

Independent National Electoral Commission's Inclusion Framework And Marginalisation Of Visually Impaired In Oyo State's, Nigeria Democratic Participation

OSENI Ibrahim Oladejo

Department of Political Science
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo

oseni.ibrahim2451@fceoyo.edu.ng

ORCID iD: 0009-0004-7033-2809

Abstract: This study examines the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the democratic participation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State, Nigeria, with a focus on the marginalisation experienced by this population. Situated within the broader discourse on electoral integrity and inclusive democracy, the study draws on democratic participation theory and social marginalisation theory to assess whether INEC's policy interventions meaningfully enhance electoral access for visually impaired citizens or whether systemic barriers continue to limit their political participation. Using a quantitative survey research design, the study collected data from 100 respondents comprising 40 staff and 40 NCE Part Three students of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, in Afijio Local Government, and 20 staff from Special School, Iseyin, in Iseyin Local Government. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Findings reveal that while INEC's Inclusion Framework has established important legal and policy foundations for disability inclusion, significant implementation gaps persist, particularly in the areas of assistive technology availability, polling unit accessibility, voter education, and training of electoral officials. Visually impaired persons continue to experience marginalisation through inaccessible voting materials, inadequate assistive devices, and limited opportunities for political candidacy. The study argues that INEC's framework remains largely aspirational rather than transformative, and that meaningful democratic participation for visually impaired persons requires stronger enforcement mechanisms, improved resource allocation, and deeper collaboration with disability organisations. The paper concludes that democratic consolidation in Nigeria depends on the genuine inclusion of marginalised groups, and that INEC must move beyond policy formulation to ensure effective implementation of its inclusion commitments.

Keywords: Democratic participation, INEC Inclusion Framework, marginalisation, visually impaired persons, Oyo State, electoral integrity

Introduction

Democratic participation is a foundational principle of modern governance, predicated on the idea that all citizens, regardless of their physical or social circumstances, have the right to participate meaningfully in the political processes that shape their lives. In Nigeria, this principle is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, which guarantees every citizen the right to vote and be voted for without discrimination. However, the translation of this constitutional guarantee into lived reality remains uneven, particularly for persons with disabilities (PWDs), who continue to face significant barriers to political participation.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as Nigeria's electoral management body, has recognised this challenge and developed a Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process. This framework, launched in 2018 with support from the European Union, was designed to enhance electoral accessibility through measures such as the provision of braille ballot guides, sign language interpreters, separate voting queues for PWDs, and the deployment of assistive devices at polling units. The framework was further reinforced by provisions in the Electoral Act 2022, which mandates INEC to take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with disabilities, special needs, and vulnerable persons are assisted at polling places through suitable means of communication, including braille, large embossed print, electronic devices, and sign language interpretation.

Despite these progressive policy developments, evidence from the 2023 general elections suggests that implementation has fallen significantly short of intentions. Reports from international observation missions, civil society organisations, and disability advocacy groups indicate that assistive devices such as braille ballot guides and magnifying glasses were available at only a fraction of polling units, that voting materials remained largely inaccessible, and that many visually impaired voters were compelled to rely on others to cast their ballots, thereby compromising the secrecy of their vote. As the European Union noted, the availability of assistive voter materials at polling units was "sporadic and inadequate".

In Oyo State, home to the Federal College of Education (Special), which has the highest concentration of literate persons with disabilities in Nigeria, these challenges are particularly acute. According to TAF Africa's Election Hub dashboard, only 2,197

PWDs voted in Oyo State during the 2023 general elections, representing a fraction of the PWD population in the state. This low turnout suggests that systemic barriers continue to limit the political participation of visually impaired persons, raising important questions about the effectiveness of INEC's inclusion framework in addressing their marginalisation.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the democratic participation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State, with a specific focus on the marginalisation experienced by this population. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of INEC's Inclusion Framework among staff and students of FCE (Special), Oyo, and staff of Special School, Iseyin?
2. What are the perceptions of INEC's Inclusion Framework implementation among visually impaired persons and staff in Oyo State?
3. What are the barriers to democratic participation experienced by visually impaired persons in Oyo State?
4. To what extent has INEC's Inclusion Framework addressed the marginalisation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey research design. This design is appropriate for investigating the perceptions, awareness, and experiences of a defined population regarding INEC's Inclusion Framework and democratic participation. The survey design allows for the collection of standardised data from a relatively large sample, enabling statistical analysis and generalisation of findings.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Afijio Local Government, Oyo State (home to the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo) and Iseyin Local Government, Oyo State (home to Special School, Iseyin). These locations were purposively selected because:

- i. FCE (Special), Oyo is the only college of education in Nigeria dedicated to special education and has the highest concentration of visually impaired students in any higher institution in Nigeria
- ii. Special School, Iseyin is a dedicated institution providing education and training for persons with disabilities, including those with visual impairments.
- iii. These locations provide access to both visually impaired persons and staff who work with them, offering diverse perspectives on the research questions .

