

**SMART TECHNOLOGY AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR CREDIBLE
ELECTION: A STUDY OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Election is a key component of democracy. Since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the conduct of election in the political history of Nigeria has been marred by fraudulent practices, corruption and violence. In spite of series of electoral reforms, the country has not succeeded in reducing incidences of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching and stuffing, multiple voting, falsifications of results and other associated electoral malpractices. In fact, the country failed to conceive and implement free, fair, transparent and credible electoral process. Admittedly, part of the efforts made towards the conduct of 2015 general elections is the introduction and use of Smart Card Reader (SCR) in the quest to ensure free, fair and credible election. Building on the gains of Smart Card Reader in the 2015 elections, INEC introduced an advance level of smart technology in elections conducted outside the election circle in the year 2021 known as Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). It is against this background therefore; the paper investigated the impact of smart technology in the electoral process. The study adopted quantitative research method as data were gathered through primary sources. David Easton's system theory was deployed for analysis. The study found amongst others that the introduction of smart technologies – Smart Card Reader and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System have reduced incidence of electoral fraud, and enhanced free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. The study recommends adequate facility, including legal framework for full adoption and operation of smart technology across all the facet of electoral process including voting in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Democracy, Election, Smart technology, and System Theory*

Introduction

In Nigerian political history, elections were first organized and conducted by the colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in the colonial government. For Moru (2004) Nigerians were given the first opportunity in 1922 to occupy certain political offices. He maintained that the

franchise was restricted and representation limited, in spite of this, the nationalists saw it as an achievement in the struggle for enthronement of democratic order as a pre-requisite for greater participation of the people in the process of governance.

Following the above argument,

subsequently, several elections were conducted in different parts of the country to elect leaders at the national, regional and local levels. However, it was 1959 general elections that paved way for the emergence of Nigeria as an independent country. Since then, various elections have been held either in transition, from one civilian government to another or from a military to civilian government.

In all the post – independent elections conducted in Nigeria, Ijayi (2004) argues, are characterized by massive fraud, intimidation of political opponents and controversy. He holds that government in power have had their own designs and used the instruments of the state to perpetuate electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare. This argument portrays the fact that elections in Nigeria have failed to promote the emergence of democratic culture even within the limited application that it has within the bourgeois social order. Indeed, each set of elections seems to deepen the culture of violence, authoritarianism, abuse of human rights, corruption and class materialism. Each succeeding election seems to perfect in an even more perverse sense, the abuses that characterize the earlier elections. Thus, with each successive elections, the ruling elites are not only more and more isolated from the people, they also come to relate with them increasingly through violence, contempt, repression and authoritarianism.

Election cycles have appeared to be

one of the most challenging periods in the national life of Nigeria. It is no wonder then, that both political actors and their supporters deploy different persuasive strategies to elicit support and woo voters in order to gain and control power. Such struggles to control the reins of political power are often wrought with rising tensions resulting in violence. For instance, the 1965 general election crisis that led to truncation of civilian rule in the first republic, also the violence that characterized the 2011 general election which posed a threat to the national unity.

In view of the challenges confronting electoral processes in Nigeria, many Nigerians and beyond have clamored for introduction of smart technology in the Nigeria electoral system. For them, this will help to mitigate electoral fraud and violence. In response to this, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adopted the use of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) which has microchips for voters information, and Smart Card Reader (SCR) were introduced and deployed to verify and authenticate voters through the PVC. With this function, only electorates who were accredited by the device were considered eligible to vote. This was equally adopted in the 2019 general elections with massive deployment with the aim to avoid resorting to manual register for accreditation. Subsequent elections outside the election cycle have witnessed the deployment of an upgraded version of smart technology known as – Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). The

device takes fingerprints and facial recognition for the verification of voters. It also has the capacity for storing and transmitting of election results beginning from the polling units into INEC data bank.

Incontestably, it is clear that the election management body (INEC) with support of many Nigerians have adopted the deployment of smart technology in the electoral process of Nigeria. It is against this background the study investigates the impact of smart technology on the electoral process of Nigeria.

Research Questions

- 1) How has smart technology impacted on the credibility of electoral process in Nigeria?
- 2) What is the degree of acceptance of smart technology in the electoral process by Nigerians?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Election.

