

DIGITILIZATION AND PROSPECT OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA.

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Moshood Abiodun Olatunji

Department of Political Science & Public Administration Fountain
University, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria

Email: olatunji.moshood@fuo.edu.ng / abikemolatunji2015@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The end of critical period of Cold War in the late 1990s paved the way for democratic agenda in Africa. The study seeks to examines the impact of adoption of technology in democratic transformation in Africa. The study posits that technology is unavoidably essential in ensuring a sustainable democratic structure, as digital technologies have had huge impact on governance around the globe which has made the world a global village. It argues that, the internet networking possibilities are creating many opportunities for the people to be actively participants in democracy. The study, establishes that, there is increase access to communication technologies which has made it easier for citizens to be politically sensitized and deeply involved in public discourse. To interrogate the discourse, the study adopts Democratic Theory and uses secondary sources to gather the relevant information. It concludes that, the technology provides a platform for citizens to exercise their franchise, which often strengthen the evolving democratic values in African countries. In view of the positive impact of technology in engendering well entrenched democratic values and effective structure, the study recommends that, the African leaders urgently need to address some challenges which often threaten the visibility of technology in the conduct of elections, particularly insecurity, falsification of data and manipulation of electoral machines.

Keywords: *Africa, Democracy, Digitalization, Election, Technology.*

INTRODUCTION:

DIGITALIZING DEMOCRACY

In the age of information and communication technology, there is a lively debate on the political consequences of the prominent place taken by technology in our daily life because some consider

the use of digital technology as a liberation that serves as an alternative to traditional media by providing a more open and freer source of information most especially in countries with limited freedom of speech (Diamond, 2010), others believe

that it is a “mis-information technology” for the dissemination of fake news dissemination, surveillance and propaganda (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

Digitalization transforms our everyday life, our way of communication and information, as well as our relationship to other people especially in African countries, digital technology is still under development and poses on the one hand risks, challenges, and difficulties, on the other hand opportunities, chances, and perspectives for users, providers, and politics. High hopes for development lie on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and their potential benefits for countries in Sub – Sharan Africa. In this context, it is important to structure and systematize the complex discourse on digital technology and democracy in Africa.

The advent of innovative communication technologies has deeply changed how societies and their governments interact, affecting both democratic processes and the ways citizens participate in political process of their country, for example, digital technology gives the people the opportunity to have easy access and inexpensive ways to follow global events in real time because,

citizens can seek out alternative sources of information, collectively organise for both online and offline programmes, express their opinion, concerns and demands as well as government authorities, and hold political leaders accountable for their actions and inactions. Digital technologies are also becoming indispensable in key democratic processes such as electoral process in Africa.

Though, the effects of digital technology on democracy have been immense because, there have been negative as well as positive. On the positive side, technologies have helped to improve political pluralism, facilitate government transparency and accountability and expanded political participation through the democratisation of communication platforms (Cheeseman and Garbe, 2021). For example, the relatively low entry barriers to participate in digital activism and organise have allowed previously unheard social groups, such marginalized minorities and women to exercise their fundamental human rights and take leadership positions in social mobilizations. Indeed, these group of people have faced social and cultural backlash when they assume prominent leadership positions in the public sphere. On

the negative side, governments are increasingly using digital technologies to consolidate and extend existing repressive practices, such as hate speech, mass surveillance, targeted monitoring of users' digital footprints, curtailment of digital spaces through legislation and internet shutdowns, and promotion of pro-government digital platforms (Roberts et al. 2021).

The digital technology as a platform for citizen participation and public discourse has important potential to improve democracy in sub-Saharan African countries. The continent of Africa has for years now been synonymous with political instability. Since the majority of African countries gained independence in the 20th century, they have been characterized by a series of problems including political corruption, ethnicity, sit – tight syndrome, tribalism and human rights violations. Political regimes have failed to give adequate attention to elite abuse, ethnic fears of oppression by the majority, and legitimate group demands for political and social rights. In many cases, ethnic minorities have as a result been largely excluded from political processes due to a lack of adequate communication channels (Rothchild, 1995).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between digital technology and democracy in Africa. The specific objectives are to:

- (a) Identify the prospects and challenges brought about by digitalization.
- (b) Examine how digitalization could enable the realization of democracy and support the practice of accountable governance.
- (c) examines “new” dynamics that are emerging due to digital technologies and their application in various aspects of political governance

METHODOLOGY, MAIN ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The paper adopts the qualitative approach anchored on historical design. Data were collected mainly through secondary sources. The textual analysis of data, major issues and themes of the paper was supplemented with Innovation Diffusion Theory and Democratic Theory as analytical framework. These illuminated the discussions, findings and recommendations of the study.

