



The Independence of Election Management Bodies: A Theoretical Review

Evi Novida Ginting Manik¹, Ramlan Surbakti², Heri Kusmanto¹ and Tonny P Situmorang¹

¹Universitas Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

²Universitas Airlangga
Surabaya, Indonesia

evinovida@usu.ac.id

Abstract . This study investigates the independence of Electoral Commission Bodies (KPU) as a key factor in organizing fair elections that adhere to democratic principles. Ensuring that KPUs operate independently is essential for upholding the integrity of general elections. However, this independence is often challenged by various political, institutional, and social dynamics that shape its meaning and practical application. Applying a literature review as the research method, this paper examines a range of studies and theoretical perspectives to provide a nuanced understanding of independence in election management. The findings of this study analyze key theories and empirical research on KPU independence, identifying strengths and limitations in each approach while highlighting relevant insights for strengthening KPU autonomy. Overall, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on enhancing the quality and resilience of KPU independence, aiming to inform reforms and best practices in election governance globally.

Keywords: Commissions, Elections, Independence

1 Introduction

Independence is a critical concept for electoral management bodies and democracy in general [Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo, 2008]. They argued that the independence of electoral management bodies not only facilitates leadership transitions within a country but also safeguards democracy from both internal and external pressures. The independence of electoral management bodies has proven effective in safeguarding the integrity of democracy by preventing potential interference from domestic political forces [Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo, 2008]. By ensuring the independence of electoral management bodies, political contests can proceed freely and lawfully, free from political influences that may threaten the fairness and freedom of elections. Consequently, all political forces are more likely to accept the results issued by the electoral management bodies, ultimately fostering trust among contestants in democracy as a legitimate political system. In safeguarding democracy, Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo [2008] align with Dahl's [1971] perspective that the independence of electoral administration is crucial in preserving and protecting the votes directly cast by the people. This highlights that public participation, which is the core idea of democracy, becomes more meaningful as it remains direct and immune to interference from any party, whether direct or indirect.

Over time, the concept of the independence of electoral management bodies has evolved and confines diverse interpretations. Based on the articles reviewed, differing

perspectives on the understanding of independence exist. First, from a legal framework perspective, Wall et al. [2016] and Cheeseman and Elklit [2020] argue that the legal position of electoral management bodies outside government control is sufficient to categorize them as independent. However, studies by Aliyu and Ambali [2021] as well as Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I [2019] indicate that even though electoral management bodies may not be legally subordinate to the government, this does not automatically render them fully independent.

Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I [2019] highlight that legal independence does not fully guarantee that electoral management bodies are free from external interference. For example, Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), despite being legally independent from executive power, continues to face various issues that spark political conflict in the country. Both Aliyu and Ambali [2021] and Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I [2019] stress the need for comprehensive evaluations and the introduction of additional regulations beyond the legal framework to ensure higher standards of independence for electoral Commission bodies.

The study conducted by Yarza [2018] supports the views expressed by Aliyu and Ambali [2021] and Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I [2019]. Yarza emphasizes that the independence of electoral Commission bodies, when assessed solely from a formal legal or *de jure* perspective, is insufficient. Evaluations of independence must also encompass actual or *de facto* aspects. In other words, while legally recognized as independent, electoral Commission bodies must demonstrate their independence in practice through their ability to operate with integrity and effectively perform their functions within a broader context.

Differing interpretations of the independence of electoral Commission bodies extend beyond the legal framework. These interpretations also relate to the relationship with the legislature as the law-making authority. According to Cheeseman and Elklit [2020], for an electoral Commission body to be considered independent, it must be completely free from the influence or involvement of other branches of power, including the executive and legislative branches. They argue that avoiding any form of intervention from any party is essential for achieving true independence for electoral Commission bodies.

Contrary to this perspective, Yarza [2018] offers an alternative viewpoint, suggesting that the relationship between electoral Commission bodies and the legislature can enhance, rather than weaken, their autonomy. Yarza argued that the key to this relationship lies in the establishment of regular and institutionalized communication through mechanisms known as Internal ICMs are internal consultation frameworks that allow for the participation of various political actors, including the legislature, in monitoring and overseeing different stages of the electoral process. Through the implementation of ICMs, Yarza [2018] argues that electoral Commission bodies can more effectively mitigate external political pressures, as these mechanisms provide space for direct engagement with political actors, thereby strengthening the transparency and accountability of the institution. Thus, rather than constituting intervention that undermines independence, legislative involvement in this context represents structured oversight that supports the *de facto* independence of electoral Commission bodies.

Despite the diverse perspectives on the independence of electoral Commission bodies, researchers have developed various analytical frameworks to understand independence more deeply. This research proposal suggests that the discourse concerning the independence of electoral Commission bodies continues to evolve rapidly. Norris [2019] argues that efforts to develop the concept of independence are inseparable from the development of democracy itself, which faces increasingly complex challenges. These diverse analyses, in turn, form the basis for determining comprehensive indicators used to assess the level of independence of electoral Commission bodies.

