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Digitalize Voting System and Electronic Transmission of Election Results in Nigeria: Insights from the 2023 Presidential Election

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Samuel Chukwudi AGUNYAI

*School of Government Studies,
North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa
& Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
agunyais@oauife.edu.ng*

Kedibone PHAGO

*School of Government Studies,
North West University, South Africa*

&

Samuel Iheanacho EBIRIM

*Department of Political Science,
Oduduma University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria*

Abstract

This research paper examines the political calculations surrounding the motivation for the passage of the bill for the transmission of election results by the Nigerian parliament. It argues that the e-transmission of election results generated mixed reactions among parliamentarians, especially between members

of the All Progressive Congress and the People Democratic Party. While research attention has been paid to the utility-value and importance of e-transmission of results, there is very little research on what exactly is the undercurrent for the failure of INEC to timely release the 2023 presidential election results. Prior to the 2023 general election, INEC had promised to transmit the election results electronically. While this initiative drew massive attention and commendation, it also raises suspicion for the sustenance of such an initiative by INEC. Drawing on secondary sources of data collection, this paper found that the inability of INEC to timely transmit the 2023 presidential election results generated mixed reactions, possibly reducing public trust and marring the public image of Nigeria's electoral body globally and nationally. It concluded that INEC's report on technical hitches, ICT failure, and attacks on its Result Viewing Portal (IREV) significantly undermine the sustainability of digitalise voting system and electronic transmission of results (ETRs) in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Digital voting, Dynamics, Election, Election results, Political undertone.*

Introduction

Studies by Afolabi (2017a, 2018a, 2018b), Ham and Lindberg (2015), Agunyai and Ikedinma (2021), and others have been prompted by intellectual discussions and research in election administration, particularly in e-voting and electronic transmission of election results. These studies aim to improve the credibility of election results through electronic transmission. This is due to the fact that election credibility often strengthens democratic consolidation (Afolabi, 2017). If votes truly count and the results of general elections are credible—especially when they are promptly communicated electronically—Nigeria's democracy can be strengthened. It strengthens the credibility of the ruling administration and lessens violent, suspicious, and endless court cases following the election.

While the Nigerian public appears to have largely supported the initiative, politicians have responded differently to the Electoral Act's approval of digital voting and the transmission of election results. These issues have persisted as national issues in the country's politics. Politicians in Nigeria, particularly those in the National Assembly, have high expectations for both gains and losses from these conflicting responses. Politicians and law-makers from the opposition parties' have largely supported the bill for electronic voting and results transmission,

while their counterparts from the ruling party seem not to be comfortable with the bill, citing problems like internet fraud, manipulations, theft, hacking, availability of the internet in rural areas, accessibility of the internet to transmit results, and a lack of technical experts to handle e-voting, among other reasons, as reasons why the bill may not be passed into law. This fear may have been due to the fact that they don't want to lose their seat or position due to the bill on e-transmission of election results (Crisis Group Report, 2015b).

There hasn't been much substantial research done on the politics or political undertones surrounding the adoption of electronic voting and the broadcasting of general election results electronically. Finding benefits from electronic voting has always been the focus of research on electronic voting and general election results transmission. There are not many studies specifically designed to look at the political scheming that took place, particularly among National Assembly lawmakers, to get the e-voting and electronic transmission bills approved.

In a liberal democracy, elections are the best means of regularly rearranging the government. It promotes leadership change and places a strong emphasis on responsibility in leadership. It makes participation possible and helps give people more power. Elections are precisely the best means of expressing the sovereign power of the people. Ojie (2006) argues that in a democracy, those in charge of enforcing political authority within a society do so with the explicit consent and sincere mandate granted by the people through frequent, transparent, free, and fair elections. This implies that a democracy needs to be a system of governance where the agenda is defined by the people with the consent of all the governed.

Nigeria is one of the African nations with the least effective election administration systems. The political heavyweights behave like gladiators; the electoral regulations and rules are vague, easily manipulated, or change frequently; as a result, the electorates are frequently powerless and at the mercy of the political heavyweights and political outcomes. The political barons, with special interests, force unpopular candidates into office and employ every conceivable political ploy to tilt the election in their favour and against the general will of the people. Elections continue to be one of the primary metrics used to assess a state's quality, which indicates a stronger link between democracy and elections. As a result, a nation that struggles with its elections is also more likely to struggle with other democratic ideals, including accountability, the rule of

law, and effective leadership or governance (Fomunyoh & Obe, 2017). This is due to the fact that when elections are rigged, the will of the people is ignored, which sets the stage for authoritarian government. The public is less likely to hold those who profit from faulty elections accountable.