The main argument of the paper is to examines the impact of adoption of technology in democratic transformation in Africa. The

study posits that technology is unavoidably essential in ensuring a sustainable democratic structure, as digital technologies have had huge impact on governance around the globe which has made the world a global village. It argues that the internet networking possibilities are creating many opportunities for the people to be actively participants in democracy. The study, establishes that, there is increase access to communication technologies which has made it easier for citizens to be politically sensitized and deeply involved in public discourse on how the digital technology can be used to promote public discourse and citizen participation as functions of democracy in African countries. It concludes that, the technology provides a platform for citizens to exercise their franchise, which often strengthen the evolving democratic values in African countries. In view of the positive impact of technology in engendering well entrenched democratic values and effective structure. The paper identifies some challenges of digital technology on democratic process in Africa such as misinformation, hate speech and the digital divide. The suggestions proffered are capable of attenuating these challenges.

Structurally, the paper is divided into eight sections. Section one which is the introduction took a general overview of the paper. Section two examined the methodology used in carrying out the research. Section three reviewed the extant literature on digitalization as a tool for good governance and benefits of E governance in Africa. Section four explained the concept of democracy and citizen's participation in democratic governance. Section five explored the work within a theoretical framework of analysis. Section six examined the concept of E- voting, Bimodal Voter Accreditation and Electoral Transparency and Smart Card Reader in Nigeria. Section seven explained a detailed dimension of the challenges of digitalization and prospect of democracy in Africa while section eight drew conclusion and recommendations.

Digitalization as a Tool of Good Governance

Digital technologies can in a broad sense and for the purpose of this study be described as the platforms through which people access the Internet. It has in many ways redefined what we understand to be effective citizenry and citizen participation, which are fundamental to a functioning democracy. Many Internet users

worldwide with unlimited information at the push of a button now have alternative access points to the political realm through their computers and mobile phones. Likewise, African citizens are slowly but surely, through the use of the digital technology, retrieving some of the power over their own lives and possessions that many believe elected leaders have been wasting (Ott & Rosser, 1999). Many continue to believe that the solution to Africa's problems lies in the utilization of the digital technology to stimulate and improve democracy in the continent of Africa. Digital tools can promote transparent and accountable institutions, advance civic education and provide means of skills training for citizens, while fostering richer political and social dialogue

Advancements in digital technologies are changing electoral processes. For example, several African countries have partially or fully digitized their electoral processes (Mosero, 2022). This has the potential to introduce greater transparency and overcome challenges regarding electoral manipulation even if the exclusion of some segments of the population and manipulation of results cannot be fully ruled out, due to the complexity of e-voting processes.

This study is, therefore, important in an African context, where until recently many countries have lacked a practical medium through which ordinary citizens could participate in and contribute meaningfully to a culture of liberal democracy in a non-offensive way that does not endorse the conflict that has in many ways become an everyday occurrence for Africans. In many instances, what are in effect single party systems have condemned opposition to the party in power as treason, and political opponents are often presented as "anti- people" or enemies of the states and are severely punished and repressed (Hameso, 2002). The digital technology now provides a platform for communication and networking where traditional media have until now been limited. Indeed, the application of digital technologies in African elections has grown in leaps and bounds in the last two decades. Since South Africa used a centralized electronic election results center in 1994, and subsequently the 'zip- zip' voter registration device, election technologies have come to form an essential part of election management. They are now used in all activities of the electoral management cycle, including the registration of voters, preparation of election plans, procurement,

logistics and, in some cases, voting. In addition, digital technologies have become an essential tool of political participation for voters. Election-related information is shared by EMBs, candidates and the media, using digital technology. Indeed, social media has become one of the most powerful tools of citizen mobilization and engagement in Africa during elections, especially with an estimated 30 million cellphones on the continent. In a new form of collective bargaining digitalization makes visible a layer of social process that is more fundamental than organisations and just as fundamental as institutions, namely, the process by which people that have something in common think together. Collective cognition is greatly facilitated by the community- building mechanisms of digitalization (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2004) because it creates the opportunity for people to form ideologies, spread news, compare agendas, exchange ideas and share experiences (Rothchild, 1995).