This study employs a literature review methodology to systematically gather and synthesize existing research on the concept of independence [Snyder, 2019]. Scholarly articles and books employing diverse methodologies and approaches will be collected from relevant academic publications addressing this concept.

These articles will be categorized based on the geographical context of the research. This categorization will also consider the specific approach used to examine independence, aiming to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted concept. Subsequently, the study will analyze the relationships between these approaches, offering critical commentary, counterpoints, and relevant insights to strengthen the conceptual framework of electoral Commission body independence. This analysis aims to enhance understanding of independence from both theoretical and practical perspectives within the context of electoral governance.

This paper aims to address the question: "How has the discourse on independence within electoral Commission bodies evolved?". In the context of developing democracies, electoral Commission bodies are expected to enhance various aspects of their operations, particularly pertaining to the concept of independence. To this end, the articles collected for this study offer diverse approaches and novel concepts that can serve as benchmarks for measuring the independence of these institutions.

This paper analyzes 73 journal articles and books addressing the independence of electoral Commission bodies. These publications were compiled from various databases (SAGE Journal, Taylor & Francis, J-STOR, Elsevier) and also include research proposals for future studies. To ensure relevance, the selection criteria for these articles included a publication date range of 2000 to 2023. This timeframe was chosen to coincide with the period when the countries under study began establishing independent electoral Commission bodies. The article selection process employed a specific focus on the principle of independence within electoral Commission bodies. This entailed examining the decision-making processes of these bodies, their relationships with other branches of power, and their constitutional positions. Consequently, journal articles and books discussing other principles, such as transparency, accountability, and integrity, were excluded from this study's analysis.

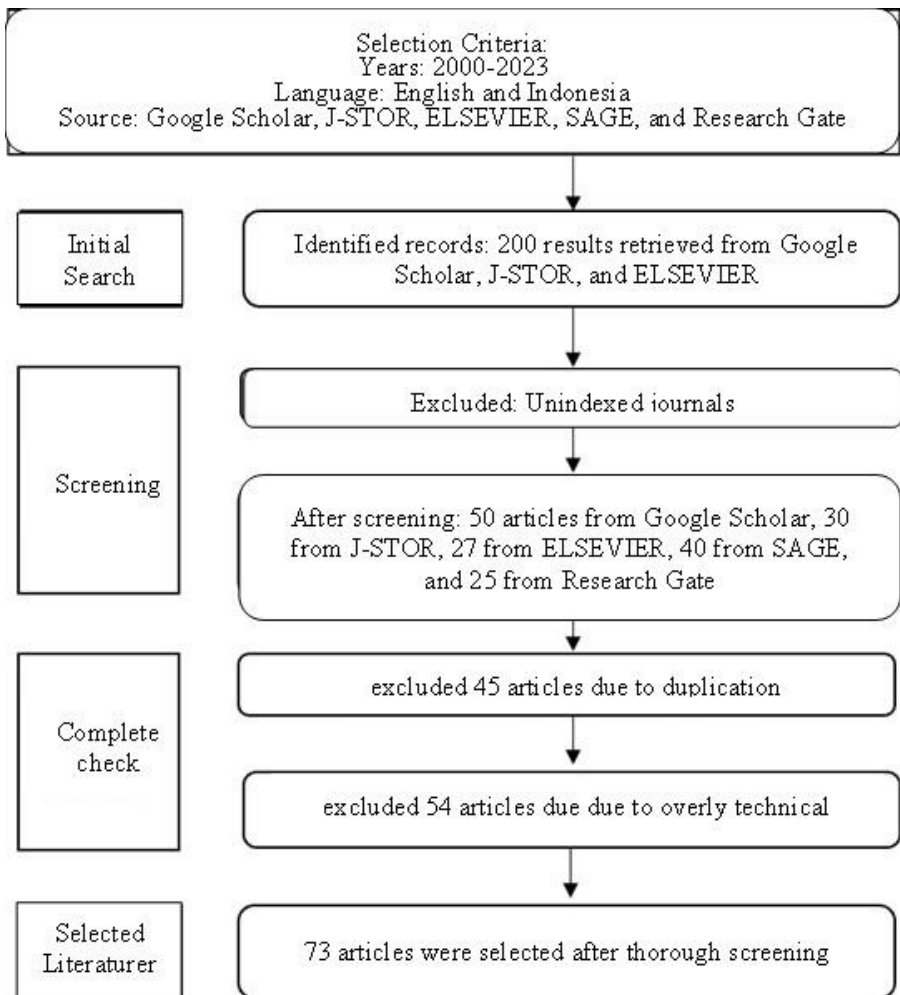


Fig. 1. Article Submission Criteria

2 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically a semi-systematic literature review approach [Snyder, 2019], which aligns with the research objective of providing a comprehensive overview of the evolving concept of electoral Commission body independence. This paper adopts a literature review methodology. Following the steps outlined by Snyder [2019], the research began with 'designing the review.' A semi-systematic approach was selected to achieve the primary objective of exploring the evolving discourse on electoral Commission body independence. Based on this design, the next step involved the collection of relevant journal articles and books that contribute to the discussion of the topic under investigation [Snyder, 2019].