Nigeria's political history is riddled with anomalies and violent protests when viewed through the lenses of elections, electioneering, and electoral management. Election administration is still quite difficult in a democracy in transition like Nigeria. Poor electoral integrity plagues the nation's election management. With the notable exception of the cancelled presidential vote on June 12, 1993, most elections managed by different election management bodies were tainted by violence, irregularities, and accusations of electoral fraud on the part of EMBs (Omoleke, 2018; Afolabi & Quadri, 2015; Omotola, 2010). Because they believed that the results of elections did not reflect the aspirations of the majority of people, many Nigerians became cynical about elections (Afolabi & Ogunne, 2018).

But there was a resurgence of interest in Nigeria's general elections once the 2022 Electoral Act was approved. The electronic transfer of results in Kaduna State, for instance, has given voters in Nigeria new hope for the upcoming elections. More significantly, the country's rate of political apathy decreased after the Bimodal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS), a digitalised voting system, was used for the gubernatorial election in places like Osun and Ekiti. This was because more people were prepared to vote because of the voting system's transparency. Many Nigerians had high expectations for the general elections in 2023 based on some of these changes. However, based on observation, news reports, statements made by the public, and election observers' reports, the general elections in 2023 fell short of INEC's expectations. The way the elections were managed by the Electoral Management Board (EMB) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) angered a lot of Nigerians (Onapajo & Babalola, 2023). Election integrity was severely impacted by INEC's administrative and logistical problems during the poll (Omotola, 2023). The results of the presidential election were not sent electronically, as INEC completely broke its word. Because of this, there were grave doubts about INEC's involvement in the election of Nigeria's current president. This prompts enquiries such as: how much has INEC's involvement tainted Nigeria's 2023 presidential election? Why did INEC decide not to send the results of the presidential election

via electronic means? Is there any way that political influence or meddling might be linked to INEC's failure to transmit the results of the presidential election? The purpose of this article is to answer these questions with sufficient facts.

Mapping the problems of political dynamics and the intrigues of digitalised voting and e-transmission of results in Nigeria

The majority of Nigerians, observers, and politicians have traditionally reacted negatively to the results of general elections, believing that manual transmission of election results is the main reason votes rarely count in Nigeria (Kerr, 2013; Agunyai, 2023). It increases skepticism and discredits the electoral process (Afrobarometer 2023). The main reason for the large number of tribunal challenges after general elections in Nigeria is that the majority of candidates or contenders from opposition parties do not really believe or have trust in the election results released by INEC (Afrobarometer 2023). The Nigerian political system has been plagued by this serious social issue, yet efforts to end this unpleasant situation have produced little to no beneficial results. The push for electronic voting and electronic election result transmission is one of the novel attempts to totally eliminate any uncertainties that invalidate election results because they were transmitted manually (Afolabi, 2018). This might, in fact, eventually end fraudulent election result manipulation and raise the legitimacy and confidence of Nigeria's election administration if it is properly implemented (Agunyai, 2023). Furthermore, the National Assembly-approved amendment to the electoral statute, clause 52(2), gives INEC the exclusive authority to decide how the election results will be disseminated, including through electronic means (Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2022).

The demand for electronic voting and the transmission of election results through electronic means has thus far remained a domestic issue in Nigerian politics (Afolabi, 2018). Although the majority of the populace appears to have endorsed this initiative, politicians have reacted differently to the approval of electronic voting and the transmission of election results through electronic means in the electoral act (Esan et al. 2020). Gains and losses anticipated by Nigerian politicians, particularly those in the National Assembly, are blended together with these contradictory responses. Politicians from the ruling party seem to be citing innumerable reasons the results of the general elections cannot be

fully transmitted, including issues with internet availability and capacity in rural areas, accessibility to the internet for transmitting results, internet fraud, manipulations, theft, hacking, and a lack of technical experts to handle e-voting. In contrast, politicians from the opposition parties have largely supported the bill for electronic voting and result transmission (Crisis Group Report, 2015b).

