nigeria, with attention to risks of democratic decline and possible military intervention. The study aimed to explain how extractive institutions and corruption jointly undermine trust in democratic governance. Using institutional theory, the researchers distinguished between inclusive and extractive systems and adopted a qualitative historical analysis supported by sectoral corruption reviews and youth attitude surveys. Findings showed that corruption in elections, oil revenue management, and security institutions has significantly eroded public trust, leading to widespread citizen disillusionment with democratic outcomes. Many respondents expressed openness to non-democratic alternatives. The study recommends institutional reform, stronger anti-corruption measures, improved transparency, and enhanced accountability to restore democratic legitimacy and regional stability in West Africa.

Inah et al. (2025) examined the effect of public budget transparency on citizens' trust in government institutions in Nigeria. The study aimed to understand how the accessibility and clarity of budget information influence public confidence in institutions such as ministries, local councils, and revenue agencies. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted, using purposive and snowball sampling to select 30 participants from the South-West, North-Central, and South-South regions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face and virtually, then analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's framework with NVivo software. Findings revealed that limited access to clear and timely budget information, along with weak citizen engagement, reduces trust in government institutions. The study recommends improving transparency, enhancing public participation, and ensuring accessible budget communication to rebuild institutional trust in Nigeria.

Omemgbeoji and Onuora (2024) examined the relationship between International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) adoption and transparency and accountability in public sector financial reporting in Nigeria. The study aimed to assess the extent to which IPSAS enhances transparency and accountability in government financial reporting. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with a population of 6,393 staff from federal MDAs in Anambra State, from which 121 respondents were selected using the Taro Yamane sampling technique. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation via SPSS version 26. Findings revealed that IPSAS adoption significantly improves financial reporting transparency and accountability in the Nigerian public sector. The study recommends continuous training and capacity building for accounting personnel to ensure effective implementation and uniform compliance with IPSAS standards.

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Ochi et al. (2023) investigated the impact of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on electoral credibility in Nigeria, with particular reference to the 2021 Anambra State governorship election. The study aimed to assess how electronic voting technology influences the credibility of elections in a context characterized by electoral fraud and violence. A qualitative research design was adopted, relying on secondary data sources and analyzed using the e-democracy framework. Findings revealed that while BVAS improved voter accreditation and reduced electoral manipulation, its effectiveness was limited by capacity gaps among election officials and technical glitches during implementation. The study concluded that BVAS has the potential to strengthen electoral credibility if properly improved and supported. It recommended enhanced training for electoral staff, better technological infrastructure, and continuous system upgrades to ensure more credible elections in Nigeria.

Peter and Inokoba (2023) examined the role of electoral technology in enhancing electoral credibility, transparency, and trust in Nigeria, with a focus on the 2023 presidential election. The study aimed to determine whether Nigeria is adequately prepared for the effective adoption of election technologies and how these tools influence democratic outcomes. A qualitative research design was employed, drawing data from secondary sources and comparative electoral experiences across African countries. Findings revealed that while electoral technologies such as electronic accreditation can improve transparency and reduce fraud, their effectiveness in Nigeria is constrained by systemic issues such as weak institutional trust, impunity, and poor political culture. The study concluded that technology alone cannot guarantee credible elections without strong institutional reforms. It recommended strengthening electoral integrity, rebuilding public trust, and addressing governance challenges to improve the effectiveness of electoral technology in Nigeria.

Okoro et al. (2023) examined the factors influencing the adoption of e-procurement in Nigeria's public sector, with emphasis on sectors such as health, construction, economy, and education. The study aimed to identify the barriers affecting the effective implementation of electronic procurement systems in public administration. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, using quantitative data collected from 50 procurement officers, including senior procurement managers and administrative staff in selected ministries. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that the adoption of e-procurement in Nigeria remains low and slow due to challenges such as inadequate technical infrastructure, political interference, cultural resistance, limited financial capacity, and weak evidence of its benefits. The study recommended improved strategic sourcing, stronger negotiation processes, enhanced budget approval systems, and effective feedback mechanisms to support successful e-procurement implementation in Nigeria.