Some political scholars have viewed the concept of election from different dimensions. Some have equally seen election as a form of political participation which is very pivotal in the practice of democracy and also has the capacity to disrupt democracy and unity of a nation if not well managed. There may not be doubt about this fact, because in Nigeria people mainly and generally participate in politics during election period. Shashi (2007) sees election as the process by which public or private officials are selected from a field of candidates by the making of ballots in a vote. He maintains that in politics, the act of choosing a

representative or the holder of a particular office is usually by ballot. This assertion shows a representative form of governance in action, which is part of Nigerian political system. In this representative political practice, the people have the right to decide who represents them. This is in line as Nnanabu (2011, p.20) holds that election is an inalienable right of the citizenry to elect their leaders according to the constitution provision of country. For him, election is the mandate of the people according to the principle of democracy to vote into power the candidates of their choice. Nnanabu further maintains that election is an instrument of power transferred to the people's-oriented government, and the means of achieving democracy is through election. This shows that a true democracy cannot be actualized without a viable electoral process which is the authentic and effective means of achieving a virile and uninterrupted democracy, therefore, election is an instrument used in a democratic dispensation for elective position. This assertion presents the legal aspect of election, where it is made clear as the constitutional right of the citizens. Anyanwu (2023) conceives election beyond constitutional right of the citizens, but rather a fundamental or natural right of citizens that could only be enshrined in the constitution for protection.

In the same vein, Amadi (2005) states that election is a process of choosing a person or group of persons for a political position by voting, or as the act of electing candidates to represent a

particular geographical area at the parliament, executive or any other area of government. He maintains that elections take different forms in different societies; the forms they take and the precise role they play vary enormously from place to place and over time. Arguing that elections serve primarily as instruments of mass mobilization and legitimization for regime, and each type of election must have certain elements. This argument is the case in Nigeria, where people are mainly found participating in politics during elections, probably because it is the means through which they can choose who represents them. Similarly, Ujo (2002) argues that election is a procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. He maintains that during elections the electorates are given the opportunity to choose between alternative programmes of contestants, which help in promoting public accountability. In line with this assertion, Nwakodo (2008) points out that election is a form of procedure, recognized by the rules of an organization, where all or some of the members of the organization choose smaller number of persons or one person to hold office or authority in the organization. This makes it clear that elections provide avenue of making a choice that is open, fair and acceptable to all concerned, and it is this element of choice that distinguishes election from other methods of selection of leaders, and it is through election that the people choose their leaders and make binding decisions concerning policy on voting. While for Jega

(2011), election is a present investment in the future. In the context of this research work, this assertion could be seen as a fact that, the present conduct of elections determines its future success and participation of the people in subsequent elections and politics in general.

Democracy

Democracy is the form of government that encourages maximum participation in governmental processes. However, some scholars see democracy as a concept and practice that revolves around political participation by the citizens. Edmund (2008) in his view sees democracy as those actions that involve private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics. It is that which promotes the greater participation of citizens in the public affairs. He identifies two types of participation which are conventional and unconventional forms. For him, conventional behaviour is the act that is acceptable to the dominant culture in a given situation. Thus, plastering campaign posters on public building is conventional, while writing slogans on wall is not. Voting and membership of a political party are example of a conventional political participation, while staging sit-down strikes in public buildings and thuggery are examples of unconventional political participation.

Appadorai (1968) has considered the term democracy. For him, it is connotes political participation which he equally sees as political liberty is the right to a share in the government of the state. People or citizens share in the

sovereign authority and are submissive to the laws of the state. He maintains that political participation involves; participation in an election either as a voter, official, contestant or observer. For him, the existence of periodic election, accountability, and equal eligibility to government offices create the right for government criticism. It is therefore, pertinent to note that political participation does not end at people exercising their franchise but there should be constant existence of public opinion, these can only take place within a democratic environment.

INEC and the Introduction of Smart Technology

In the effort to enhance the credibility of elections in Nigeria, INEC under the chairmanship of Prof. Attahiru Jega to a decision to adopt and apply the use of some smart technology – Permanent Voters Card, and Smart Card Reader (SCR), and subsequently, under the leadership of Mamood Yakubu the Commission adopted and deployed a device known as Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). There is no doubt that INEC is empowered to carry out the functions conferred on them by the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended). The Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (as cited in Alebiosu, 2015) argued that section 188 of the 1999 constitution (as amended) subjects the registration of voters and the conduct of elections to INEC's discretion while section 16 of the electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) gives power to INEC the cause to design, print and control the issuance of voters card to voters whose names appear on

the register.