Studies that have evaluated the significance of electronic voting and results transmission electronically include Afolabi, 2021; Afolabi, 2015b; Afolabi, 2016; Ikeme, 2016; Norris et al., 2014; and Obadare, 2014. E-voting for democratic government in Nigeria is the subject of an expanding body of literature (Salimonu, Osman, Shittu, & Jimoh, 2015; Esan & Ayeni, 2018; Ayo & Sofuluwa, 2019). Other studies, like those by Ayeni and Esan (2019) and Osita (2016), investigate the usefulness and effects of a partial adoption of technology deployment in elections on violence and electoral fraud. Afolabi (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of the adoption and effects of biometric technology, which is a crucial element of e-voting in elections, and electoral fraud. A significant number of these studies have listed the potential benefits of electronic voting and electoral transmission of results; however, not all of these studies have looked at the political calculations made by political parties and politicians regarding the approval of the use of electronic transmission of results in Nigeria. This study looks at the politics surrounding the transmission of election results in Nigeria and electronic voting in light of this gap.

Review of related literature

Election

A democratic government cannot exist without elections (Bacud, 2017). Without elections, it would be difficult to implement a modern representative democratic government. Elections are the means by which people and organisations exercise their right to govern in order to elect political leaders to public office, hold them responsible, and compel them to enact laws that represent the will of the people, according to Heywood (2013). Similarly, Wojtasik (2013) saw elections as a way for political figures and parties to interact with the people in a democracy in order to garner support and legitimacy for governing. Put differently,

Bacud (2017) argues that elections are a legal and peaceful way for power to be transferred within a democratic society.

The literature takes two main approaches to the conceptualisation of elections. On the one hand, there are academics who believe that elections are the cornerstone of any democratic political system, regardless of how stable it is (Meshin, 2008; Kuhne, 2010; Bacud, 2017; Elkit and Reynolds, 2005). In both authoritarian and democratic states, the second group of researchers views elections as a tool for consolidating the power of the ruling class. According to Heywood (2013) and Ginsberg (1982), those who take part in elections help legitimise the rule of the elite. Ginsberg (1982) asserted that elections are a means by which political elites can control a populace.

Academics and election observers are approaching elections as processes rather than events when conceiving them (ACE, 2011). Elections are thus viewed as a sequence of procedures known as the electoral process, as opposed to a single, one-day event. Election Day, Election Day aftermath, and the pre-election phase comprise the electoral process. Events that take place prior to elections are categorised as pre-election. Included in this are voter registration, party registration, voter registration preparation, and other election-related tasks. Voter tabulation, election result tabulation, and announcement are all part of the election stage.

Election Management Body (EMB)

The most important phase in the public's consolidation and cultivation of faith in democracy is the efficient administration or management of the voting process. The body designated by law to oversee, coordinate, or manage the electoral process is known as the Election Management Bodies (EMB). Election management bodies are described by Pinto (2000) as public institutions of governance in a globalising democratic society. This is why Election Management Bodies (EMBs) are important institutions for the growth of democracy because of their direct engagement in running multiparty elections and their indirect involvement in governance and the rule of law. Election management bodies, as defined by Aaaken (2009), are a subset of a state's Independent Administrative Agencies (IAAs) and are essential as an institution to democracy's survival in the sense of free and fair elections. A clear definition of the organisations in charge of organising elections and

referenda (ACE, 2012). In addition, the EMB is responsible for overseeing the registration of political parties, managing campaign funds, drafting ballots, drawing voting districts, resolving electoral disputes, civic and voter education, and media monitoring. (ACE, 2012).

There are multiple classifications for EMBs. Pastor (2009) and Pintor (2000) employed five models to offer a thorough understanding, which are as follows: Distinguished individuals from a list proposed by the president and legislature, narrowed down based on the opinions of the political parties, and selected by a panel of judges for a ten-year tenure comprise this neutral electoral commission. EMBs are in the government sector. EMBs under judicial oversight but under the authority of a government ministry. Political party representatives participate in independent elections. According to whether the models Pintor (2000) and Pastor (1999) highlighted are governmental or independent, or incorporate both features, three models—the independent model, the government model, and the mixed model—have been developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2006).