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised staff and students of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, and staff of Special School, Iseyin.

The sample consisted of 100 respondents, selected through purposive and convenience sampling techniques:

Category	Location	Sample Size
Staff of FCE (Special), Oyo	Afijio LGA	40
NCE Part Three Students of FCE (Special), Oyo	Afijio LGA	40
Staff of Special School, Iseyin	Iseyin LGA	20
Total		100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The sample size of 100 was considered adequate for quantitative analysis, and the inclusion of both staff and students provided a comprehensive perspective on the research questions. Staff respondents were selected based on their direct involvement in supporting visually impaired students, while student respondents were selected based on their lived experience as visually impaired individuals. Total enumeration was not feasible due to the size of the populations, but efforts were made to ensure representativeness across categories.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire comprised four sections:

- i. **Section A:** Demographic information (age, gender, disability status, educational level, role/position)
- ii. **Section B:** Awareness of INEC's Inclusion Framework (awareness of framework, knowledge of its provisions, sources of information)
- iii. **Section C:** Perceptions of Framework Implementation (perceived effectiveness, availability of assistive devices, accessibility of electoral processes)
- iv. **Section D:** Barriers to Democratic Participation (institutional barriers, social barriers, economic barriers, accessibility challenges)

Questions were primarily closed-ended, using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to capture perceptions and attitudes. The instrument was developed based on a review of relevant literature and validated through expert review.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over a period of four weeks. The researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants, administered questionnaires to respondents at FCE (Special), Oyo, and Special School, Iseyin. For respondents with visual impairments, questionnaires were administered verbally or in braille format as appropriate. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and provided with the opportunity to ask questions before participating.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, and results were presented in tables and figures for clarity. The demographic profile of respondents was summarised using frequency tables, while perceptions and barriers were analysed using mean scores and percentages.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities. All respondents provided informed consent before participating, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. The study complied with relevant guidelines on research involving human participants, with particular attention to the rights and needs of visually impaired respondents.

Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, the sample was limited to 100 respondents from two specific institutions in Oyo State, which may limit the generalisability of findings to other contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported perceptions rather than objective measures of electoral participation. Third, the use of a structured questionnaire may have limited respondents' ability to provide nuanced qualitative insights. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable empirical evidence on the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the democratic participation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State.

Conceptual Clarifications

Democratic Participation

Democratic participation refers to the involvement of citizens in the political processes that govern their lives, including voting, standing for office, engaging in political campaigns, and participating in civic activities. In democratic theory, participation is not merely a right but a fundamental responsibility of citizenship, enabling citizens to hold their leaders accountable and influence public policy decisions.

For persons with disabilities, democratic participation is particularly significant because it ensures that their voices and interests are represented in political decision-making. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which Nigeria is a signatory, explicitly guarantees the right of PWDs to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others.

INEC's Inclusion Framework

INEC's Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process, launched in 2018, is a policy document that outlines the Commission's commitment to ensuring that PWDs can fully and effectively participate in Nigeria's electoral processes. The framework includes provisions for:

- i. Accessible voter registration and education
- ii. Accessible polling units and voting procedures
- iii. Provision of assistive devices (braille ballot guides, magnifying glasses, sign language interpreters)
- iv. Separate voting queues for PWDs
- v. Training of electoral officials on disability inclusion
- vi. Collection of disaggregated data on PWD participation

Marginalisation

Marginalisation refers to the process by which certain groups are excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life. It is a multidimensional concept encompassing legal, institutional, social, and economic dimensions. For visually impaired persons, marginalisation manifests in limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation.