Studies specifically dedicated to the independence of electoral Commission bodies

remain limited, underscoring the significance of this paper. This research not only contributes to enriching the perspectives on the concept of independence but also aims to inform policy arguments. It serves as a valuable resource for both researchers and practitioners interested in the study and policymaking surrounding electoral Commission body independence. This paper specifically focuses on the concept of independence as a core principle of electoral governance, examining the facets of electoral Commission body independence in the context of decision-making capacity, institutional relationships with other branches of power, and constitutional positioning.

Therefore, this study does not prioritize other potentially relevant aspects that do not directly emphasize independence, such as transparency, technological implementation, and accountability, as previous research on the independence of electoral Commission bodies has predominantly focused on their institutional positioning within their respective political contexts.

The second stage comprised "conducting the review" [Snyder, 2019]. This stage aimed to assess the adequacy of the first stage, which involved the collection and selection of previous studies, assess the adequacy. Furthermore, this stage aimed to formulate a systematic search strategy and selection criteria [Snyder, 2019]. For this purpose, this paper utilized four primary databases—SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis, J-STOR, and Elsevier—supplemented by platforms such as ResearchGate, IDEA, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected based on their capacity to provide articles addressing relevant themes aligned with the research focus, as well as their reputable standing in academic publishing.

Open access was also an essential factor in selecting these databases, enabling the author to obtain journal articles and books that met specific criteria: articles had to be scholarly, systematically written, in English or Indonesian, and published between 2000 and 2023. Initially, articles were collected based on titles, followed by an analysis of the abstracts of each relevant article. Initially, articles were collected based on titles, followed by an analysis of the abstracts of each relevant article, resulting in a collection of 104 articles and books that either focused on or discussed the independence of electoral Commission bodies.

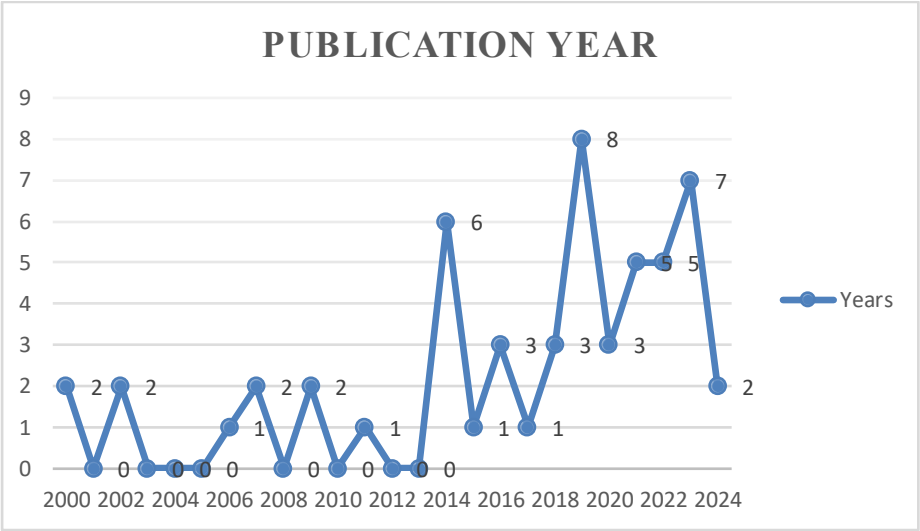


Fig. 2. Articles by Publication Year
source: data processing

The subsequent step consisted of conducting an in-depth analysis of each article, encompassing the approach, theoretical framework, findings, and conclusions primary research object, where other topics were the primary focus drawn within the respective studies. This data was then systematically organized into a predefined table. During this stage, 32 articles were eliminated based on additional

criteria: publication year, excessively philosophical approaches, or lack of focus on independence as the