These models are divided into groups according to a number of criteria, such as the way institutional arrangements are put into practice, formal accountability, authority, composition, tenure, and funding. These characteristics are the standard by which EMBs are judged by international organisations as well as by the academic community (Makulilo, Ntanganda, Aywa, Sekaggya, & Osodo, 2015). Aaken (2009) states that distinguishing between independent and non-independent EMBs is a multifaceted task, and he provides four criteria for determining an EMB's independence. Institutional independence, financial independence, personal independence, and functional independence meet these requirements.

Digitalised or E-voting

In order to prevent electoral fraud, unethical behaviour, and vote-buying before or during the election, voting is conducted using digital technology and contemporary equipment, according to Afolabi (2021). According to Agunyai and Ikedinma (2021), it symbolises the use of machines and electronic transmission in election administration. It is simply the process of using technologies and electronic internet-connected devices to vote in an election. It is possible to list the

following advantages of electronic voting: reduced expenses, increased voting options and participation, faster and more accurate vote counting, and improved accessibility and flexibility for the disabled (Data-monitor, 2008).

Despite its benefits, electronic voting is hard to rely on due to technological know-how issues. Relying on electronic systems comes with a lot of hazards. When one problem is solved by technology, other problems could also occur. For example, electronic voting technology eliminates the need for paper ballots and many other problems, but voters cannot independently confirm the results or ensure that their votes are accurately recorded without a paper copy (Bishop and Wagner, 2007). Voting on paper can be less private and secure than voting electronically. But in order for these systems to work well, they need to adhere to seven design principles. First, all protocols and procedures must have security that is mathematically validated. Government security agencies should be tasked with creating secure voting systems, since the second is dependable design accountability. The public release of the source code fulfills the third prerequisite. Fourth, in the final election tallying, there ought to be a means of verifying that each and every vote has been correctly counted. The sixth objective is that the system needs to be easy to use and accessible to all voters. Lastly, ensure anonymisation. Onion routing and other techniques are required to ensure anonymisation. Lastly, professional monitoring is provided by a group of experts selected and approved by all major political parties and candidates (Gerlach, 2009).

Political dynamics of electronic transmission of results (ETR) and E-voting in Nigeria

A system for electrical voting that has been adopted by developed nations to improve election procedures is called electronic voting, or occasionally E-Voting. Literature claims that a number of e-voting initiatives have been started in the US, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, France, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and other nations as a result of technological advancements and the many problems with manual voting. Voters can cast their ballots and have them counted using electronic voting. The procedure is visible, auditable, safe, and has minimal space for human error. Large countries like Brazil, the Philippines, India, and Brazil can swiftly announce election results because of electronic voting

and counting. This strategy guarantees that all voters may access the polls and gives them the ability to select respectable candidates without undue influence. Additionally, during the voting process, it enables voters to protect the privacy of their ballots. Voters become more confident in the electoral institutions as a result (Obradovic et al., 2006).

The primary motivations for installing electronic voting machines (EVMs) in 2007 were to reinforce the integrity of INEC, ensure the validity of election results, and dispel INEC's public charges of rigging elections in collusion with the ruling party. Other causes include the need to put an end to the post-election violence that has taken so many innocent lives in previous elections and the public's desire to choose leaders who are trustworthy and committed to infrastructure development (Adebayo, Ugiomoh, & AbdulMalik, 2013).

The concept of an EVM, however, was met with conflicting responses from Nigerians. Although there was a lot of excitement among those who believed the invention would lessen election fraud, there was also a ban on multiple registrations and impersonations, as well as the authentication of voter biometric data and images. Nevertheless, some perceived the idea as a means of boosting their chances of success by employing customary illicit techniques (Duruji & Joshua, 2014). Thus, desperate political gladiators, fearing that the new system would undermine their victory, organised the National Assembly to prevent the intended EVM in the Electoral Act of 2006 from being implemented. The recurring electoral frauds in the 2007 elections were made possible by this, which also damaged INEC's reputation.

