

Public Policy and Governance In Relation To Nigeria's Electoral Reform: An Analysis through Intent-Focused Management Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the Nigerian electoral reform using the lens of Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) and finds that the problem with electoral reforms is not only a lack of legislation, but also the lack of clarity of articulation of electoral reform intent, misaligned incentives for stakeholders, or a lack of feedback mechanisms. Despite the innovations incorporated in the Electoral Act 2022 which featured some new technologies and transparency in the electoral process, the 2023 general elections revealed challenges in coordination between stakeholders, preparedness of institutions, and operational alignment between INEC, political parties, security agencies and civil society organisations. This analysis shows how the three axes of IFMT (intent definition, intent alignment, and intent realization) can help address the intent-implementation gap that has always hindered electoral governance in Nigeria: by breaking down broad electoral goals into operational targets, creating participatory forums for deliberation and engagement, and institutionalizing adaptive feedback mechanisms. Combining election reports, assessments from civil society, and election management scholarship, the study proposes sustainable electoral reform to move beyond reactive, incremental 'muddling through' to strategic, proactive, intent-oriented governance, incorporating legal, institutional, resource allocation and political dimensions to the collective democratic purpose of credible and inclusive elections.

KEYWORDS

Public Policy, Electoral Reform, Intent-Focused Management Theory, Political Institutions, Transparency

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, electoral reform efforts have increasingly emphasized strategic public management, institutional accountability, and adaptive governance as essential mechanisms for strengthening democratic credibility and public trust (Kettl, 2024; Bryson, 2023; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2024). In Africa, however, electoral systems still have some challenges with implementation, including institutional coordination, administrative inefficiency, and policy inconsistencies, that can impede democratic consolidation and governance processes (Ndema, 2022; Ezeani, 2021; Hill & Varone, 2021). The problems have been acute in Nigeria where electoral reforms have continued to struggle with

implementation gaps that undermine credibility of electoral governance and trust in the electoral process.

The Electoral Act 2022 had made provisions for some innovations in technology, process transparency and electoral efficiency, however, the general elections of 2023 had revealed some persistent challenges of alignment of stakeholders, coordination of operations and institutional preparedness (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD] 2023, European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023, INEC, 2023, NILDS, 2022). Additionally, the weak implementation structures, competition among institutional incentives and the failure to realign resources as reported by International IDEA (2024), Yiaga Africa (2024), and the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) are responsible for myriad electoral policy challenges in Nigeria, which consequently leads to governance paradoxes.

These challenges are tackled by the Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) that emphasises the clear articulation of the reform intent, decomposing policy objectives into measurable operational targets, such as within INEC, political parties and judiciary (Omuse, 2025). This is different than the traditional model which ignores dynamics of the feedback mechanism, and which Omuse (2025) suggests requires continuous realignment to reduce risks in complex systems. This approach is consistent with other public administration research that focuses on strategic coherence and adaptive governance.

Nigeria's electoral governance can be demonstrated through the use of IFMT, as it shows how vague and misaligned intent can be a source of electoral malpractices and litigation. While election reforms have been implemented, post-election reviews highlight logistical challenges and controversies over the results due to a lack of coordination among the actors and a lack of focus on a single manager in charge of the electoral process (INEC, 2024; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA], 2024; National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies [NILDS], 2022). In addition to feedback loops for risk management (Rainey, 2022; Omuse, 2025), IFMT promotes the decomposition of intent, which involves dividing broad intentions (such as, credible elections) into specific goals that align with incentives for actors, including security institutions and civil society. An approach that comes between the theory and practice of public administration is moving from incremental "muddling through" to strategic "planning with intent"