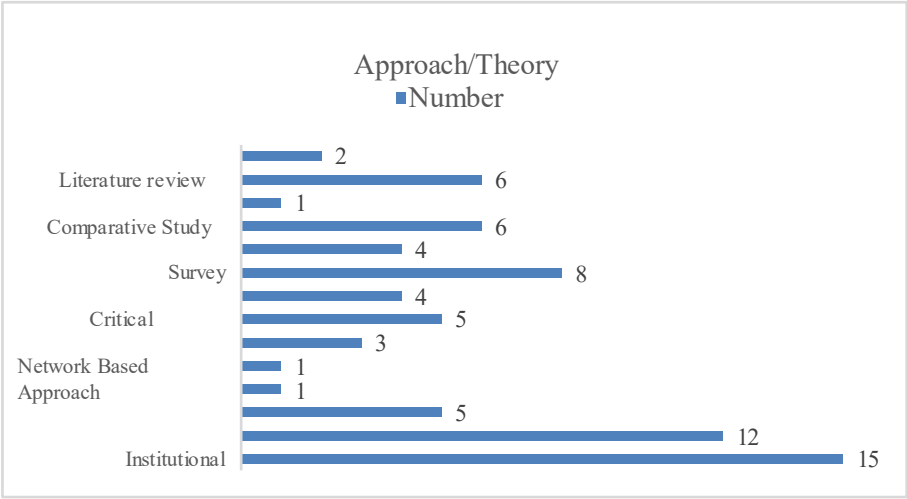


Fig. 3. Articles by Approach/Theory
source: data processing

The final phase involved conducting the review [Snyder, 2019]. Following the initial analysis and the mapping of key ideas into the table, the author reviewed the collected articles to identify the contributions of this research and to uncover research gaps—namely, unexplored areas and their relevance for further research to expand upon existing findings.

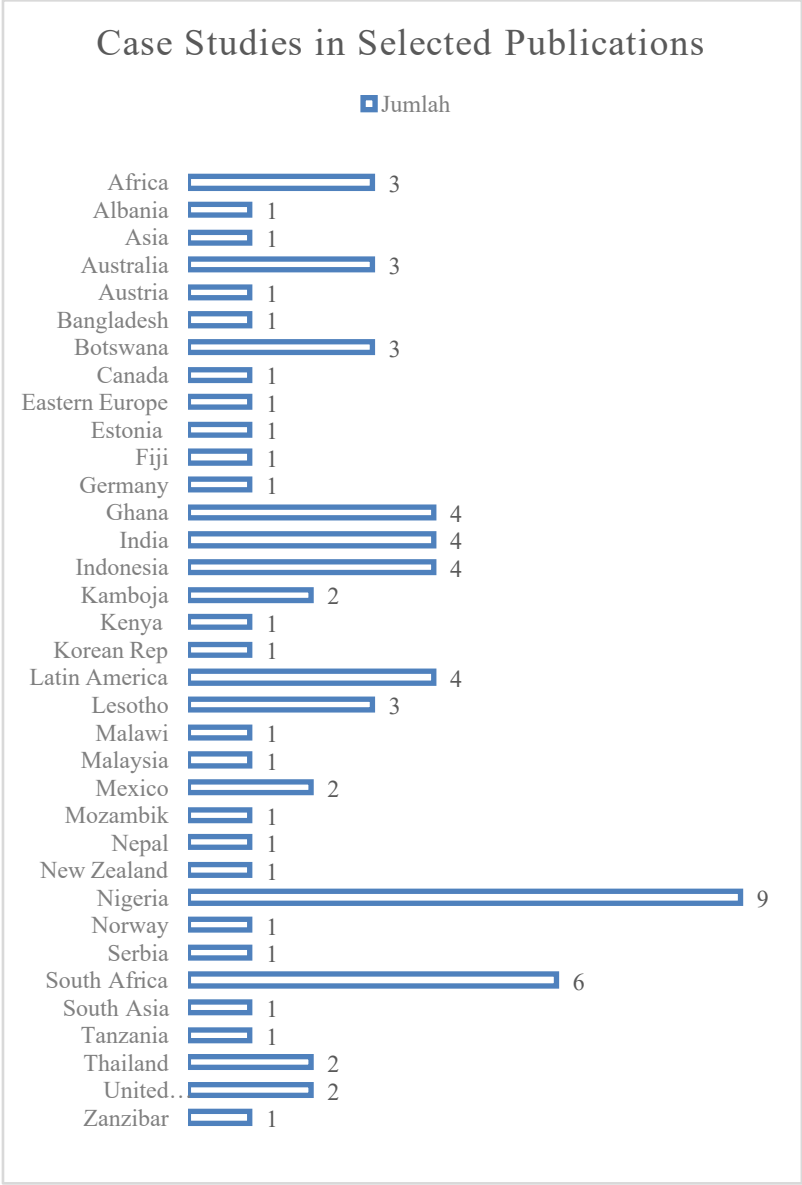


Fig 4. Number of Publications/Region/Country Acquisition
source: data processing

3 Results And Discussion

Research on the independence of electoral Commission bodies has shown a significant increase in the last decade, particularly since 2013. Based on the collected data, the number of publications addressing this topic between 2000 and 2012 remained stable, averaging two publications per year. A notable surge in publications on electoral Commission body independence occurred in 2013, reaching 6 publications annually and peaking in 2019 with a total of 8 publications, including journal articles and books, dedicated to the subject. Subsequently, publication trends have fluctuated; in 2020, the figure decreased to 3 publications per year, but rose again in the following two years, reaching 5 publications each. Furthermore, in 2023, the number of publications further increased to 7, before declining to 3 publications in 2024.