In order to solve a number of problems from the 2007 election, including multiple registrations and the phenomenon of abnormally high voter participation on election days, INEC bought a Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) in advance of the 2011 election. 94%, 96%, and even 100% voting turnout are a few examples. (NCSSR, 2015). The strategy could not work since it was claimed that the computers' intended purpose was altered before they were even delivered to INEC. This led to a great deal of doubt and rumours in Nigeria and other places.

Based on the challenges from 2011 and previous experiences, INEC introduced Smart Card Readers as a new template in 2015 for the first time in Nigerian history in order to strengthen the integrity of the voting procedures (Olumide, 2015). The independent body in charge of regulating elections, INEC, opposed the new policy despite efforts by the

ruling party to undermine it (Fabiya, 2015). Thus, the smart card reader (SCR) was presented together with a host of characteristics, such as:

- Voter identity cards given by politicians to their supporters during the previous elections in Nigeria could be ejected if they are not set up by the INEC (Idowu, 2015; Jega & Hillier, 2012).
- Forging cards was difficult since the card reader reads the embedded chip of the PVC and communicates with it using a secret code. The voter's identity is confirmed by the SCR by a cross-matching of the thumbprints stored on the embedded chip. hence making the voter's card transfer challenging. The SCR cannot be relocated to another polling place without first requiring a reconfiguration by authorised INEC staff since it is only intended to operate on election days and in designated polling places in order to avoid fraudulent behaviour (Idowu, 2015; Jega & Hillier, 2012).

The voter registration card reader keeps track of each voter's card details, including those of confirmed and unconfirmed voters. It then sends this data to a central INEC server over the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) data service. Voter statistics submitted to the server will allow INEC to verify polling unit results and ensure statistical analysis of voting demographics (Idowu, 2015).

It has been suggested that implementing strong IT policies and initiatives is the most effective approach to tackling Nigeria's problems with insufficient democratic practices. Electronic voting can increase civic engagement and save on election costs by making voting more convenient. Critics claim that with the absence of a paper record, recounts are more difficult, open to electronic ballot fraud, and may even affect the result of an election. In many countries, both in-person e-voting and remote i-voting have been tested during elections. The US, Australia, Estonia, Japan, Brazil, and India have varying degrees of e-voting acceptance (Sanjay and Ektar, 2011). According to Oladotun and Rafiu (2015), Namibia became the first country in Africa to implement electronic voting for its 2014 general elections.

Election credibility and overall success are largely dependent on the integrity of the results collection process. Credible election outcomes will be obtained if the process is transparent and well-managed (Ihuoma, 2021). In contrast to manual computation of results, electronic transmission of results is a computerised way of computing and sending election results (Ihuoma, 2021). Instead of sending the poll results to a

central computing facility for processing, it is a quicker way that allows for real-time communication from the voting booths (Adenekan, 2021). Election results are electronically transmitted, according to INEC (2020), which means that in addition to transferring the results straight from the pooling booths to the internet for instant viewing, the results are also electronically compiled to determine the election's outcome.

The INEC (2020) identifies the importance of e-transmission of results as follows:

- (a) Public trust in the voting process is increased by the growing use of technology in election administration. The commission received widespread recognition for implementing the smart card reader (SCR), chip-based voter cards, and biometric register, which significantly increased election standards, particularly in 2011 and 2015. Subsequently, Nigerians have advocated for a reduction in human intervention that could alter the choices of voters.
- (b) The wellbeing and security of voters should be the top priority during all electoral processes, including voting. There's no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic has altered global practices. These modifications have been well received by INEC and Nigeria.
- (c) The integrity of elections depends on prompt and effective results handling and announcement. Feelings that findings could be compromised are stoked by protracted delays in compiling and releasing data. The public will become more confident in the electoral process, and results administration will become more efficient with the use of electronic transmission.
- (d) Minimising the extent to which adverse human interference affects election results.
- (e) Election integrity depends on prompt and effective results administration and announcement. Feelings that findings could be compromised are stoked by protracted delays in compiling and releasing data. The public will become more confident in the electoral process, and results administration will become more efficient with the use of electronic transmission.

While the electronic system still has some issues, such as fingerprint rejection, card reader malfunction, needless delay, mismatch of information, and pockets of violence, there has been a noticeable improvement, with problems with the card reader during the

gubernatorial and state assembly elections dropping almost by half to 27% (Monitor, 2015).