In Nigeria, synchronisation of reform intention and capacities may mitigate the governance lapses identified during the transmission of votes and the collation process in the 2022 elections (CDD-West Africa and academic research on the Electoral Act 2022 and 2023 elections, 2024-2025 and Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre [PLAC] 2022). Finally, IFMT offers a strong lens to continue to maintain electoral reform, focusing on feedback-based governance and resource restructuring within public organisations. The theory's emphasis on clarity of purpose with a view to accountability and institutional resilience, as recommended by the post-2023 reviews, could help inform Nigeria's iterative reform process (Ezeani, 2021, Uwais Electoral Reform Committee, 2023, Yiaga Africa, 2024). Incorporating IFMT principles in policy can shift from a reactive approach to a proactive approach to policy management, improving democratic legitimacy through aligned incentives and adaptive mechanisms (Omuse, 2025; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2024; Kettl, 2024). The intent-centric approach can help bridge the gaps in electoral credibility and help ensure that electoral reform leads to effective delivery of public services.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is a review of the overview of Intent-Focused Management Theory, recent empirical literature and policy literature on the Electoral reform in Nigeria after the Electoral Act 2022 and the general elections of 2023, and management and governance theory which is relevant to the implementation of Electoral reform.

A. Overview of Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT)

The Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) suggests that the success of an organization lies in the deliberate communication of intent and sharing of intent as the primary motivator for all activities rather than fixed organizational structures or adherence to rules and regulations (Omuse, 2025). IFMT builds on critiques of classical approaches that are often driven by processes more than goals, focusing on breaking down high-level intent into measurable, actionable goals and operating rules, and then aligning incentives, routines and resources (Chanana et al., 2024; Briner et al., 2022). As noted by Chanana et al. (2024), this intent-centric view introduces ongoing feedback loops to promote realignment with the dynamic, rather than structural, realities, a feature missing from traditional theories where formalism can become disconnected with dynamism. Hammond (2022) and Sułkowski and Lenart-Gansiniec (2025) emphasize the importance of intent as the connecting thread, highlighting its potential for continuous success in complex settings and filling the gap between theory and practice in the field of organizational management. Strategic alignment and adaptive governance are also cited as key to organizational success in volatile contexts by Bryson (2023) and Rainey (2022).

As a public policy organisation, IFMT views problems as opportunities to transform the vision of a free, fair and credible election into coherent systems of law, institutional capacity and incentives, and effective monitoring (Omuse, 2025; Hill & Varone, 2021). IFMT proposes that instead of relying on incremental or garbage-can approaches that tolerate ambiguity and ad hoc decision-making, proactive intent decomposition should be implemented to avoid the likelihood of alignment problems and implementation failures in public administration, as identified by Cohen et al. (2023) and by Lindblom (1959). Often, decision-making within an organization can be likened to a "garbage can," as Cohen et al. (2023) write, a place where problems, solutions, and participants collide in unstructured ways. IFMT provides intentional structure, so that the decision-making process becomes more effective within the organisation. This method challenges abstract procedural ends-in-themselves and suggests revising procedures based on feedback to increase accountability and organizational effectiveness in complex reforms that include multiple actors.

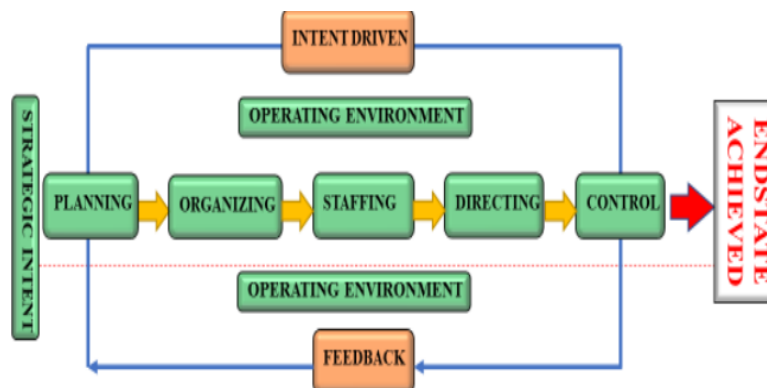


Figure 1: Intent Focused Management Theory Theoretical Framework

Based on the work of Frank line Oyese Omuse (Omuse, 2025), Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) emphasizes that the effectiveness of any organizational or policy system rests on the clarity, consistency and continuity of managerial intent, calling into question traditional practices that tend to focus on rigid structures, processes, or incremental changes rather than purposeful direction (Briner et al., 2022; Sułkowski & Lenart-Gansiniec, 2025). The theory is based on three interrelated pillars:

- Intent Definition: explicitly defining the main objective and intended outcomes of policies or initiatives to inform decision-making in a changing environment;
- Intent Alignment: Being coherent and incentive compatible from the strategic intent to the daily administrative implementation, at the stakeholder level; and
- Intent Realization - Focus is on keeping the adaptive feedback mechanisms, resource realignment, and continuous monitoring to reach the desired goals, while dealing with implementation risks and gaps (Omuse, 2025; Bryson, 2023; Rainey, 2022; Chanana et al., 2024).