This paper examines 49 countries as case studies. Among these countries, the Asian and African regions dominate, accounting for 41 studies on independence, some of which involve comparative analyses across multiple countries within these regions. This is followed by countries in Eastern Europe, such as Serbia, and Western Europe, including the United Kingdom and Austria, with several studies employing a comparative approach that involves between 2 and 6 countries as research locations.

In terms of approach, studies employing legal and institutional frameworks predominate, with 25 studies, followed by comparative studies and literature reviews, each with 6 publications. Other approaches include historical, critical, survey-based, empirical, content analysis, and network-based analysis. The diversity of approaches in analyzing electoral Commission bodies is particularly noteworthy as the chosen approach can yield distinct findings and conclusions. Specifically, the discussion section will further elaborate on the differences in output based on the selected approach to analyzing the independence of electoral Commission bodies.

As indicated in the introduction, while the notion of 'independence' in the context of electoral Commission bodies is interpreted diversely by researchers, discussions on independence generally focus on three key aspects: the constitutional positioning of electoral Commission bodies [Wall et al., 2016]; their relationship with other branches of power [Catt et al., 2014; Marwa, 2022]; and their decision-making processes [Makulilo, 2009b; Mogalakwe, 2015].

Typically, researchers begin by examining these three key aspects of electoral Commission body independence. Regarding the first question, researchers examine the constitution of each country [Wall et al., 2016] to determine whether the term "Independent" is explicitly stated within the constitutional text.

For the second question, studies investigating the interaction of electoral Commission bodies with other branches of power analyze the influence of the executive branch on these bodies. This includes examining the selection process, the appointment of selection committees, and other related aspects [Catt et al., 2014; Marwa, 2022]. The third question focuses on analyzing the decision-making processes within electoral Commission bodies, examining potential interventions in decision-making, ranging from the formulation of electoral laws to the determination of electoral stages and schedules [Makulilo, 2009b; Mogalakwe, 2015].

While research on independence generally revolve around these three core aspects, the research agenda concerning the independence of electoral Commission bodies continues to evolve, with increasingly diverse and complex questions emerging. Some studies, such as those by Norris [2019] and Norris, Frank, and Martínez I Coma [2014], argue that these three questions are no longer sufficient to provide a comprehensive assessment of the independence of electoral Commission bodies. This review reveals a predominance of discussions on the independence of electoral Commission bodies employing legal and institutional frameworks, with studies adopting this approach typically assessing the independence of electoral Commission bodies based on their positioning within constitutional documents and gauge their independence by referencing this constitutional foundation. Cheeseman & Elklit [2020] propose three categories for measuring the level of independence: a) Highly Independent; b) Moderately Independent; and c) Not Independent, while IDEA [Wall et al., 2016] distinguishes between Government, Mixed, and independent categories. These categories are formulated based on the position and role of the electoral Commission body within the institutional structure.

Table 1. List of Selected Literature

Year	Author	Title	Publication
2000	López-Pintor	Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance	United Nation Development programme Research Papers/Unpublished
2000	Ber, Ali Memon, and Rama Skelton	Designing an Independent Regulatory Commission	Harvard Law Review
2000	Ackerman	The New Separation of Powers	Association PURC/World Bank International Training Program on Utility Regulation and Strategy
2000	Sanford V. Berg, Ali Nawaz Memon, and Rama Skelton	Designing an Independent Regulatory Commission	The Architecture of Democracy
2000	Taagepera	Designing Electoral Rules and Waiting for an Electoral System to Evolve	International Political Science Review
2002	Mozaffar, Schedler	The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance-Introduction	Political Science University of Ghana
2002	Wallace		
2006	Okello	Guaranteeing The Independence Of Election Management Bodies In Africa: A Study Of The Electoral Commissions Of Kenya And South Africa	
2006	Cho Wonbin	Electoral Institutions, Partisan Status, and Political Support in Lesotho	Electoral Studies
2007	Hartlyn, McCoy, Mustillo	Electoral Governance matters: Explaining the quality of elections in contemporary Latin America	Comparative Political Studies
2007	Kelly	The Independence Of Electoral Management Bodies: The Australian Experience	Political Science
2009	Makulilo	Independent Electoral Commission In Tanzania: A False Debate?	Representation
2009	Aaken	Independent Electoral Management Bodies and International Election Observer Missions: Any Impact on the Observed	Cons Polit Econ