E-voting and ETR adoption, however, may be seen as rising difficulties in Nigeria, a developing nation, due to the country's use of ICT. However, a thorough examination is necessary to understand the politics underlying e-voting and ETR in Nigeria due to the peculiarities and laziness of the elites over their use of these technologies. One example is the term "dirty game" that has been applied to politics in Nigeria (Ake, 2001; Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). Political patronage, money politics, and the accumulation of crude wealth are all made possible by Nigeria's state power grab, according to Ake (2001), which reduces politics to a struggle of wills between the ruling class and the general populace. According to Awofeso and Irabor (2022), political thugs are frequently used in Nigerian politics to rig elections, kill opponents, or kidnap opponents. This indicates that political thugs are a major factor in the country's violent electoral rivalry. According to Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) and Awofeso and Irabor (2022), the manual voting system in Nigeria became characterised by a range of electoral irregularities, such as stuffing ballot boxes, destroying election materials, the late arrival of personnel and materials at the polling place, and intimidating and harassing voters.

The delay in policy support for implementing and improving electronic voting in Nigeria is another example of elite neglect. Section 153(f) of the Nigerian Constitution (as modified) specifies the INEC's responsibility in organising and conducting elections; nevertheless, it does not allow for electronic voting or electronic tabulation of votes (ETR). The absence of electronic voting and electronic tabulation of results (ETR) in the Nigerian constitution suggests a basic lack of flexibility and gaps that accompanied the country's late embrace of technology for electoral purposes (Esan et al., 2020; Eme, 2022). Once more, the 2010 Electoral Act severely restricted INEC's ability to use electronic voting and electronic tabulation until it was revised and approved by President Muhammadu Buhari on February 25, 2022. The use of electronic voting in Nigerian elections was prohibited in the interim by Section 52 (1b) of the 2010 Electoral Act (Electoral Act, 2010). More precisely, voting at an election must adhere to the INEC-specified procedure, which may include electronic voting, as per Section 50(2) of the 2010 Electoral Act. However, INEC is not permitted to communicate the election results electronically (Electoral Act, 2010).

These inserted clauses into the Electoral Act explain the peculiarities of the political class's opposition to electronic voting and electronic tabulation in Nigeria.

The 2010 Electoral Act was modified by the 9th National Assembly and signed into law by the President on February 25, 2022, in response to public outcry, years of review, and contentious debate in the National Assembly. This allowed for the establishment of policy support and a legal foundation for the adoption of electronic voting and electronic tabulation in Nigeria (Eme, 2022). The 2022 Electoral Act, Section 50(2), now stipulates that ETR must follow the process set by the INEC (Electoral Act, 2022). It has been explained that the legislators who voted against ETR, abstained, or showed indifference to the issue are those who like the status quo and stand to gain from the electoral violence, election tampering, and spoiling that followed the manual voting method (Eme, 2022). According to Ahmed (2022) and Ajibade (2022), the government's reactionary attitude towards providing policy direction on matters of national significance was also justified by the President's delay in approving the 2022 Electoral Act.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was utilised to retrieve the data and information in this article. Data were sourced through desktop reviews of related works. Empirical studies that were indexed in Scopus, IBSS, DHET, and other reputable, accredited journal outlets were sourced for this paper. The data were content-analysed.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The communication theory, which emphasises the necessity of developing electronic voting and using digital devices to communicate election results nationwide, was used in this work. Nigerian election management requires the application of ICT due to the 21st century's technological revolution. Despite the country's transition from manual to biometric voting, vote-buying and election result manipulation are quickly becoming unsightly aspects of Nigeria's general elections. Therefore, cybernetics theory holds that elections are rarely credible with effective communication of election results to the people. It also holds the condition that effective channels of communication between the

electoral body and the electorate are the basis of a free, fair, and credible election in any country. It is the belief of this theory that the e-transmission of election results, e-voting, and e-compilation of results are better ways of communicating election administration or management to the electorate. It boosts the trust of the people in the electioneering process and in the electoral body. This theory directly aligns with the core issue in this paper, which is the political dynamics of digital voting and e-transmission of election results in Nigeria. Since one of the conditions of the theory is adequate communication of the electioneering process to voters, which makes it easier for voters to vote and hear the results, this tends to promote the trust of the people in the electoral body and the processes of the election. With this theory, all things being equal, Nigeria's 2023 presidential election ought to have been credible with adequate communication of election results to the public, but the reverse was the case, as the electoral body claimed that it faced the challenge of a technical glitch, which prevented it from communicating or conveying the result to the public. This goes to explain why there are more doubts and a series of tribunal cases after the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. It is because the much-expected communication of the election results to the public, as promised by INEC, was not done. This partly contributed to the loss of trust and interest in Nigeria's electioneering process by the majority of Nigerians.