The intent-based paradigm of IFMT is one that is different from classical public management and new public management, as it centers intent as the unifying force driving theory-practice gaps in public administration and governance (Hammond, 2022; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2024; Hill & Varone, 2021). In conclusion, IFMT is an all-round solution that deals with the interplay of clarity of intent, alignment and realization to enable accountability and strengthen institutions for democratic governance.

B. Electoral Reform in Nigeria

A large and growing body of post-2023 literature documents the legal, operational, and political problems that have complicated Nigeria's recent reform efforts. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has published several internal review and reform roadmaps in the wake of the logistical and legal challenges faced during the 2023 general elections (2023, 2024). INEC's review documents highlight issues in the capacities that need to be strengthened, including preparedness, logistics, procurement, and contingency planning, and propose multi-year recommendations to enhance capacity and system resilience. These documents clearly highlight a difference between changes to the law (the Electoral Act 2022) and being ready to operate.

The reflections from INEC are complemented by civil society and expert observers, including Citizens' Memorandum (2024) and outputs of advocacy by INEC's Citizens' Network of the organization, Yiaga Africa. Yiaga Africa (2024) identifies ambiguities in the 2022 Act; identifies judicial interpretations which could not align with the Act as drafted and suggest priority legislative interventions and procedural clarifications that can minimize ambiguity and minimize litigious risks. It also calls for party regulation, inclusion measures for voters and the need for continuous voter education to support the reforms. In these advocacy texts, reform is not just a legal drafting issue; it is a governance issue that needs to be addressed across the sectors, including parties, INEC, civil society and the Executive and Legislature.

Independent policy centres and research organisations, such as CDD-West Africa and scholarly reviews of the 2022 Act (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; CDD, 2023), have conducted critical empirical studies that highlight the various issues with

turnout, the registration experience, and the reporting of observers, which point to systemic vulnerabilities, including procurement irregularities, inconsistent application of electoral rules across states, and technological teething problems in relation to the deployment of BVAS and results transmission. These studies underscore the argument that without investments in institutional capacity, the procurement process, and the operations of electoral bodies, legal reform alone is not enough for credible elections.

C. Technology, Procurement, and Institutional Capacity

One of the recurring issues in scholarly and policy reflections on electoral processes in Nigeria is the double-edged swords of technological innovations, especially those aimed at improving the integrity of the electoral process, but also adding new vulnerabilities (INEC, 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Omuse, 2025). INEC's strategic planning documents and technical handbooks underscore the transformative potential of biometric enrolment systems, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter verification, and secure electronic results transmission through the IReV portal to strengthen transparency, and mitigate traditional malpractices such as over-voting or result manipulation.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) highlights, however, that these developments place significant demands on implementation, including formal procedures for training staff, maintaining equipment, providing spare parts and implementing rigorous procedures for vetting vendors, which, if not met, can result in disruptions and undermine the trust of stakeholders. Similarly, Hood (2021) and Ndema (2022) subscribe to the view that the new public management reforms demand more than only a financial investment in technology; it takes continuous organizational capacity building.

Recent experiences and analysts warn that technology procurement without proper governance measures, including open tendering, independent audits and lifecycle support commitments, can result in technology creating critical single points of failure that further deepen public mistrust as compared to purely manual systems (CDD-West Africa, 2023; International IDEA, 2024; Ezeani, 2021; Adebayo & Lawal, 2020). The literature highlights the need to implement technological reforms alongside holistic project management principles, robust vendor monitoring and oversight, and lasting financial support in line with a project's institutional capacity-building goals (Bryson, 2023; Omuse, 2025; Ostrom, 2023). For effective deployment, legal and technical innovations and adaptive institutional mechanisms are needed to reduce risks and maintain electoral credibility (Hill & Varone, 2021; Uwais Electoral Reform Committee, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2024).