Year	Author		Title	Publication
			Level of Democracy? A Conceptual Framework	
2009	Toby James		International Electoral Management Governance Networks	Comparative Electoral Management
2010	Carter		Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in the 21st Century	Electoral Systems and Election Management
2011	Makulilo		The Zanzibar Electoral Commission And Its Feckless Independence	Journal of Third World Studies
2011	Farrel		Electoral Systems and Electoral Institutions	Electoral Systems
2012	Fall, Mathias		Election Management Bodies in West Africa	African Minds
2013	Antonio Ugues		Electoral Management Bodies in Central America	Oxford University Press
2014	Laanela		Crafting Sustainable Electoral Processes in New Democracies	Representation
2014	Van Ham		Building impartial electoral management? Institutional design, independence and electoral integrity	Democratization
2014	Norris, Frank, Coma		Measuring Electoral Integrity around the World: A New Dataset	American Political Science Association
2014	Ernest Adu Ghamfi		Assessment of Citizens' Perception on the Independence of Ghana's Electoral Commission	Public Policy and Administration Research
2014	Catt & Andrew Ellis		Electoral Management Desain	IDEA
2014	Leonard L. Sesa		A Comparative Study Of The Challenges Of Being Independent: Case Studies (Botswana Independent Electoral Commission And Electoral Commission Of Zambia)	Politeia, Unisa press
2014	Chernykh		Constitutions and Election Management	Advancing Electoral Integrity,
2015	Mogalakwe		An assessment of Botswana's electoral management body to deliver fair elections	J o Contemporary African Studies
2015	Badejo		A Critical Insight into Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): Implications for 2015 General Election and Democratic Advancement in Nigeria	Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science
2016	Cho & Kim		Procedural justice and perceived electoral integrity: the case of Korea's 2012 presidential election	Democratization
2016	The Common Wealth Electoral Network		Upholding Democracy Through Electoral Observation, Networking and Technical Assistance	Commonwealth Secretariat
2016	Michael Pal		Electoral Management Bodies as a Fourth Branch of Government	Working Paper (University of Ottawa)
2017	Balule		Election Management Bodies in the Sadc Region — An Appraisal of the Independence of Botswana's Independent Electoral CommissionFootnote	South African Journal of Human Rights
2017	Babayo Sule, Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani & Bakri Mat		Independent National Electoral Commission and Campaign Financing Monitoring in Nigeria: The 2015 General Elections	Journal of International Studies
2017	Gyu Go		Electoral Democracy and the Role of the Electoral Management Body in South Korea	Public Policy and Governance