Digitalise Voting System and the Credibility of the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges

The introduction of e-voting and ETR has been recognised as the solution to the numerous election anomalies in Nigeria, providing an alternative to the country's traditional voting system. Similar to this, the prospect of e-voting and ETR may not be satisfactory without sufficient and effective use of ICT devices, especially in a developing nation like Nigeria where the use of technology for government and by the populace is still at a low level (Ahmed & Usman, 2015; Sabo et al., 2015). To this extent, the purpose of this section is to dissect the opportunities and obstacles supporting and opposing the implementation of electronic voting and electronic tabulation in Nigeria (Ogbaudu, 2011). The ability to speed up collation and minimise human error and logistical issues in the computation process is one benefit of electronic voting and electronic tabulation (ETR) in Nigeria. The Nigerian election is rife with

logistical issues and human mistakes, such as incorrect election results calculations and delayed collation of result due to delays in getting INEC officers to the collation centre (Kuye et al., 2013; Esan & Ayeni, 2018).

Nigeria may also benefit from the possibility of enhancing the legitimacy and security of the electoral process. Election violence takes several forms in Nigeria, including ballot stealing, intimidation of voters, and manipulation of election outcomes (Ake, 2001; Awofeso & Irabor, 2022). Election results sheets are frequently destroyed during violence, altered by INEC workers under pressure or inducements, or both (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017). E-voting will also guarantee a safe and legitimate election process by eliminating the violence, ballot stuffing, voter impersonation, and multiple vote incidents that plagued Nigerian elections (Olaniyi et al., 2011). In addition to reducing money politics in Nigerian elections, electronic voting and electronic voting receipts (ETR) will also work to prohibit vote buying and vote selling as well as direct communication between voters and politicians (Ahmed & Usman, 2015; Oguejiofor, 2018).

In Nigeria, e-voting and KETR allow for more open election administration and greater confidence in the INEC during the 2023 presidential election. The INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal's launch will improve results management's transparency and boost voter confidence in the INEC and turnout for elections (INEC, 2021). Indeed, promises made by INEC's chairman prior to the 2023 presidential election about the use of the IREV portal to release the presidential election results boosted the morale of many Nigerian voters to participate in voting. This does not only enhance large voters' turnout but also their confidence in INEC. However, the confidence of voters was worsened by the news of a technical hitch and difficulties preventing the digitalised release of the presidential election. The fact that only the

INEC released a policy on May 21, 2020, regarding the 2023 presidential election (INEC, 2020). One of such reforms is reducing in-person interactions during the presidential election by using more technology, which was a key component of the policy (INEC, 2020; Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). The goal was to guarantee the safety and protection of the electorate during voting. In order to lessen crowds and in-person interactions during the election process, INEC has implemented pertinent technologies for the past four years. Oguejiofor (2018), INEC (2021), and Mahmood (2021) mention a few of these: the establishment of portals for candidate nomination, the certification of

election observers and media organisations, and enhancements to the INEC's results watching portal. Strong phone and internet infrastructure has enabled Nigerians all around the nation to take part in virtual elections, and this has been the driving force behind all of these.

Despite these admirable benefits, there are still obstacles that may prevent Nigeria from adopting ETR and electronic voting. The reaction and support of the political elites towards the success of e-voting and ETR is one obstacle to their effective implementation in Nigeria. The efficiency of voter education and stakeholder interactions aimed at fostering widespread support and participation in the electoral process determines whether electronic voting is successful or not (Ahmed & Usman, 2015; Akinniranye & Uleanya, 2016). A new set of voter education materials is needed for the adoption of electronic voting. These materials should clarify voting procedures and eliminate any misconceptions regarding issues like identity theft and voter preference disclosure (Akinniranye & Uleanya, 2016). The need to manage public expectations regarding electronic voting—some of which are at odds with the INEC plan and the state of affairs at the moment—makes this crucial (Kuye et al., 2013; Nwogu, 2015).