By providing a new means of gaining information from citizens, digitalization has helped some governments design better social protection schemes and enhanced resilience to external shocks even if the mechanisms used for such purposes have also expanded

surveillance by states (Alcorn 2021: Roberts et al. 2021)

E-payment platforms, similarly, have made it easy the process of collecting taxes and service fees for utilities. This has both reduced administrative burdens on government and given citizens greater access to public information and services. Digitalisation allows governments to easily share information across line ministries and departments, in many cases, reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency. Digitalisation facilitates information dissemination and government service provisions easier. Governments thus increasingly rely on the internet and digital technologies to communicate with citizens and carry out their responsibilities through what is commonly referred to as e-governance. For example, laws, policies and government regulations are announced online and public documents and tenders can also be disclosed to the general public. Many countries also use digital data registry systems to document births and deaths and to issue certificates, passports and other legal documents (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022).

Benefits of E-Government

The goal of e- government is to be

able to offer an increased portfolio of public services to citizens in an efficient, effective, and cost-effective manner because e-government allows for government transparency. Government transparency is important because it allows the public to be informed about what the government is working on as well as the policies they are trying to implement. Simple tasks may be easier to perform through electronic government access. Many changes, such as marital status or address changes can be a long process and take a lot of paper work for citizens. E-government allows these tasks to be performed efficiently with more convenience to individuals. It is an easy way for the public to be more involved in political campaigns (Ayo & Ekong,2008). It could increase voters' awareness which could lead to an increase in citizen participation in elections.

Also, it is convenient and cost-effective for businesses and the public benefits by getting easy access to the most current information available without having to spend time, money and energy to get it (Ayo & Ekong,2008).

In addition, e-government helps simplify processes and makes access to government information

more easily accessible for public sector agencies and citizens. For example, India became the first country to allow government records to be digitally signed, legally certified and delivered electronically by using Electronic Postmark Technology (UNCTAD,2004)

Furthermore, the introduction of e-government will facilitate e-procurement and better communication between government and business because the society is moving towards the mobile connection

Lastly, the ability of government service to accessible to citizens irrespective of location throughout the country brings the next and potentially biggest benefit of e-government services (Asogwa,2012).

The Concept of Democracy and Citizens' Participation in Democratic Governance

Democracy like most other concepts in social sciences lacks precise and universally acceptable definition although, there are quite areas of convergence among the scholars on the concept.

According to Eke (2005) in Ogbulafor, etal (2018) defines democracy to means population in the decision-making process with

its core component as political pluralism through party politics in a free, fair and periodic election to enhance freedom of choice of leaders. Shively in Eze, (2015) views democracy as a state in which all full adult citizens vote at regular intervals to choose, from among alternative candidates, the people who will be in charge of setting the state policies. However, Willige (2017) defined democracy as a political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making or to elect representatives to government bodies. This supports the assertion of Gilbert and Ubani (2015) who posits that democracy is a form of government which lays emphasis on active participation by the citizenry and on popular sovereignty. Ogbulafor (2018) see democracy from the prism of representation through a periodically organized free and fair election. Willige (2017) defined democracy as a political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making or to elect representatives to government bodies. This supports the assertion of Gilbert and Ubani (2015) who posits that democracy is a form of government which lays emphasis on active participation by the citizenry and on popular sovereignty. Okeke (2017) sees

democracy as a people-centered system of government. Democracy is “a system of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of making governmental decisions, that is, of allocation of scarce resources” (Erunke, 2012).

Public participation in democratic governance comes in different shapes and shades, such as involvement in campaigns, holding public offices, being a candidate in an election, analyzing political events, dissemination of party programmes, membership of a political party, financial contribution towards the activities of political party etc.