The success recorded in 2011 general election marked a watershed in Nigeria's democratic trajectory. It contrasted sharply with the mismanagement and widespread fraud of previous polls. For instance, Aziken (as cited in Nwangwu, 2015) observed that at the end of the voters registration exercise in 2011, INEC had claimed that a total of 73 million Nigerians had registered out of which the automated fingerprint identification system had removed 800,000 persons for double registration. Determined to improve on the outcome of the 2011 polls, INEC had set in motion various reform measures to ensure credible and successful election. Some of the measures were initially introduced for the 2011 elections with appreciable results, and implications for the 2015 elections, and include:

- i. A new Biometric Register of Voters
- ii. A Re-modified Open Ballot System (REMOBS)
- iii. Improved standards in production of sensitive electoral materials (serial numbering and color-coding of ballot papers and result sheets, as well as securing coding of ballot boxes).
- iv. Revised framework for result collation and returns
- v. More open and transparent procedures, modalities and processes on election day (pasting of results at polling units and collation centers).

vi. Improved voter education and citizen engagement

vii. Creation of Inter-agency, Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) to ensure coordinated engagement of all security agencies during election periods (Jega, 2014).

These were some of the reform measures taken by INEC in the run-up to the 2015 elections which were mainly driven by smart technology. However, the most novel and strategic measure taken was the introduction and use of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC), and the Smart Card Reader (SCR) which has currently been enhanced to Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS). The SCR machine was used to verify the authenticity of the PVC and also carry out verification of the intending voter by matching the biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with the ones stored on the PVC. The introduction of smart technology in the electoral process of Nigeria is case of electoral policy. The public acceptance and compliance with the policy is predicated on the participatory nature of the policy process. This is in line with Mutiula and Anyanwu (2020) argument that participatory policy formulation process is important to the success of every public policy.

Ejimonu and Anyanwu (2020) hold that, it can be noted that the 2011 voters register was Nigeria's first electronically compiled register and it helped in the production of the PVCs that were used in the 2015 general

elections. According to press release by Kayode Idowu, the Chief Press Secretary to the then INEC Chairman (Prof. Attahiru Jega), the decision to deploy SCR for the 2015 general elections have four main objective:

i. To verify PVCs presented by voters at polling units and ensure that they are genuine, INEC issues (not clone) cards.

ii. To biometrically authenticate the person who presents PVC at the polling unit and ensure that he/she is the legitimate holder of the card.

iii. To provide disaggregated data of accredited voters in male/female and elder/youth categories – which is vital for research and planning purposes.

iv. To be able to send data of all accredited voters to INEC's central server, equipping the commission to be able to audit figures subsequently filed by polling officials at polling units and thereby, be able to determine if fraudulent alterations were made (Idowu, 2015).

Since 2011 elections, Nigerians became conversant with the introduction of smart technologies by INEC. From Smart Card Reader to Z-pad device, which the election governing body adopted in conduction few offseason elections. In the quest for credibility in the electoral process, the election regulatory raised the bar as they introduced Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). This was deployed in few bye-elections within states, and also in the Anambra state governorship election in

November, 2021. The device contributed immensely in the credibility of the election. Though, this was not without some hitches which the Commission promised to address for further deployment. In subsequent elections, including the 2023 general elections, the device is expected to carry out multiple functions - Voter Enrolment Device (IVED) during voter registration, Voter Accreditation on election day, INEC Results Viewing Device (IREV Device) to be used for election result upload on election day. Therefore, BVAS is calibrated to carry out the functions of both Smart Card Reader and Z-pad, having been designed to take on fingerprint authentication during accreditation of voters and eliminate issues of filling incident forms (Odermi, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

System theory of David Easton is adopted to analyze the study. David Easton was the first political scientist to develop a system framework for political analysis (Ball, 1983, Offiong, 1996). An idea extracted from the biological sciences, a system can be seen as a set of interrelated elements or set of interdependent variables, while a political system on the other hand can be seen as a system of interactions in any society through which binding or authoritative allocations are made.

Udu (2015) holds that a system is composed of elements or parts (sub-system) that function as a whole. In other words, there is an organic unity and interdependence between component parts of a system such that any change in one part causes change

in the other parts, and by extension the entire system. A system has identifiable boundaries distinguishing it from the macrocosm within which it operates. However, where these cooperative and harmonious relations are lost or denied in a political system, then systemic breakdown would be inevitable. Furthermore, the theory posits that a political system is an activity in which inputs from the environment are converted into outputs through the authoritative allocation of values. Consequently, as delineated by Easton, there are four (4) main processes involved in a typical political system – the input process, the output process, the conversion and the feedback processes (Udu, 2015).