As a result, voters may lose faith in the new system, and the possibility of e-voting and ETR in Nigeria may come to nothing if they are not provided with sufficient information and instruction to enable them to forget about the manual voting system and learn about e-voting and ETR procedures (Olagbegi, 2007). In a similar spirit, a crucial component of the adoption of electronic voting is stakeholder engagement. It may be challenging to come to a consensus on how to improve e-voting and ETR in Nigeria given the varied and frequently opposing viewpoints of stakeholders on important election-related problems (Aghu, 2016; Aziken, 2018).

The extent of the nation's infrastructure, which can support the devices' continuous power supply and enable broadband coverage and internet access, is another argument that might be used to undermine the adoption of electronic voting and electronic tabulation in Nigeria. ETR and internet voting require internet access, much as operating e-voting equipment requires enough electrical provision (Ekikeme, 2015; Esan & Ayeni, 2018). But in Nigeria, where just 40% of the population has access to electricity, power outages are a frequent occurrence (Ekikeme, 2015; Oguejiofor, 2018). It's anticipated that this situation will have an impact on how well ETR and electronic voting work in Nigeria. However, given

the low 3G network coverage of data, which stands at 74.2%, which is undoubtedly greater in urban centres and nearly nonexistent in some rural communities (Esan & Ayeni, 2018), the introduction of online voting will undoubtedly face significant obstacles.

Similarly, Nigeria does not have a complete biometric database for voter identification and election monitoring, which is a fundamental requirement for the deployment of electronic voting (Umoru, 2012; Ekikeme, 2015). More difficult to handle is the uncertainty surrounding the nation's ability to produce the skilled technologists needed to operate complex technologies, such as electronic voting. Some critics argue that e-voting is not yet ready for Nigeria due to the inadequate ICT infrastructure, resources, and knowledge (Iferi, 2011).

Election-related problems stem from INEC's weak institutional ability, which is linked to its lack of financial and independent autonomy, poor technical and logistical planning, and inadequate organisational and administrative capabilities (Adetula, 2008; Nwogu, 2015). Moreover, a range of staff members, politicians, and party cronies exhibit dishonest practices and low technical proficiency during the 2023 presidential election (Agbu, 2023). The INEC's blatant lack of "capabilities" to detect on-time the technical glitches that prevented the real-time online release of the presidential election results makes the election suspicious and vulnerable to various forms of election tampering, which in turn causes voters to lose faith in the organisation's honesty and integrity. In fact, one other challenge of the ETR during the 2023 presidential election, is that it heightens the tendencies of several tribunal cases due to a loss of trust in INEC's capacity to fulfil its promise of transmitting the presidential election results electronically. This has made lots of Nigerians believe that INEC's failure to publicly communicate or announce the presidential election is more of a political undercurrent than just an excuse for technical glitches. This may have partly been correct due to the fact that other federal elections (Senate and House of Representatives election results) were publicly communicated or released via the digital or electronic transmission process.

Conclusion

Nigerian lawmakers, notably members of the National Assembly, were aware of the significance of electronic voting and the electronic transmission of results, which, in the long run, are critical to election

integrity and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Rather than prioritising the interests of the country, Nigerian politicians overseeing the adoption of proposed measures supporting electronic voting and electronic voting records (ETRs) have always viewed politics as a means of advancing their own political agendas and enhancing their own stature. The traditional manual voting system in Nigeria is prone to significant electoral irregularities, which has inevitably damaged the credibility of the country's elections. Many changes to the 2010 Electoral Act have been made in order to address issues with the manual voting system. The adoption of the digital voting technology known as BVAS was one of these changes. Results of this research demonstrate that BVAS significantly impacted Nigerian voters' behaviour in addition to aiding in the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy. Most Nigerian youngsters hurried to pick up their PVC at various INEC offices around the nation, as it was discovered that the majority of Nigerian voters had a revived enthusiasm for voting as a result of BVAS. The BVAS, a digital device, appears to have had a good impact on the behaviour of young Nigerians in collecting their PVC so they could cast ballots in the general elections of 2023.

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