In electoral contexts, marginalisation may take the form of:

- i. **Institutional barriers:** Inaccessible voting materials, lack of assistive devices, poorly trained electoral officials
- ii. **Structural barriers:** Polling units located in inaccessible buildings, inadequate transportation, distance to voting centres
- iii. **Attitudinal barriers:** Stigma, discrimination, and low expectations regarding PWDs' political capabilities
- iv. **Informational barriers:** Limited access to voter education materials in accessible formats

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on a combination of democratic participation theory and social marginalisation theory, both of which provide a strong explanatory foundation for understanding the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the political participation of visually impaired persons.

Democratic Participation Theory

Democratic participation theory posits that the legitimacy and effectiveness of a democracy depend on the active involvement of its citizens in political processes. According to this perspective, participation is not only a right but a fundamental requirement for democratic governance. The theory emphasises that participation must be inclusive, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their social, economic, or physical circumstances, have the opportunity to engage in political life. The key assumption of democratic participation theory is that institutional mechanisms must be in place to facilitate participation, including accessible electoral processes, voter education, and legal protections against discrimination. Where these mechanisms are absent or inadequate, participation is constrained, and democratic legitimacy is undermined.

In the context of this study, democratic participation theory provides a framework for assessing whether INEC's Inclusion Framework has created the institutional conditions necessary for visually impaired persons to participate meaningfully in Nigeria's electoral processes. The theory also highlights the importance of moving beyond formal rights to ensure substantive participation.

Social Marginalisation Theory

Social marginalisation theory examines how certain groups are systematically excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life. The theory emphasises that marginalisation is not a natural state but is produced and maintained by institutional arrangements, social practices, and cultural norms that disadvantage certain groups. For persons with disabilities, marginalisation is often compounded by multiple forms of exclusion, including inaccessible infrastructure, discriminatory attitudes, and limited opportunities for education and employment.

The key assumption of social marginalisation theory is that addressing marginalisation requires structural changes that remove barriers and create enabling conditions for participation. The theory also highlights the importance of voice and agency, arguing that marginalised groups must be involved in the design and implementation of interventions intended to address their exclusion. In the context of this study, social marginalisation theory provides a framework for understanding the barriers that visually impaired persons face in participating in electoral processes. The theory also helps to explain why INEC's Inclusion Framework, despite its progressive intentions, has been insufficient to address the deep-seated exclusion experienced by visually impaired persons.

Theoretical Relevance to the Study

Combining democratic participation theory and social marginalisation theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the democratic participation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State. While democratic participation theory emphasises the institutional conditions necessary for political engagement, social marginalisation theory highlights the structural and systemic barriers that must be addressed to ensure genuine inclusion.

In Oyo State, where the Federal College of Education (Special) serves as a vital institution for visually impaired persons, these theories help explain the gap between policy commitments and lived realities. They also provide a basis for critically examining whether INEC's Inclusion Framework is genuinely transformative or merely symbolic in addressing the marginalisation of visually impaired persons.

Results and Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed, and 94 valid responses were returned, representing a response rate of 94%. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Institution	FCE Staff	38	40.4
	FCE Students	38	40.4
	Special School Staff	18	19.1
Gender	Male	52	55.3
	Female	42	44.7
Age Range	18-25	30	31.9

	26-35	35	37.2
	36-45	18	19.1
	46+	11	11.7
Disability Status	Visually Impaired	38	40.4
	Not Visually Impaired	56	59.6
Educational Level	NCE Part Three	38	40.4
	NCE/PGD	30	31.9
	Bachelor's/Master's	26	27.7

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic profile indicates that the sample was balanced across institutional categories, with 40.4% from each of FCE Staff and FCE Students, and 19.1% from Special School Staff. Males constituted a slight majority (55.3%). Most respondents were under 35 years (69.1%), consistent with a student population. Visually impaired respondents comprised 40.4% of the sample, providing direct insight into their experiences.