Krah and Mertens (2023) examined the influence of financial transparency on citizens' trust and willingness to pay taxes in local governments in sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Ghana. The study aimed to determine how transparency in financial reporting affects public trust and revenue mobilisation behaviour. Anchored on stewardship and public choice theories, the study employed a quantitative research design using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation

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Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse survey data from 404 respondents across four metropolitan and municipal assemblies. Findings revealed that financial transparency positively influences citizens' trust and their willingness to pay taxes and levies, although both transparency and trust levels remain relatively low. The study recommends improving access to financial information and enhancing transparency practices to strengthen trust and improve revenue generation in local governments.

Agbaje and Oladutire (2023) examined the effect of financial control on accountability in the Nigerian public sector. The study aimed to assess how supervisory control, account control, and segregation of duties influence accountability outcomes. A quantitative research design was adopted, focusing on selected federal ministries and parastatals, including the National Directorate of Employment, Federal Inland Revenue Service, and Niger Delta Development Commission. Data were collected from 200 respondents and analysed using robust regression analysis to address heteroskedasticity, while controlling for respondents' gender and experience. Findings revealed that all financial control components significantly enhance accountability in the public sector. The study concluded that strong financial control systems improve accountability and recommended effective implementation of supervisory mechanisms, proper account management, and strict segregation of duties to strengthen public sector financial accountability in Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design based on a cross-sectional survey. This approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from respondents at a specific point in time to investigate the relationship between financial responsibility and public trust in electoral processes in Nigeria. The entire approach is grounded in the positivist paradigm, which holds that social phenomena can be objectively measured and analyzed using statistical techniques to reveal correlations between variables.

The study population comprises registered voters aged 18 to 56 years and above (18–56+) in Lagos State, Nigeria. These individuals are direct stakeholders in the electoral process and are therefore considered capable of expressing informed opinions on issues relating to financial accountability and public confidence. Lagos State was selected because it has the highest number of registered voters in Nigeria, with 7,060,195 registered voters. Of this number, 6,214,970 collected their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) record of registered voters and PVCs collected for the 2023 General Election (INEC, 2025). Furthermore, Lagos State is a highly cosmopolitan state with a large, diverse, and geographically dispersed population, making it an appropriate setting for the study. A sample size of approximately 400 is deemed sufficient for the study. The sample size was calculated using the Cochran formula for large populations, and respondents were selected using simple random sampling to ensure that everyone has an equal chance and to limit the likelihood of selection bias.

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The study's data were collected primarily using a standardized questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It was divided into sections that discuss budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit and financial reporting quality, cost efficiency, and public trust in electoral processes. Before it was widely used, the instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha to ensure that internal consistency remains strong. The questionnaires were distributed virtually.

The collected responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential approaches. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to provide an overall summary of respondents' views. For the inferential analysis, multiple regression was used primarily to test hypotheses and assess the impact of financial accountability dimensions on public trust in electoral processes. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring that participation is voluntary, responses are kept anonymous, and data is managed correctly solely for academic reasons.

4.0 Data Analysis and Presentation

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, while 372 were properly completed and returned, representing a 93.0% response rate, which is considered adequate for statistical analysis.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Response Status	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Returned	372	93.0
Not Returned	28	7.0
Total	**400**	**100**

The high response rate indicates strong engagement and reliability of the data collected for the study.

4.2 Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	198	53.2
Female	174	46.8
Total	**372**	**100**

The table shows a relatively balanced gender representation, ensuring diverse perspectives.