D. Governance, Incentives, and the Intent-Implementation Gap

An ideological strand in the literature sees Nigeria's electoral reform problems as a governance problem with institutional incentives, accountability structures and inter-agency coordination playing a significant role in the electoral outcomes (Ezeani, 2021; Ojo, 2022; Hood, 2021). Misaligned incentives are cited as a key cause of failures in reform, including vote-buying, politicized logistics, and selective enforcement of rules by political actors, who

are concerned with gaining short-term electoral benefits rather than ensuring the integrity of the system (Adebayo & Laval, 2020; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

This mismatch compounds the "intent-implementation" gap, by which lofty policy promises weaken in the face of tensions from divided institutional relationships and inadequate monitoring systems (Omuse, 2025; Cohen et al., 2023; Hill & Varone, 2021). Organizational choice in this regard takes place in a "garbage can" where solutions and problems meet in an unplanned manner (Cohen et al., 2023).

Also, episodic institutional learning, where learning from elections does not inevitably lead to strong commitments to reform, continues cycles of weak progress and re-emerging vulnerabilities in procurement and logistics governance (INEC, 2024; Lindblom, 1959; International IDEA, 2024). As Lindblom (1959) famously wrote, "much of the policymaking process is a matter of 'muddling through' without the cumulative rationality that is required to construct a coherent policy. Lindblom (1959) famously argued that often the policymaking process is "muddling through" without the rationality necessary to build up a coherent policy; the pattern of electoral reform in Nigeria is illustrative of this incremental, non-cumulative approach. There is a need to increase transparency, which can be achieved through independent verification, statutory accountability mechanisms and institutionalized feedback mechanisms (such as conducting mandatory post-election audits and allocating resources based on performance) to ensure that incentives are aligned and increase the momentum for reform (Bryson, 2023; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2024; Uwais Electoral Reform Committee, 2023).

The measures are the result of new public management principles as defined by Hood (2021) and seek to help address governance paradoxes by creating conditions for fidelity to shared electoral intents rather than partisan gains. Collective action issues in governance must also be addressed through institutional designs, which are aligned with the individual and organizational incentives and with the public ones (Omuse, 2025; Ostrom, 2023).

E. Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT): Bridging Management Theory and Electoral Reform

Omuse's (2025) recent formulation, Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT), turns the focus of organizational and managerial performance around by placing the explicit articulation of shared intent as the primary motivator of design, implementation and evaluation. IFMT promotes a clear, hierarchical prioritization of goals, which is articulated comprehensively and guides laws, budgets, procurement processes, operational procedures, incentive structures and iterative feedback mechanisms.

It directly challenges traditional approaches to management focused on compliance or structural change without connecting that to specific intent fidelity, and provides a bridge between management theory and issues of public governance challenges (Briner et al., 2022; Sułkowski & Lenart-Gansiniec, 2025; Chanana et al., 2024). Briner et al. (2022) state that a lot of management research is detached from management practice, and IFMT aims to bridge this gap by articulating what management intends and how it operates. The consequences of IFMT were used to diagnose the Nigeria context of electoral reform by chronic governance failures such as unclear policy goals, weak institutional learning systems and divergent incentives of various stakeholders.

IFMT highlights the main electoral governance gaps, including the presence of various and conflicting agendas from the different stakeholders—political actors who are focused on electoral outcomes, administrative actors who are focused on the process, security actors who are focused on stability, and civic actors who are focused on inclusion—and this results in some legal confusion and contestations regarding operational decisions (Omuse, 2025; Cohen et al., 2023; Ostrom, 2023). Cohen et al. (2023) refer to this as a "garbage can" situation where there is organizational chaos due to competing intents. Furthermore, there is a gap between the design and the capacity, including investment in resources, procurement and technical capacity, with statutory developments such as the Electoral Act 2022 lagging behind resources and transparent procurement, and technical capacity (INEC, 2024; CDD-West Africa, 2023; Adebayo & Lawal, 2020).