Awareness of INEC's Inclusion Framework

Respondents were asked about their awareness of INEC's Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2: Awareness of INEC's Inclusion Framework

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I am aware of INEC's policy on disability inclusion	22 (23.4%)	35 (37.2%)	28 (29.8%)	9 (9.6%)	2.74	Agree
I know the specific provisions of the framework	12 (12.8%)	23 (24.5%)	39 (41.5%)	20 (21.3%)	2.29	Disagree
I have seen information about disability inclusion during elections	18 (19.1%)	31 (33.0%)	30 (31.9%)	15 (16.0%)	2.55	Neutral
INEC has effectively communicated its inclusion framework to disability communities	10 (10.6%)	21 (22.3%)	42 (44.7%)	21 (22.3%)	2.21	Disagree

Note: 4-point Likert scale: SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1; Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree/Positive

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal mixed levels of awareness. While 60.6% of respondents indicated awareness of INEC's disability inclusion policy (Mean=2.74), only 37.3% reported specific knowledge of the framework's provisions (Mean=2.29). Similarly, only 32.9% agreed that information about disability inclusion is disseminated during elections (Mean=2.55), and only 32.9% felt that INEC has effectively communicated its framework to disability communities (Mean=2.21).

These findings suggest that while general awareness of the policy exists, specific knowledge of its provisions and outreach to disability communities remains limited. This is consistent with findings from other studies that have identified communication gaps between INEC and disability organisations.

Perceptions of INEC's Inclusion Framework Implementation

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of how effectively INEC's Inclusion Framework has been implemented. Table 3 presents the findings.

Table 3: Perceptions of INEC's Inclusion Framework Implementation

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
INEC has made electoral processes more accessible to visually impaired persons	12 (12.8%)	28 (29.8%)	35 (37.2%)	19 (20.2%)	2.35	Disagree
Braille ballot guides are available at polling units in Oyo State	8 (8.5%)	18 (19.1%)	41 (43.6%)	27 (28.7%)	2.07	Disagree
Magnifying glasses for voters with low vision are provided at polling units	6 (6.4%)	15 (16.0%)	43 (45.7%)	30 (31.9%)	1.97	Disagree
Polling units in Oyo State are physically accessible to visually impaired persons	14 (14.9%)	25 (26.6%)	38 (40.4%)	17 (18.1%)	2.38	Disagree
INEC officials are trained to assist visually impaired voters	10 (10.6%)	22 (23.4%)	40 (42.6%)	22 (23.4%)	2.21	Disagree

Separate queues for PWDs are available on election days	20 (21.3%)	34 (36.2%)	28 (29.8%)	12 (12.8%)	2.66	Agree
INEC provides voter education materials in accessible formats	11 (11.7%)	23 (24.5%)	39 (41.5%)	21 (22.3%)	2.26	Disagree

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal significant implementation gaps. A majority of respondents disagreed that INEC has made electoral processes more accessible to visually impaired persons (57.4%, Mean=2.35). Even stronger majorities disagreed that braille ballot guides (72.3%, Mean=2.07) and magnifying glasses (77.6%, Mean=1.97) are available at polling units. Similarly, 58.5% disagreed that polling units are physically accessible (Mean=2.38), and 66.0% disagreed that INEC officials are trained to assist visually impaired voters (Mean=2.21).

The only area where respondents expressed agreement was the availability of separate queues for PWDs (57.5%, Mean=2.66), suggesting that this relatively simple provision has been implemented more effectively than measures requiring more substantial resources or training. These findings are consistent with reports from international observation missions and civil society organisations, which have documented the inconsistent availability of assistive devices at polling units. As noted in the IRI/NDI report, despite improvements compared to previous polls, the availability of assistive materials was "sporadic and inadequate".

Barriers to Democratic Participation

Respondents were asked about the barriers they have experienced or observed in democratic participation. Table 4 presents the findings.

Table 4: Barriers to Democratic Participation

Barrier	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Inaccessible voting materials are a major barrier	35 (37.2%)	42 (44.7%)	12 (12.8%)	5 (5.3%)	3.14	Strongly Agree
Lack of assistive devices limits voter participation	32 (34.0%)	40 (42.6%)	15 (16.0%)	7 (7.4%)	3.03	Strongly Agree
Visually impaired persons struggle to vote independently	30 (31.9%)	43 (45.7%)	14 (14.9%)	7 (7.4%)	3.02	Strongly Agree
Public awareness of the rights of visually impaired voters is low	25 (26.6%)	41 (43.6%)	21 (22.3%)	7 (7.4%)	2.89	Agree
Political parties do not adequately include visually impaired persons	28 (29.8%)	42 (44.7%)	16 (17.0%)	8 (8.5%)	2.96	Agree
Transportation to polling units is a significant challenge	22 (23.4%)	38 (40.4%)	25 (26.6%)	9 (9.6%)	2.78	Agree
Stigma and discrimination discourage political participation	19 (20.2%)	35 (37.2%)	28 (29.8%)	12 (12.8%)	2.65	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal widespread recognition of barriers to democratic participation. The most strongly endorsed barriers were inaccessible voting materials (Mean=3.14), lack of assistive devices (Mean=3.03), and inability to vote independently (Mean=3.02). These findings align with the earlier perception data and confirm that even when the legal framework exists, implementation gaps prevent meaningful participation.