African countries have made varying degrees of progress in building democratic institutions, and the scope and quality of citizen participation in democratic processes differs. Digital technologies provide additional avenues for governments to expand and facilitate citizens' participation and involve them in public institutions. Government institutions and officials increasingly use digital tools, such as social media platforms and government websites, to interact

with citizens. For example, in the 2022 general elections in Kenya, one area of progress, according to the country's electoral commission, was in the public online dissemination of election results from polling stations, in Ethiopia, the National Election Board created a Twitter profile and used the platform to conduct online question and-answer sessions to inform electorates about the electoral process before the 2020 general elections and this has enabled the citizen groups and the media to do their own independent tabulations and tallying of results, in 2019, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa used his Twitter live chat to engage with citizens of the country which was part of an online campaign programme before the elections.

The civic technology sector is still growing, bringing a stream of new web platforms and mobile applications geared at improving the political participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in the continent of Africa. For instance, Nigerians used social media platform to express their concern towards their political leaders for abandoning them during the COVID-19 pandemic in spite of the country's already fragile and under-resourced public health care system, while the same

political leaders sought medical care for themselves in oversea countries. Also in Mali, the mobile phone application allows citizens to directly contact their elected politicians to raise concerns and provide ideas for improving governance and through this, increase government accountability and citizen participation in government activities. In Kenya, the non-partisan parliamentary monitoring organisation uses technology to make the Kenya's parliament more accessible, connecting the political representatives with their constituents through the rollout of legislative trackers in selected countries. All these allow citizens to claim more influence over public institutions and political processes (Onminyi, 2020).

In addition, social media platform have advanced citizen mobilization and collective action, especially in contexts where offline spaces are limited and politically controlled. Some of this online mobilization has influenced decision-making and led to offline action and reform. In Ethiopia for example, Facebook Twitter were used to disseminate information on protests that led to the overthrow of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition in 2018 (Meseret, 2020).

In a Similar vein in Nigeria, social media has allowed the transition of activists from online agitation to fully fledged offline protest, as in the 2020 protests the Nigerian Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Since 2017, Nigerian citizens have used social media to report excessive violence by SARS. In 2020, this led to a social media campaign with global reach under the hashtag #EndSARS. The peaceful, offline youth-led protests that followed were met by police violence. Though, the movement was successful to force the government to disband SARS but the demands for the compensation of families who lost their relatives due to police brutality and calls for independent investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of police brutality and misconduct were not satisfactorily met (Vanguard, 2020; Uwazuruike, 2021). However, the examples from Nigeria and Ethiopia, as well as those of other African countries provide precedents for the transformative potential of online social movements. Specifically, they offer two lessons on how digital tools can lead to positive change. Firstly, digital activism may be most effective when paired with offline action and not instead of it. This demonstrates the continuing relevance of offline civic

engagement and the value of open offline civic and political spaces for the consolidation of democracy and accountable governance in African countries because digital tools allow citizens to circumvent some legal and physical barriers, offline civic spaces remain necessary for transformative change. Secondly, digital tools can lead to change derives from the experiences of women, minorities and other socially marginalized actors.

In digitalized environments, these actors may be able to overcome some cultural and structural barriers and take a more central role in initiating and leading civic and political movements (Salzinger et al. 2022). Digital activism blurs the line between the public and private spaces; it allows anonymity and provides for broader platforms from which actors can generate support. Digital activism, therefore, has potential to increase women's political and civic participation even if various examples demonstrate that women continue to be excluded from formal processes once online and offline movements formalize (Salzinger et al. 2022).

Thirdly, citizen disengagement from politics and public life is one of the fundamental reasons for the

systemic failure of our democracy (see, for example, the result of the last Italian general elections, which saw only slightly more than 50 percent of Italians go to the polls). The public has difficulty relating to politics and often believes that it is only a context of victories and defeats that cannot be influenced by individual action (much less individual voting). New technologies can be used to make politics more interesting, fairer, more engaging, and even more fun. Improving participation can be the first step and the way to solve the dangerous problem of political disempowerment.

Fourthly, new technologies improve representation in decision-making which enable the minority voices to be represented in democratic realities.