Year	Author	Title	Publication
2017	Kerr	Public Trust in Elections: The Role of Media Freedom and Election Management Autonomy	Afrobarometer Working Papers
2018	Yarza	Building Democracy: De Jure and De Facto Autonomy in Electoral Management Bodies in Latin and Africa	University of Pittsburgh
2018	Rupiya, Teffo	A Review of the Election Commissions' Decisive Roles, in Managing Highly Contested Processes: Malawi (May 2014) and Lesotho (February 2015)	Journal of African Union Studies
2018	Singh & Roy	Regulating the Electoral Domain: The Election Commission of India	Indian Journal of Public Administration
2019	Ham, Garnett	Building impartial electoral management? Institutional design, independence and electoral integrity	International Political Science Review
2019	Sawasdee	Electoral integrity and the repercussions of institutional manipulations: The 2019 general election in Thailand	Asian Journal of Comparative Politics
2019	Norris	Conclusions: The new research agenda on electoral management	International Political Science Review
2019	Toby S James, Holly Ann Garnett, Lontine Loeber, Carolien Van ham	Electoral management and the organisational determinants of electoral integrity: Introduction	Sage Journal
2019	Marko Milenković	Electoral Management in the Western Balkans – Overview of Institutional Setting	Serbian Political Thought
2019	Joseph Kwaku Asamoah	Electoral Management in Africa: A Facade or Reality- The Case of Election Dispute Resolution Mechanism	Public Policy and Administration Research
2019	Alboin Pasaribu	Tafsir Konstitusional atas Kemandirian Penyelenggara Pemilu dan Pilkada	
2019	Samuel C. Ugoh dan Wilfred I. Ukpere	Assessment of Electoral Management and Democratization System in Nigeria	Journal of Reviews on Global Economics
2019	Troco	Electoral Governance and Democratisation in Southern Africa Post-conflict states: Electoral Management Bodies in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa	Journal of African Elections
2020	Cheseeman & Elklitt	Understanding and Assessing Electoral Commission Independence: a New Framework	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
2020	Shukla	Democratic Deficit: The Electoral System Under Fiji's 2013 Constitution	Journal Of The Australasian Law Academics Association
2020	Killdea	The Constitutional Role of Electoral Management Bodies: The Case of the Australian Electoral Commission	Federal Law Review
2020	Kildea	The Constitutional Role of Electoral Management Bodies: The Case of the Australian Electoral Commission	Federal Law Review
2020	Lundstedt	Institutions of Electoral Integrity and Clientelism: The Role of Electoral Management Bodies	V-Dem Institute
2021	Joseph	Independence in Electoral Management: Electoral Processes	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Year	Author	Title	Publication
2021	Bhat	Governing Democracy Outside the Law: India's Election Commission and the Challenge of Accountability	Asian Journal of Comparative Law
2021	Aliyu, Ambali	Electoral institutions and management of elections in Nigeria and Ghana: A comparative assessment	Political Science And International Relations
2021	Mayengbam Nandakishwor Singh	Election Commission, Electoral Democracy and Constitutionalization of Elections in India	India Journal of Public Administration
2021	Langford, Rebecca, Wilson	The Rise of Electoral Management Bodies: Diffusion and Effects	Asian Journal of Comparative Law
2021	Ezugworie	Independent National Electoral Commission and The prosecution of Electoral Offences in Nigeria: Is The 2010 Electoral Act Implied	International Journal of Business Management and Economic Review
2022	Partheymüllera, Wolfgang C. Müller, Rabitsch, Michael Lidauer Paul Grohma	Participation in the Administration of Elections and Perceptions of Electoral Integrity	Electoral Studies
2022	Muriuki	Consolidating Electoral Democracy through Enhanced Electoral Management Body: A Case of Kenya, 1992- 2017.	Journal Of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship In Africa
2022	Marwa	The Competence of the Electoral Commission to Conduct Free and Fair Elections in Tanzania: A Legal Analysis	Journal of Politics and Law
2022	Irsyad, Noak, Erviantono	Analisis Komparatif Lembaga Penyelenggara Pemilu: Election Commission Of India Dan Australian Electoral Commission	Nawala Politika
2022	Aboh & Ebem	Election Related Conflicts in Nigeria: The Role of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	Tamaddun Life
2023	Masahe, Kepa Akter	The Crisis of Independence and Impartiality of the Election Commission of Bangladesh: A Study on the Eleventh National Parliamentary Election	International Journal of Research and Innovation in social Science
2023	Awwal Muhammad Shafiu, Abdullahi Umar, Halimah Abdul Manaf	Leadership Challenges in Democratization: An Analysis of Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria	Yustisia Jurnal Hukum

Year	Author	Title	Publication
2023	Petra Alderman	Autocratic Electoral Management: Lessons From Thailand	Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs
2023	Sonali Campion dan Jega	African election management bodies in the era of democratic backsliding	South African Journal of International Affairs
2023	Ojukwu, Grace, Okoye	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Promotion of Democracy in Nigeria: The Study of 2023 Presidential Election	Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies
2023	Kotze	Electoral management for a maturing democracy: A look at the contribution of the South African Electoral Commission	South African Journal of International Affairs
2023	Bado	Designing Election Management Bodies for Post-Conflict Electoral Processes to Consolidate Peace	African Journal of Democracy and Election Research
2024	Aldermann	Autocratic Electoral Management: Lessons From Thailand	J o Current of SEA
2024	Agbevade	Ghana's 2020 Electoral Politics: an Assessment of The Electoral Commission	Cogent Social Science

Fig. 5. Comparison of Definitions of Independence

Legal Framework/Institutionalis	Critical/Interpretatif
Independence is stated in the constitution	Independence is not enough to be stated in the constitution/de jure

For instance, electoral Commission bodies in Venezuela and Egypt are categorized as 'not independent,' while those in Kenya and Albania fall into the 'moderately independent' category, and those in Indonesia, Mexico, India, and Nigeria are classified as 'highly independent'".

This distinction highlights the divergence from other approaches, including critical analysis, empirical studies [Asamoah, 2019], historical analysis [Sawasdee, 2020], and political science perspectives [Aboh and Obem, 2022; Alderman, 2024; Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I, 2019]. These approaches contend that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to determine whether an electoral Commission body is truly independent.