Other significant barriers included low public awareness of the rights of visually impaired voters (Mean=2.89), inadequate inclusion by political parties (Mean=2.96), transportation challenges (Mean=2.78), and stigma and discrimination (Mean=2.65). These findings suggest that marginalisation is multi-dimensional, encompassing institutional, social, and attitudinal dimensions.

Impact of INEC's Inclusion Framework on Marginalisation

Respondents were asked about the extent to which INEC's Inclusion Framework has addressed the marginalisation of visually impaired persons. Table 5 presents the findings.

Table 5: Impact of INEC's Inclusion Framework on Marginalisation

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
INEC's framework has reduced electoral marginalisation	10 (10.6%)	22 (23.4%)	40 (42.6%)	22 (23.4%)	2.21	Disagree
INEC's framework has improved voter confidence among visually impaired persons	8 (8.5%)	21 (22.3%)	42 (44.7%)	23 (24.5%)	2.15	Disagree
INEC's framework has increased political participation of visually impaired persons	9 (9.6%)	19 (20.2%)	44 (46.8%)	22 (23.4%)	2.16	Disagree

More resources should be allocated to implement the framework	38 (40.4%)	42 (44.7%)	10 (10.6%)	4 (4.3%)	3.21	Strongly Agree
Stronger enforcement mechanisms are needed	35 (37.2%)	44 (46.8%)	10 (10.6%)	5 (5.3%)	3.16	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal that respondents perceive INEC's framework as having limited impact on reducing marginalisation. Only 34.0% agreed that the framework has reduced electoral marginalisation (Mean=2.21), and only 30.8% agreed that it has improved voter confidence (Mean=2.15) or increased political participation (Mean=2.16).

However, there was strong agreement (85.1%, Mean=3.21) that more resources should be allocated to implement the framework, and even stronger agreement (84.0%, Mean=3.16) that stronger enforcement mechanisms are needed. These findings suggest that while the framework is perceived as inadequately implemented, there is strong support among respondents for its underlying objectives and a belief that it could be effective if properly resourced and enforced.

Discussion of Findings

Awareness of INEC's Inclusion Framework

The study found that while a majority of respondents (60.6%) are aware of INEC's disability inclusion policy, specific knowledge of its provisions is limited (only 37.3%). This gap between general awareness and specific knowledge suggests that while INEC's policy framework has achieved a degree of visibility, the substantive content of the framework has not been effectively communicated to the intended beneficiaries.

This finding is consistent with broader observations about INEC's communication strategies. As noted by the EU-SDGN programme, despite progress in establishing legal and policy frameworks, implementation of these commitments remains a significant challenge. The limited awareness among staff and students of FCE (Special), Oyo an institution with the highest concentration of literate persons with disabilities in Nigeria is particularly concerning and suggests that outreach to disability communities has been insufficient.

Implementation Gaps in INEC's Framework

The findings reveal significant implementation gaps across multiple dimensions of INEC's Inclusion Framework. The most pronounced gaps were in the areas of assistive technology availability (braille ballot guides and magnifying glasses), training of electoral officials, and accessibility of voter education materials.

These findings echo reports from international observation missions and civil society organisations. The IRI/NDI report noted that despite improvements compared to previous polls, the availability of assistive voter materials at polling units was "sporadic and inadequate"

. Similarly, TAF Africa's Election Hub dashboard documented that only 85,363 PWDs voted in the 2023 general elections, representing a fraction of the PWD population. The one area where implementation was perceived more positively was the availability of separate queues for PWDs (Mean=2.66, 57.5% agreement). This suggests that relatively simple provisions requiring minimal resources have been implemented more consistently than measures requiring substantial investment in assistive devices and training.