Fifthly, it improves trust in politics by enhancing fairness, transparency, and accountability. Citizens are increasingly concerned about transparency and accountability in the functioning of any democratic institution, but at the same time they have become increasingly aware of the issue of data privacy. New decentralized technologies and distributed ledger systems can provide transparency without endangering individual privacy.

Sixthly, it improves sharing of resources and expertise across geographical barriers. The Open Science, Open Data, and Open Education movements have demonstrated that technology can improve access to science, information, and education for communities around the world that lack the infrastructure, money, or human resources to obtain them. These technologies are inherently suited to democratize access to knowledge across geographic, economic, and social barriers.

In addition, successful examples of digital democracy projects have shown that technology can be used to disrupt power, protest, and mobilize the masses. These examples show the opportunities that technology can offer to bring democracy to places where it is not taken for granted.

Lastly, social media have shown that ICT tools can radically broaden participation in many social processes such as commerce, education, work and socialization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To this study, the author based his analysis on democratic theory. Democratic theory is an established subfield of political theory that is primarily concerned

with examining the definition and meaning of the concept of democracy, as well as the moral foundations, obligations, challenges, and overall desirability of democratic governance. Democracy is a government in which powers and civic responsibility are exercised by all the adult citizens directly or through their freely elected representatives. The basic principles of democracy are free, fair, credible and transparent elections, accountability, transparency, citizens' participation, equality and political tolerance among others. Democratic theory will not have meaning except democracy promote the interest of the people and no democracy will promote the interest of the people except there is free, fair, credible and transparent elections. Digitalization can promote, strengthens and reinforces the assumptions of democratic theory particularly because free, fair, credible and transparent makes democratic government to be accountable to the people and to be transparent in its activities, democratic theory is valid but digitalization will strengthen it by ensuring that the political leaders are accountable, responsive and responsible to the people that

elected them to different political offices. The theory looks closely at one significant facet of how rapidly evolving digital lives and how technology is radically changing our lives as citizens and participants in democratic government. The question of how digital technologies shape, reshape and affect fundamental questions about democracy and democratic theory. Cunningham (2002) presents a more comprehensive survey of the different currents of democratic theory and their historical developments.

The Concept of E-Voting and Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in Nigeria.

The aim of any system of voting is to ensure credible, free, fair and transparent election where the votes of the electorates count. Electronic voting system is one of different forms of automated voting methods which employ computer technology devices to improve different aspects of the electoral process. The system incorporates to a large extent paperless voting techniques such as Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), Internet voting, Digital TV voting, electronic kiosk voting among others. According to Babalola (2021) in Ogieva and Ajisebiyawo (2023), electronic voting is a comprehensive system

of casting, counting and transmission of votes via electronic methods. It may involve both the process of casting and counting of votes or may relate only to the process of counting. According to Akena (2007), electronic voting system is a device where voters' collective intent are electronically determined and it is believed that when the e-voting method is employed, it allows for security of the votes cast and which will invariably allow the preferred candidates of the electorates to be elected.

The Nigerian Election Management Body (EMBs), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) started with the experimentation of BVAS in the year 2021 in the Isoko South constituency 1 bye-election in Delta State and it was first used in a statewide election in Anambra State in 2021. The experimentation was followed in the 2022 gubernatorial elections in both Ekiti and Osun States which made the electorates in both states, civil society organisations and other stakeholders believe that elections in both states was to a large extent free, fair, credible and transparent (Iremeka, 2023) in Ogieva and Ajisebiyayo (2023). According to Odinakalu (2021) BVAS technology combines voter accreditation, voter enrollment

and result interface capabilities in one device and it is used to transmit a snapshot of the result sheet at polling units to INEC portal for assessment of the public as they logged in to the portal. Okonji (2023) in Ogieva and Ajisebiyayo (2023) posits that in order for INEC to show its preparedness to conduct a free, fair, transparent and credible elections in the 2023 general elections, the electoral body insisted to use the BVAS as a solution to election malpractices such as poor record keeping, falsification of number of accredited voters at the polling booths, making declaration and return while collation is still on going, falsification of votes at the polling unit, forging of results sheets, collation of false results, swapping of results sheets, mutilation of result and computational errors among others. The deployment of technologies in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria has brought about a number of improvements to the electoral process because it is on record that for the first time since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, the incumbent President Bola Hammed Tinubu lost an election to a party considered to be small and a number of sitting governors such as Ben Ayade of Cross River State,

Samuel Ortom of Benue State to mention but a few lost the election in their attempts to become Senators in the 10th National Assembly and these heavyweight politicians would have done everything possible to win the elections if 2023 electoral act did not give the electoral body the needed legal backing on the deployment of BVAS technology as the only legal means of accrediting the electorates for the election. Also, technology innovation and its deployment into electoral process has been a major factor that encouraged citizens to participate in political process.