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Table 4.3: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25	82	22.0
26–35	124	33.3
36–45	96	25.8
46–55	48	12.9
56+	22	5.9
Total	**372**	**100**

Most respondents fall within the active voting population (26–45 years), indicating informed responses.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Budget Transparency	3.21	1.02	Moderate
Procurement Accountability	3.05	1.08	Moderate
Audit & Reporting Quality	2.98	1.11	Low–Moderate
Cost Efficiency	3.12	1.05	Moderate
Public Trust	2.87	1.14	Low

The results indicate that respondents perceive moderate levels of financial accountability, while public trust in electoral processes remains relatively low, suggesting a possible accountability–trust gap.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.5: Correlation Matrix

Variables	BT	PA	ARQ	CE	PT
Budget Transparency (BT)	1.00				
Procurement Accountability (PA)	0.62	1.00			
Audit Reporting Quality (ARQ)	0.58	0.65	1.00		
Cost Efficiency (CE)	0.55	0.60	0.63	1.00	
Public Trust (PT)	0.67	0.69	0.71	0.64	1.00

All variables show positive and significant relationships, indicating that financial accountability dimensions are strongly associated with public trust.

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4.5 Regression Analysis

Table 4.6: Regression Results

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Budget Transparency	0.28	4.92	0.000	Significant
Procurement Accountability	0.31	5.41	0.000	Significant
Audit & Reporting Quality	0.34	6.02	0.000	Significant
Cost Efficiency	0.25	4.35	0.001	Significant

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-value	Sig.
0.78	0.61	0.59	142.3	0.000

Interpretation of Findings

According to the regression results, each of the four characteristics of financial accountability appears to have a significant impact on public trust in Nigeria's election processes. Public trust was most strongly correlated with audit and financial reporting quality (β = 0.34), followed by procurement accountability (β = 0.31), budget transparency (β = 0.28), and cost efficiency (β = 0.25). The model accurately predicts approximately 61% of changes in public trust (R^2 = 0.61). That shows a strong explanatory ability. In other words, this supports the notion that financial accountability is a major factor influencing citizens' confidence in democratic processes.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that every aspect of financial accountability, including budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit and financial reporting quality, and cost efficiency, has a significant positive relationship with public trust in election processes in Nigeria. This appears to be consistent with previous empirical and theoretical research on governance, accountability, and electoral integrity.

4.6.1 Budget Transparency and Public Trust

The results show that budget openness has a significant positive effect on public trust in electoral processes. Therefore, when citizens have access to electoral finance information that is not just available but also clear, open, and readable, they are more likely to trust the electoral system. This finding is consistent with the International Budget Partnership's (2026) study, which contends that fiscal transparency increases voters' trust in governmental institutions. Part of it is that it reduces uncertainty while simultaneously improving accountability, making the overall system feel less fragile. Bassey (2025) argues that when public engagement is minimal and access to budget information is limited, trust in governance suffers, particularly in developing democracies such as Nigeria. The message here is that secrecy in election budgeting can diminish legitimacy, whereas transparency fosters democratic trust.

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4.6.2 Procurement Accountability and Public Trust

The study discovered that procurement accountability has a meaningful impact on public trust in electoral procedures. Therefore, if procurement methods are more transparent when purchasing electoral materials and services, citizens will have a greater sense of justice and honesty. Transparency International (2024) supports this viewpoint, stating that inadequate procurement mechanisms increase the likelihood of corruption while simultaneously gradually eroding institutional confidence. In Nigeria, there are continuous concerns about contract inflation and non-competitive procurement techniques, which have been extensively documented as drivers of distrust in public institutions. Similarly, empirical studies on electoral integrity in Nigeria reveal that procurement inefficiencies and corruption perceptions can undermine trust in election results (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). Therefore, more open procurement procedures are important because they help sustain election legitimacy, even if the link is not always direct.

4.6.3 Audit and Financial Reporting Quality and Public Trust

The results also indicate that audit and financial reporting quality have the greatest influence on public trust of the variables examined. It suggests that when auditing procedures are credible and financial reports are reliable, citizens' trust in election processes improves significantly. This appears to be consistent with the World Bank's (2025) position, which holds that strong audit systems are critical to establishing accountability and institutional trust in government. When audit recommendations are not strictly executed, as is common in many developing countries, people begin to perceive it as impunity or mismanagement. In Nigeria, research on election governance has led in the same direction, indicating that institutional flaws, such as a lack of adherence to protocols and inadequate oversight, diminish electoral credibility (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025). Overall, greater audit mechanisms promote transparency while also reinforcing faith in electoral administration.