Barriers to Democratic Participation

The study identified multiple barriers to democratic participation for visually impaired persons in Oyo State. The most significant barriers were inaccessible voting materials, lack of assistive devices, and the inability to vote independently. These institutional barriers were compounded by social barriers, including low public awareness, inadequate political party inclusion, transportation challenges, and stigma and discrimination.

The finding that visually impaired persons struggle to vote independently is particularly significant from a democratic participation perspective, as it undermines the fundamental principle of secret ballot. As noted in multiple reports, the lack of braille ballot guides and other assistive devices forces visually impaired voters to rely on others to cast their ballots, compromising the secrecy of their votes and increasing the risk of coercion.

Marginalisation and Democratic Participation

The study found that respondents perceive INEC's Inclusion Framework as having limited impact on reducing marginalisation. Only 34.0% agreed that the framework has reduced electoral marginalisation, and even fewer agreed that it has improved voter confidence or increased political participation. This limited impact can be understood through the lens of social marginalisation theory, which emphasises that addressing marginalisation requires structural changes that remove barriers and create enabling conditions for participation.

INEC's framework, while progressive in its intentions, has not been adequately resourced or enforced to achieve transformative change. The strong endorsement among respondents for increased resources (85.1%) and stronger enforcement

mechanisms (84.0%) suggests that the framework's potential is recognised, but that its implementation has been insufficient to address the deep-seated marginalisation of visually impaired persons.

Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The findings of this study have significant implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Democratic consolidation depends on the genuine inclusion of all citizens, including marginalised groups such as visually impaired persons. When significant segments of the population are excluded from meaningful participation, the legitimacy of democratic institutions is undermined, and political stability is threatened.

The marginalisation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State's democratic processes is particularly concerning given the presence of FCE (Special), Oyo, which serves as a vital institution for literacy and advocacy among persons with disabilities. The limited political participation of visually impaired persons in this context suggests that even where educational opportunities exist, political empowerment remains elusive.

Position Argument / Critical Analysis

This study adopts a critically cautious position on the effectiveness of INEC's Inclusion Framework in addressing the marginalisation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State's democratic participation. While acknowledging the importance of the framework as a policy foundation, the study argues that its implementation has been insufficient to achieve meaningful transformation.

Is INEC's Framework Transformative or Symbolic?

The findings of this study suggest that INEC's Inclusion Framework remains largely symbolic rather than transformative. While the framework establishes important legal and policy foundations for disability inclusion, its implementation has been inconsistent and resource-constrained. The limited availability of assistive devices at polling units, inadequate training of electoral officials, and insufficient outreach to disability communities suggest that the framework has not been operationalised effectively.

From the perspective of social marginalisation theory, symbolic recognition without substantive implementation can be counterproductive, as it creates the appearance of inclusion without delivering meaningful change. This can lead to disillusionment among marginalised groups and undermine trust in democratic institutions.

Do Implementation Gaps Reflect Institutional or Resource Constraints?

The implementation gaps identified in this study reflect both institutional and resource constraints. Institutionally, INEC has faced challenges in translating policy commitments into operational procedures, as evidenced by the inconsistent use of EC40H forms for tracking PWD participation and the lack of comprehensive data on the specific needs and locations of PWDs. Resource constraints are also significant. As noted in the IRI/NDI report, there were reportedly only 6,000 magnifying glasses to cover Nigeria's nearly 180,000 polling units. This resource gap reflects broader challenges in funding disability inclusion programmes, despite the strong endorsement from respondents for increased resource allocation.

Are Visually Impaired Persons' Voices Heard?

The study found that while respondents are aware of INEC's inclusion framework, their perceptions suggest limited impact on reducing marginalisation. This indicates that the voices and experiences of visually impaired persons have not been adequately incorporated into the design and implementation of the framework. As noted by disability advocates, inclusion must be intentional and tailored to the diverse realities of PWDs, and those affected must be involved in designing interventions.

The low political participation of PWDs, as documented in TAF Africa's data, suggests that despite the framework, visually impaired persons continue to be excluded from meaningful political engagement. This exclusion is consistent with the disability community's concern that their voices are not always heard in political processes.

Position of This Study

This study maintains that INEC's Inclusion Framework represents an important but insufficient response to the marginalisation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State's democratic participation. While the framework has established critical policy foundations, its implementation has been inconsistent, under-resourced, and insufficiently inclusive of disability perspectives.