However, the deployment of BVAS is not without its shortcomings as experienced in the 2023 general elections because the technology has failed in some areas and it is susceptible to manipulation. The increasing reliance on e-voting is not without risk of cyber-attacks by those entrusted with the technology. There have also reported cases of BVAS not capturing older Permanent Voter Card (PVC) and its inability to read some elderly peoples' thumb print which has disenfranchised many eligible voters

Electoral Transparency and the Smart Card Reader in Nigeria: The Nexus

The smart card reader is a technological device setup to authenticate and verify on election day a Permanent Voter Card (PVC) issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) The device uses a cryptographic technology that has ultra – low power consumption. It is a portable electronic voting authentication device configured to read only the Permanent Voters Card (Ibrahim and Makama,2015). This card reader is designed to scan and translate information stored in the implanted chip of the PVC issued by INEC so as to confirm the genuineness of the PVC. It also performs the function of confirmation of the prospective voter by comparing the biometrics of the potential voter taken on the spot with the embedded on the PVC. The smart card reader was the most highly contentious and the real issue in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. It was a critical component in the 2015 general elections and it was used for the first time in Nigeria's electoral and it remains one of the greatest innovative technologies in the 2015 general elections. Past elections in Nigeria had witnessed the desperate bid for political

power by some stakeholders with vested interests in Nigerian electoral process. Some of these stakeholders engaged in all forms of electoral malpractices including multiple voting, impersonation, manipulation and falsification of results which has led to legal actions, violence and electoral conflicts. Electoral malpractices make the citizens to lose confidence by the citizens in the democratic process and lack of confidence by the citizens in the electoral process is a big challenge in deepening democratic process because if the citizens does not believe in the fairness, openness, integrity and accuracy of the electoral process, the very basis of any democratic society might be threatened (Alvarez and Hall,2008). However, in view of the negative impacts of electoral malpractices, global attention is now focused on how to reduce this undemocratic behaviour and improve the electoral process if not totally eradicated. One such mechanisms to mitigate the electoral malpractices is the introduction of information and communication technology into the electoral process. Though, the use of technology in election is not an end in itself but assists in different aspects of electoral administration (Beetseh & Akpoo,2015). It is against this

background that an electronic technologically based device, the smart card reader was introduced into the Nigerian electoral process in 2015 general elections in Nigeria to help improve and deepen electoral process. The ability of the card reader to perform the above-described functions as well as keeping a tally of the total numbers of voters accredited at the polling unit and forwarding the information to a central database server over a Global System for Mobile (GSM) network makes the card reader most welcome at that point in time in Nigeria's electoral history.

However, despite the challenges that confronted the operation of some of the smart card readers during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, the following significant impact of the device usage was observed:

- a. The use of card reader led to the increase and reinforcement of public confidence and trust in the electoral process and this public confidence is dependent on the integrity of an election which the 2015 general election appears to possess.
- b. Nigeria's democratic capacity

has increased and its democratic institutions now understood the knowledge needed to have a free, fair, credible and transparent election in order to deepen the democratic process.

- c. Electoral fraud was reduced and inflation of the number of voters and multiple voting at polling booths were reduced to the barest minimum. The device checked the undemocratic attitude of politicians in electoral malpractices.
- d. Electoral crises and violence became minimal as the election was seen to be free, fair, transparent and credible because of the use of the smart card reader. Tensions were reduced drastically reduced among the political elites compare to the past elections.
- e. Election litigation were minimized and there was a departure from the past where every election outcome is being contested at the election petition tribunal and most of the candidates that lost the 2015 general elections did not challenge the outcome. Some of the major players that lost the election congratulated and

embraced the winners. For example, the then PDP presidential candidate, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan immediately called and congratulated the then APC presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari who was the winner of the presidential election in 2015 general election. This attitude also occurred in many states of the federation in governorship, house of assembly and national assembly elections