These problems are exacerbated by weak institutional feedback, because regular reviews and recommendations following elections are unlikely to become binding mechanisms like performance-based budgeting or independent technical committees that are effective in holding governments accountable for their performance and facilitating learning over time (Lindblom, 1959; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; International IDEA, 2024; Uwais Electoral Reform Committee, 2023). This reactive, non-strategic sequence of reform cycles is well captured by Lindblom's (1959) notion of "muddling through."

F. Intent Gaps in Governance

Researchers of Nigeria's governance note that there is a wide gap between the policy intentions and their actual operation, which is often compounded by political maneuvering, inefficiencies in administration, and institutional shortcomings (Ezeani, 2021; Ojo, 2022; Adebayo & Lawal, 2020). This phenomenon is in line with the concept of "intent drift" in Intent Focused Management Theory (IFMT) which refers to the degradation of initial intent over time because of competing priorities and divided execution (Omuse, 2025). In the context of electoral reforms, this reflects recurring patterns of ambitious laws that never lead to credible results, which highlight the importance of effective mechanisms to ensure intent fidelity at multiple governance levels.

The essence of Nigeria's electoral reform policies as captured in policies such as the Electoral Act 2022 is to ensure free, fair and credible elections that are enhanced in transparency and inclusivity (NILDS, 2022; CDD-West Africa, 2023; PLAC, 2022). While intent articulation is often general and aspirational, however, this lack of specificity in measurable operational indicators can make it difficult to monitor and align (Rainey, 2022; Bryson, 2023; Omuse, 2025). According to Bryson (2023), a translation from vision to measurable goals is essential in strategic planning—the intent without this translation being rhetorical. Weak coordination between key institutions, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Assembly, political parties, and security agencies, also exacerbates this issue and inconsistent policy implementation across institutions is another major hindrance to the implementation, as IFMT emphasizes institutional alignment as a core pillar of good practice.

Monitoring and evaluation systems for electoral reforms in Nigeria are also limited, particularly in the development of strong accountability mechanisms that systematically track electoral reforms' intended outcomes and outcomes; only limited robust systems exist in Nigeria (INEC, 2024; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; International IDEA, 2024). The absence of this can lead to policy fatigue, loss of public trust, and repeated

cycles of reform with limited overall institutional learning and improvement (Lindblom, 1959; Lebow & Pelopidas, 2023). Periodic elections reveal these vulnerabilities without fostering adaptive responses to overcome them, leading to governance paradoxes (Cohen et al., 2023; March & Simon, 2023). March and Simon (2023) state that organizations learn from routines and feedback, and electoral failures are repeated in a predictable manner if there are no institutionalized learning mechanisms in place.

To meet these challenges, IFMT principles call for the creation of mechanisms for intent continuity: clear and specific statement of policy objectives linked to measurable policy indicators; pre-rollout alignment forums for stakeholders (INEC, party and civil society); and institutionalized adaptive feedback loops to enable continuous policy iteration for reform (Omuse, 2025; Bryson, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2024). This would help promote accountability through independent audits and performance indicators, and would make it possible to learn from the past elections and incentivize common national goals, not short-term results (Hood, 2021; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2024; Uwais Electoral Reform Committee, 2023). Denhardt and Denhardt (2024) propose a "new public service" concept in which public service is provided to citizens rather than for them and public actors' behaviour is aligned with democratic values, which is also central to IFMT's intent-alignment pillar.

G. Applying IFMT to Electoral Reform

The application of Intent-Focused Management Theory (IFMT) to the electoral reform in Nigeria exposes the challenges in the electoral reform process due to divergent intents of key stakeholders (Omuse, 2025). There are several actors, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which has an operational mandate to deliver credible elections, political parties committed to winning elections, security agencies that seek to maintain the stability of the system, and civic groups advocating for more sweeping reforms, all whose priorities are often in conflict. The misalignments make it possible to achieve negotiated compromises that weaken policy effectiveness, such as governance failures, which result from short-term political gains outweighing credibility at the system level.

The problem with reform design is that it requires a minimal common set of nation-wide electoral preferences as an anchor, IFMT argues (Omuse, 2025; Bryson, 2023). This is a concept that is in line with the concepts of strategic planning which lay emphasis on the achievement of the organization's goals. If there is no strategic direction or target, then organisations develop disjointed and ineffective actions (Bryson, 2023).