The study argues that meaningful democratic participation for visually impaired persons requires:

1. Strengthened enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the framework's provisions
2. Increased resource allocation for assistive technologies and training
3. More effective outreach and communication with disability communities
4. Inclusion of visually impaired persons in the design and evaluation of electoral reforms
5. Attention to the diverse needs of PWDs, including those with visual impairments

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the democratic participation of visually impaired persons and address their marginalisation in Oyo State's electoral processes:

1. INEC should strengthen its enforcement mechanisms for the Inclusion Framework, including regular monitoring and evaluation of compliance at polling units across Oyo State.
2. Political parties should promote their internal inclusivity by creating disability wings or directorates, reducing or removing barriers to candidacy for Persons with Special Needs and ensuring that party manifestos are disability-inclusive
3. Civil society organizations should continue advocacy for the effective implementation of INEC's Inclusion Framework, using evidence from studies like this to hold INEC accountable.
4. Government should enforce the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018, including its provisions on political participation

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between INEC's Inclusion Framework and the marginalisation of visually impaired persons in Oyo State's democratic participation. The study found that while INEC has established a progressive policy framework for disability inclusion, its implementation has been inconsistent, under-resourced, and insufficient to address the deep-seated marginalisation of visually impaired persons.

The findings reveal significant implementation gaps, particularly in the availability of assistive technologies, training of electoral officials, accessibility of voter education materials, and outreach to disability communities. These gaps contribute to continued marginalisation, as visually impaired persons face multiple barriers to democratic participation, including inaccessible voting materials, lack of assistive devices, inability to vote independently, limited political party inclusion, and stigma and discrimination.

The study argues that INEC's Inclusion Framework, while important, remains largely symbolic rather than transformative. Meaningful democratic participation for visually impaired persons requires stronger enforcement mechanisms, increased resource allocation, more effective outreach, and genuine inclusion of disability perspectives in the design and evaluation of electoral reforms.

In conclusion, democratic consolidation in Nigeria depends on the genuine inclusion of all citizens, including marginalised groups such as visually impaired persons. INEC must move beyond policy formulation to ensure effective implementation of its inclusion commitments, and all stakeholders including political parties, civil society organisations, and government must work together to remove barriers and create enabling conditions for the full participation of visually impaired persons in Nigeria's democracy.

References

- Adeniyi, E. O., Olawale, S. G., & Ademokoya, J. A. (2009). Democratic dividends in Nigeria as perceived by persons with special needs: A case study of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 4(11), 549-552.
- African Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria*. African Union Commission.
- Burchard, S. M. (2021). Electoral integrity and international observation: Assessing effectiveness in emerging democracies. *Journal of Democracy and Elections*, 15(2), 45-62.
- Cheeseman, N., Lynch, G., & Willis, J. (2019). Democracy and elections in Africa: Challenges and prospects. *African Affairs*, 118(471), 1-20.
- Dahl, R. A. (2020). *On democracy* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press.
- Economic Community of West African States Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Preliminary statement on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria*. ECOWAS Commission.
- European Union Election Observation Mission. (2023). *Nigeria general elections 2023: Final report*. European Union External Action Service.
- European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria. (2022). *More inclusive elections: Enhancing participation of persons with disabilities*. EU-SDGN Programme.
- Hyde, S. D. (2020). *Election observation and democratization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2018). *Framework on access and participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process*. INEC.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2023). *Report on the 2023 general elections*. INEC.
- International Republican Institute & National Democratic Institute. (2023). *International election observation mission to Nigeria: Final report*. IRI/NDI.
- Kelley, J. G. (2019). *Scorecard diplomacy: Grading states to influence their reputation and behavior*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P. (2019). *Electoral integrity and global politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P., Frank, R. W., & Martínez i Coma, F. (2021). *Assessing the quality of elections*. Cambridge University Press.

Quadir, R. O., Oyedepo, O. S., Yusufu, A., & Abdulkadir, A. O. (2025). Access and utilization of library information resources for academic activities by students of Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Library and Information Science*.

SERVICOM. (2023). *Compliance evaluation report: Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo*. SERVICOM.

TAF Africa. (2023). *Election hub dashboard: PWD participation in the 2023 general elections*. TAF Africa.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2025). *Accessibility audit for enhancing enforcement of the Disability Act in Nigeria's political space*. WFD.

World Bank. (2018). *Nigeria: Disability and development report*. World Bank Group.