Electoral transparency in this context refers to a condition where the entire processes of conducting elections are carried out in accordance with the constitutional specified rules and regulations. In other words, it connotes free and fair elections. According to (Eya,2003), transparent elections are those administered in line with non – discriminatory electoral process. He further posited that a transparent electoral process is the one that is conducted without elements of malpractice, bloodshed, dishonest conduct and unruly activities that have the tendency of changing the real expected result of the entire process. In a similar vein, (Oyenka,2002) defines electoral transparency as the process that leads to the actualization of

democracy and legitimization of governmental powers.

The Digitalisation of Governance Challenges in Africa

Digitalisation can improve state-society relations and bring about good governance as discussed above but it is not immune to exploitation by state and non-state actors because there are shortcomings while implementing on e-governance in Africa. Evidence has shown that digitalization in Africa is low because some government organizations have even by-passed the interact stage as capture thereby giving no room for citizen request or feedback. There are some challenges that influence the implementation of digitalization in Africa as follows:

Digitalisation has greatly added to states surveillance capabilities as phones and electronic devices as well as one's digital activities can be tracked and monitored towards both commercial and political reasons. As an extension of political repression, the internet and other certain social media tools can be partially or fully blocked and/or censored to curtail or contain political dissent. (Ennatu and Lidet,2022)

Misinformation and voter

manipulation, which pre-date the internet, are increasingly being adopted and weaponized by state and non-state actors, including to undermine electoral processes in African and other developing nations of the world because digitalization has empowered certain non-state actors, including businesses such as Facebook and Twitter to mention but a few to get involved alongside foreign governments and political opponents with minimal or dubious accountability.(Benchmarking e-government,2012)

Inadequate resources such as electricity supply, internet diffusion, adult literacy rate, political challenges, and others. There are other significant problems like maturity of governmental process and lack of other physical communications (Adeyemo,2011).

Government must maintain partnership with other organizations, either private sectors or non-profit making organizations as well as relationships within departments. On the other hand, a poor coordination between federal, regional, and local agencies may leads to ineffectiveness of e-government, especially for implementing e- administration

(Greenhill,2010).

Lastly, the large demand of e-administration systems requires external vendors to provide high quality products and services.

The digital technologies can also be used by government for repression because, States, too, are resorting to digital tools, not only to serve their citizens, but also to control and regulate their actions which is otherwise known as ‘digital authoritarianism’.

CONCLUSION

Based on the facts on ground and from the recorded events, the paper concluded that the use of digital technology will result to incremental development in Africa electoral process, it will give room for inclusive citizenship, public survey, public forum, citizens engagement, participatory budget process, public forum, community conversation, consensus conference and information dissemination where electronic system of operation will help government to judiciously engage public participation, encourage government transparency and give proper accountability on how governance is run in Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper was informed by the need to examine impact of digital

technology as a platform for citizen participation and public discourse as potential to improve democracy in sub-Saharan African states and to know why digitalization is not yet developed in Africa and it was observed that lots of factors are militating against its achievements as discussed above. To curtail the observed challenges, the following policy options are hereby recommended:

- a. African leaders should urgently address some challenges which often threaten the visibility of technology in the conduct of elections, particularly insecurity, falsification of data and manipulation of electoral machines.
- b. The most significant solution to achieve the implementation of digital technology in Africa is for the political institutions to strengthen their level of will and commitment both attitudinally and financially.
- c. The primary agenda of the government of African countries is to ensure that adequate and constant power supply is guaranteed because without constant power supply e-government is bound to fail.
- d. A successful digitalization programme is dependent on

- the sophistication and availability of ICT infrastructures and government of African countries needs to employ a scheme that will make computers and internet affordable to the citizens for them to actively involve and participate in the e-government programme.
- e. African governments need to really invest in education and make ICT a compulsory subject in schools from primary education up to tertiary education and adult education so as to improve the knowledge and skills required by citizens to operate and communicate with the government electronically.
- f. African governments should establish a Commission on ICT to regulate the sector and to see to the full implementation of digital technology.

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