While the Electoral Act 2022 and laws give electoral procedures, they often fail to adequately provide for coordinated investments in INEC's operational capabilities, such as staff training, equipment maintenance and procurement integrity (INEC, 2023; CDD-West Africa, 2023; NILDS, 2022). IFMT supports the idea that good policy needs to be implemented through complementary capacity development and resource allocation, directly aligned with the key goals (Omuse, 2025; Rainey, 2022). There is a need for incentive redesign (through performance indicators, public disclosure and independent audit) as shorter time frame of delivery might be politically easier or more credible and might be politically easier or more credible than longer-term credibility.

Also, electoral events occur episodically, which hinders institutional learning, as it requires structured feedback mechanisms such as real time monitoring as well as mandated post-

election review (European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEM), 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEM), 2024; Lindblom, 1959). Although Lindblom (1959) claimed that rational-comprehensive policy-making is impossible, the IFMT approach shows that it can be helpful to select and monitor purposeful, explicit goals in order to smooth out incremental improvements rather than to do so unstructured.

Targeted recommendations under IFMT include producing a bipartisan Electoral Intent Charter endorsed by the National Assembly, INEC, parties, and civil society to prioritize objectives like inclusion and result integrity (Omuse, 2025; Yiaga Africa, 2024). Ambiguous provisions in the Electoral Act 2022 could be clarified through amendments based on post-2023 review and citizen inputs, (CDD-W Africa, 2023; PLAC, 2022; Research Gate, 2025). Enhancing procurement transparency and implementing independent technical verification of technologies such as BVAS, along with performance-based funding linked to preparedness stages, would help to connect resources with the operational purpose.

Capacity building and feedback should involve investments in logistics, data integrity systems, and local trainings that incorporate long-term maintenance and cyber security programs, and independent monitoring should be included (INEC 2024; Uwais Electoral Reform Committee 2023). Requiring statutory reviews for parliamentarians, strengthening party internal democracy, financing civic education programs with partners such as Yiaga Africa would promote continuous improvement and public confidence (Yiaga Africa, 2024; Ezeani, 2021; Ostrom, 2023). These measures aligned with IFMT can be used to solve the governance paradoxes, in that they focus on shared intent rather than divided incentives (Omuse, 2025; Cohen et al., 2023). It turns out that collective action problems are most effectively solved by institutional designs which link individual incentives to collective goals, and IFMT operationalizes this principle with intent alignment. Ostrom (2023) shows that it is best to solve collective action problems through institutional designs that link individual incentives to collective goals; IFMT operationalizes this principle with intent alignment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative and desk-based research design which uses secondary data obtained from academic journals, scholarly articles, military and police reports, legislative report, and credible web sources to analyze the use of Intent-Focused Management (IFM) in Nigeria's Electoral Reform process, based on the approach of Bello et al. (2026). The study is based on INEC strategic reviews and reform documents (2023-2024), reports from civil society organizations such as Yiaga Africa, CDD-West Africa, PLAC, reports from international observer missions (European Union Election Observation Mission & International IDEA) and academic papers by scholars on governance, public policy, and management theories.

IV. DISCUSSION

In the case of electoral reform in Nigeria, the theory of Intent-Focused Management (IFM) as proposed by Omuse (2025) has a lot of pros over the classical management theories. While scientific management emphasizes efficiency and standardization, it does not work well in environments where things change quickly and there is intense political competition, as this approach can be rigid and hard to adapt to, even though it can be helpful for day-

to-day operations, such as efficient logistics to provide electoral materials (Taylor, 1911; Bello et al., 2026). What INEC (2023) and the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) observed is that the adaptation of procedures to the new challenges of guerrilla-like political disruptions, misinformation campaigns, and fluctuating infrastructure in Nigeria's 36 states and FCT was not possible through rigid compliance with procedures.