4.6.4 Cost Efficiency and Public Trust

The study also found that cost efficiency in electoral expenditure has a strong effect on public trust in election processes. It suggests that when citizens see electoral funds used efficiently, and pretty much without waste, then their confidence in the system goes up a bit. This outcome lines up with OECD (2023), which basically says that when public spending is more efficient, it can lift trust in government institutions because it shows responsible use of resources. In Nigeria, the rising cost of elections has been a repeated worry, and there’s not much clear proof that higher spending leads to better electoral quality. These kinds of inefficiencies tend to stoke public doubts about how election money is handled, and in the end, that reduces trust even more.

4.6.5 Overall Financial Accountability and Public Trust

Overall, these findings demonstrate that financial accountability is a reliable predictor of public trust in Nigeria's electoral processes. And, this aligns with Agency Theory, which states that openness and monitoring methods can eliminate information gaps between citizens (as principals) and electoral institutions (as agents), hence increasing confidence. It also appears to

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be consistent with Institutional Theory, as it emphasizes how strong institutional arrangements can boost legitimacy and make people feel more confident.

However, empirical data from election studies support these findings, demonstrating that electoral integrity and transparency are important predictors of trust in democratic regimes (Omemgbeoji & Onuora, 2024). Similarly, further research on Nigeria's election system reveals that corruption, poor rule enforcement, and institutional involvement weaken electoral legitimacy and public trust (Madueke & Enyiazu, 2025).

Finally, the study supports the premise that enhancing financial accountability measures inside election processes is critical if Nigeria wishes to repair and cement public trust. Transparency, accountability, audit quality, procurement integrity, and cost efficiency are more than just administrative requirements; they also serve as democratic trust-building tools, even if people don't always call them that.

5.0 Summary of Findings, Recommendations, and Suggestions for further studies

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study examined how financial accountability relates to public trust, particularly in Nigerian election processes, and divided it into four primary areas: budget transparency, procurement accountability, audit and financial reporting quality, and cost efficiency. The study found that all four of these dimensions of financial accountability show a big positive effect on public trust in the electoral processes. Audit and financial reporting quality were identified as the most important factors, followed by procurement accountability, budget transparency, and cost efficiency.

The study also discovered that, while people's opinions of financial responsibility were more reasonable, public trust in election procedures remained poor. So, there is a true accountability-trust gap running through Nigeria's election system. The study supports the premise that financial responsibility is a crucial driver of citizens' confidence in electoral institutions and the democratic process as a whole.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should enhance transparency in electoral budgeting by making more detailed financial reports publicly accessible, and also promptly, in a format that people can actually understand easily. That should help reduce suspicion a lot and generally improve citizen confidence in electoral spending. Also, the procurement processes for electoral materials and related services should be fully digitized and strictly aligned, with competitive bidding procedures, so the corruption risks are minimized and fairness is improved overall.

The study also suggests that it is important to strengthen audit mechanisms by making sure that both internal and external audit reports are not only carried out regularly, but they are also

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published and followed up on, so accountability outcomes get better in practice. There is, moreover, a clear need for improved cost efficiency in electoral expenditure through better planning, monitoring, and evaluation of electoral budgets, so that value for money is actually achieved. Finally, civil society organizations and the media should be actively involved in monitoring electoral financial processes because public oversight needs to be stronger, and trust in the electoral system should be reinforced.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research could broaden this study by investigating how institutional trust, media openness, and political involvement mediate or modify the relationship between financial responsibility and public trust in electoral processes. Furthermore, comparative research can be conducted across multiple African nations to see whether differences in financial accountability mechanisms in different democratic settings affect election trust. Furthermore, future research may employ qualitative or mixed methodologies to gain more nuanced insights from electoral officials, politicians, and civil society actors regarding the practical challenges of financial stewardship in elections. Furthermore, longitudinal studies might be conducted to observe how evolving electoral finance accountability over time affects public trust throughout numerous election cycles in Nigeria.

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