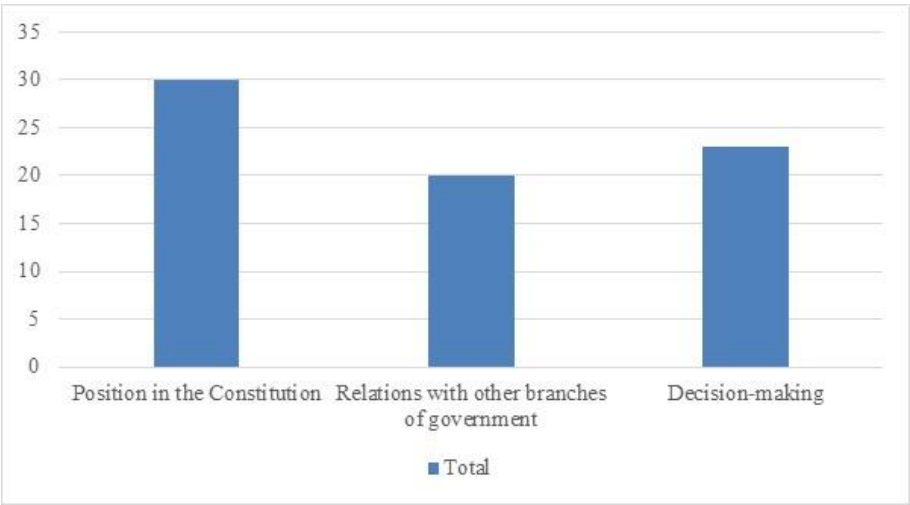


Fig. 6. Research Findings in Literature Review

For example, in their study on the electoral Commission body in Nigeria, "The Role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)," Aboh and Obem [2022] argued that despite INEC being constitutionally designated as an independent body, this does not automatically translate into actual independence. In many instances, political backgrounds often interfere with and influence INEC's decisions, ultimately leading to conflict and a decline in public trust. Aboh and Obem's research, supported by other studies, indicates that INEC lacks the necessary independence at the practical

level [Aliyu and Ambali, 2021; Ojukwu et al., 2023; Ugoh, Ukpere, and Wilfred I, 2019]. Norris [2019] supported this view, who states that while electoral Commission bodies may possess sufficient safeguards against political influence in theory, this capacity often remains unproven in practice.

“In particular, the organizational independence of electoral administrators and their ability to avoid partisan meddling and political pressures is commonly assumed to be essential for their impartiality and fairness. But empirical evidence scrutinizing EMB performance to demonstrate this claim has been patchy” [Norris 2019; Norris, Frank, and Martínez I Coma 2014].

These case findings have led Norris [2019] to call for a new research agenda on the independence of electoral Commission bodies, urging researchers to engage at the paradigmatic level (i.e., to fundamentally rethink existing assumptions and approaches) and develop models to identify challenges to the independence of these bodies. This is where the findings of Yarza [2018], Alderman [2024], and Pal et al. [2016] are essential for future research agendas. Yarza challenges prevailing theses on the ideal interaction between electoral Commission bodies and other branches of power, advocating for exploration through informal and equitable forums. Alderman [2018] posits that electoral independence can only be achieved when civil society and the media have sufficient freedom to observe and evaluate the processes and performance of electoral Commission bodies. Pal et al. [2016] take a more radical stance, proposing that electoral Commission bodies should constitute a separate pillar (a fourth pillar), completely independent of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

From the 73 collected journal articles and books, several research gaps emerge, particularly concerning the independence of electoral Commission bodies in leading electoral processes. This covers the composition of electoral Commission bodies, the backgrounds of their members, the rights and responsibilities of members, and the collective decision-making processes within these bodies. For instance, research in Nigeria indicates that the lack of clear regulations regarding the membership of electoral Commission bodies contributes to various challenges to the independence of electoral administration. In contrast, Aliyu and Ambali [2021] emphasize that the composition of the electoral Commission body in Ghana plays a crucial role in safeguarding its independence.

Another under-researched area is the relationship between the independence of electoral Commission bodies and political development, with Asamoah's [2019] research highlighting the contribution of such independence to post-conflict peacebuilding, while Laanela [2001] argues that it is a fundamental prerequisite for democratic systems.

Within the context of political development, research on electoral Commission body independence holds broader significance, with the potential to strengthen political institutions, enrich political culture, develop institutions and bureaucracies, and build political infrastructure within society, including mobilization efforts aimed at fostering a more democratic governance. Therefore, the research agenda concerning electoral Commission body independence should be directed towards specifically examining political development to assess how such independence can enhance the quality of

democracy and the effectiveness of political development. Further research should delve into how independent electoral Commission bodies contribute to strengthening political systems, including by fostering more meaningful public participation.

4 Conclusion

This article explores the diverse understandings of independence for electoral Commission bodies as reflected in the 73 articles gathered, demonstrating how different methods, approaches, and theories yield distinct findings. Rather than viewing these differences as conflicting, it is crucial to recognize this diversity of approaches, methods, and findings as valuable assets that should be synthesized through scholarly analysis to produce a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the independence of electoral Commission bodies. This diversity of perspectives provides a broader lens for comprehending how independence can be strengthened amidst complex political and social challenges. Ultimately, by integrating these various findings, academics and practitioners can develop more effective research strategies to support electoral Commission bodies in fulfilling their roles independently.

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