However, the flexibility of IFM, which allows leaders to adapt strategies dynamically in response to the adaptive intent cycles, allows INEC and stakeholders to respond much faster to unforeseen electoral challenges (Omuse, 2025). For example, during the 2023 elections, some polling units had issues with their BVAS, which required some adaptive responses – including manual fall-back and quick technical support – that are what IFMT is focused on: feedback-driven adjustment, not sticking to plans (INEC, 2024; CDD, 2023). In Africa, where electoral processes are often complex, International IDEA (2024) agrees that adaptive strategies are essential for electoral effectiveness. Balancing efficiency and adaptability is a key factor in the development of management scholarship as discussed by Sułkowski and Lenart-Gansiniec (2025) in their paradigm shift discussion, which offers a solid framework to overcome scientific management constraints in unstable governance settings.

The theory of the human relations theory has been expanded with the inclusion of aspects of morale and cohesion in the strategic alignment in electoral organizations, at least in the Nigerian context (Mayo, 1933; Rice, 1954). Human relations theory relates to morale and unit cohesion which are important to small teams, like electoral officials at polling units, but does not have systems to coordinate these with overall strategic goals – Mayo, (1933). Well motivated INEC ad-hoc staff can then achieve mission success only if there is an alignment of objectives at the level of the broader system, such as timely result transmission or transparent collation, for instance, (NILDS, 2022; CDD-West Africa, 2023).

IFM addresses this by developing the participative intent formulation process which fosters cohesion and sets up units to strategic objectives (Omuse, 2025). INEC, security agencies (police, civil defence, military), and civil society observers also worked together in Nigeria during the 2023 elections, though communication was sometimes disjointed, and priorities were not always aligned, resulting in a lack of coherence (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). If an IFMT approach had been taken, pre-election stakeholder alignment forums, like those recommended by Yiaga Africa (2024), could have set out a shared goal (e.g., “every valid vote counted and transmitted within 24 hours”) and defined with measurable responsibilities the roles played by the different actors.

Human factors and strategic intent are added to the management theory, so IFM is a comprehensive new management theory that has overcome the shortcomings of human relations theory in a dynamic electoral environment. Denhardt and Denhardt (2024) likewise emphasize that public service excellence needs to be linked to the individual's motivations as well as the values and operational objectives of the democratic system—just what IFMT's pillar of intent-alignment advocates.

Without a unifying concept, systems theory and contingency theory are only useful for discussing complexity and adaptability in organizational operations; in the context of the Nigerian elections, Intent-Focused Management (IFM) theory is useful for answering this question (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Fiedler, 1967). While very helpful, the interdependence perspective of systems theory can lead to delays in electoral coordination with multiple

stakeholders (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011). The need for INEC, state governments, political parties, and security agencies to agree on the deployment of sensitive materials, for instance, can delay response times during crises.

In a similar fashion, contingency theory suggests contextual flexibility, the use of different management styles depending on the context (Fiedler, 1967; Schriesheim et al., 1976). This is beneficial, but offers no guarantee of congruence among different units moving in different directions, as was the case in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, where various INEC state offices had different understandings of the result transmission procedures, which resulted in litigation (International IDEA, 2024). On the other hand, the intention as a guiding principle of IFM ensures flexibility and convergence towards the same coordinated goal (Omuse, 2025). If INEC had communicated a clear and unified purpose: 'transparent, real time result transmission via IReV in all 176,846 polling units' and broken this down into state-level operational targets, with monitoring of the results, then much of the post-election controversy could have been defused.

Likewise, Voulvoulis et al., (2022)'s perspective of systems thinking in a dynamic environment can apply to cross-state electoral logistics, with a shared goal to integrate federal, state and local initiatives. This fits into Ostrom's (2023) collective action framework, which is based on aligning the incentives of different actors towards common goals.

A. *Contributions of IFM Theory to Electoral Governance Scholarship*

The Intent-Focused Management (IFM) theory makes significant contributions to management and governance scholarship within electoral contexts by integrating electoral management tools such as strategic planning frameworks, performance metrics, and stakeholder coordination mechanisms into management theory (Omuse, 2025; Wren, 2005; Chanana et al., 2024). This integration connects the practice of electoral governance and the academic research on it, helping to make management concepts more relevant and applicable to electoral governance. IFMT can be integrated with Bryson's (2023) strategic planning model, which can help the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) translate the goals of democracy into operational objectives, budgetary priorities, and accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, IFM presents the Dynamic Intent Framework which focuses on flexibility, lifelong learning and strategic adjustment of electoral management, and not the election itself as a singular event (Omuse, 2025; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this way, post-election reviews can be used as an intentional and forward-looking process, as opposed to the incremental 'muddling through' process proposed by Lindblom.

In addition, IFM builds on the concept of Mission Command through decentralized decision-making based on a shared strategic intent, to build a scalable model for managing complex electoral operations at multiple administrative levels within Nigeria (Omuse, 2025; Fiedler, 1967; Schriesheim et al. 1976). This approach offers the advantage of ensuring strategic consistency from the center, while being flexible, responsive, and coordinated at the local government, state, and ward/polling unit levels. This flexibility and adaptability is crucial for navigating dynamic and unpredictable election contexts (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011; Day & Hunt, 2023; Voulvoulis et al., 2022). This results in a broad and flexible framework that enhances electoral practice and management scholarship, namely through strategic planning, adaptive intent cycles and decentralized operational control of IFM.

B. Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of Intent-Focused Management (IFM) theory for management scholarship and electoral practice are significant, especially as it merges the concepts of intent, alignment, and adaptation into a cohesive governance framework (Omuse, 2025; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In contrast to classic management theories that address separate entities like efficiency, morale or contingent leadership (Taylor, 1911; Mayo, 1933; Fiedler, 1967), IFM reflects a more holistic view, taking into account mutual relationships between these components in complex organizational context (Sułkowski & Lenart-Gansiniec, 2025; Voulvoulis et al., 2022). The theory is also a contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship, by embedding tools of electoral decision-making (e.g., campaign planning, performance dashboards, and post-election audits) in management theory and electoral strategy (Wren, 2005; Hill & Varone, 2021). Therefore, IFM offers a structure that could also be relevant to other key public services including healthcare delivery or disaster response, where there is a need for coordinated intent and adaptability.

From a practical perspective, IFM improves electoral processes through a decision-making framework that is structured yet flexible, allowing various stakeholders to come together, hold each other accountable, and adapt as needed (Omuse, 2025; Chanana et al., 2024). Participatory intent formulation promotes cooperation between all electoral stakeholders, such as the INEC commissioners, ad-hoc staff, and party agents, which enhances organizational cohesion and commitment (Rice, 1954; Schriesheim et al., 1976). The theory also suggests that introducing performance indicators like timely result transmission, voter turnout, and dispute resolution timelines into strategic planning processes can help ensure alignment between electoral objectives and resources, while adaptive intent cycles enable electoral managers to adjust effectively to new challenges without compromising their overall strategic objectives (Omuse, 2025; Markovsky & Dorfler, 2021). IFM has the potential of enhancing electoral governance in Nigeria by coordinating legal reforms, institutional capacity building, political party regulation and civic engagement towards a common democratic goal of attaining credible, inclusive, and peaceful elections (Omuse, 2025; Yiaga Africa, 2024). This intent can then be communicated to measurable responsibilities for all stakeholders, with regular review and post-election audits promoting continuous improvement.

V. CONCLUSION

The Intent-Focused Management (IFM) theory offers a revolutionary approach to how electoral organizations are managed, overcoming the shortcomings of traditional management theories and highlighting the need to formulate intent, align strategy and make adaptive decisions. It connects with instruments like strategic planning, performance dashboards, and post-election assessments to keep electoral actions and resources in line with democratic goals and flexible in the face of shifting political contexts. IFM provides a practical and scholarly process for enhancing coherence, effectiveness and accountability in electoral governance as a result of the technological evolution of the electoral system and the increasing polarization of politics and the demands of the electorate in Nigeria. The theory further posits that the problem with electoral reform in Nigeria is much more about an attitudinal problem as a result of the lack of political consensus among political actors and institutions. IFM thus offers a framework for bridging the goals and actions of political

elites, electoral institutions and laws with transparent governance, accountability and ongoing feedback mechanisms to turn electoral reform into a process of continuous adaptation and strengthening democratic legitimacy and public trust.

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