In further analysis, Easton (as cited in Udu, 2015) posited that while the inputs give the political system its dynamic character as it consists of – Demands and Supports, the Outputs on the other hand refers to those values that have been authoritatively allocated for all of society. Since a system is primarily interested in survival and persistence, this information is essential to the authorities who take decisions for the system.

In the application of the theory, the introduction of smart technologies in the electoral system of Nigeria was as a result of the demand and support from Nigerians for a credible election. The environment is represented by the Nigerian state and all the past negative experiences of electoral malpractice and the post-election violence witnessed in the country. These formed the basis for the demand and the

supporting system of the Nigeria state. As such, the need for electoral transparency and credulity emanates from the environment. Demands on electoral system, no doubt, come in virtually infinite variety of forms – from accurate and updated voters register, to the registration of qualified Nigerians, to actual voting, to proper and accurate collation, counting and announcement of results.

The conversion process in Nigeria context refers to those saddled with the authoritative allocation of value – those elected as the peoples’ representatives. They also include other groups that constitute the mechanism of government. They are responsible for the conversion of the inputs which are the demands coming from the environment into adequate outputs through the decision-making process. The conversion process enabled INEC to employ smart technologies to meet the demand of Nigerians on conducting credible election

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research method. Cluster Sampling Technique is used to carry out a scientific investigation within the population. By Cluster sampling, the samples are clustered based on the six (6) Geo-Political zones in Nigeria. This technique made the coverage of the Area of Study (Nigeria) feasible.

Population of the study is made up of Nigerians who actually voted in the elections, totaling - Twenty-eight million, Six hundred and fourteen thousand, One hundred and ninety, (28,614,190,000), (INEC, 2019). This

is owing to the fact that most electorates who participated in the 2019 general election were same electorates who voted in the 2015 general election. Selecting the sample size, Taro Yamane formula was adopted. Data collection instrument (questionnaire) was administered on the various respondents in their various geo-political zones. To collect data for the study, a set of 400 (Four hundred) questionnaires were used to get information from respondents.

Data collected were organized in a tabular form for easy analysis. Statistical data collected were analyzed using "Simple Percentage Statistic Tool".

The following formula was applied respectively:

$$\frac{N \times 100}{TN}$$

TN 1

Cluster Table 1.1 Geo political zone distribution of respondents

Geo-Political Zones	Frequency	Percentage
North East	51	16.6%
North West	52	16.9%
North Central	51	16.6%
South East	51	16.6%
South West	51	16.6%
South South	51	16.6%
Total	307	100%

Source: Field Survey, May, 2022

The above table indicates the geo-political zones of the respondents, which is very important to this study as it practically helped in the possibility of covering the area of study considering its vast nature. The result shows that 51 respondents representing about 16.6% are from north east, 52 respondents representing 17% are from northwest; 51 respondents representing about 16.6% are from north central; 51

respondents representing about 16.6% are from south east; 51 respondents representing about 16.6% are from the south west; while 51 respondents representing about 16.6% are from south south.

ANALYSIS ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How Smart Technologies have Impacted on the Credibility of Electoral Process in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
High	78	25.4%
Very High	204	66.4%
Low	23	7.5%
Very Low	2	0.7%
Total 2019	307	100%

Source: Field survey, June, 2022

The distribution table above shows the independent opinion of respondents on how smart technologies have impacted on the credibility of electoral process in Nigeria. To ascertain this degree and difference is very important as the study makes effort to ascertain the importance of introducing technologies in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The frequency distribution table indicates that 78 of the total respondents hold that the impact is high. The table also indicates that 204 respondents which is the highest number of respondents constituting 66.4% maintain that the impact is very high. Furthermore, 23 respondents of 7.5% believe that it is low, while 2 respondents of 0.7% argue that it is very low.

The Introduction of Smart technology in the Electoral Process of Nigeria is very popular among Nigerians

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	83	27.0%
Strongly Agree	212	69.1%
Disagree	7	2.3%
Strongly Disagree	5	1.6%
Total	307	100%

Source: Field survey, June, 2022

It is very important to ascertain the acceptability of the introduction of smart technologies in the electoral process by Nigerians. This will support or deny the position of INEC that majority of Nigerians have agitated and supported the introduction of technology in the country’s electoral process. The frequency distribution table above shows that 83 respondents of the total respondents which is 27.0% “Agree”. The table further shows that 212 of total respondents constituting 69.1% which is the highest number “Strongly Agree”, while 7 respondents of 2.3% are of the view “Disagree”, and 5 respondents of 1.6% “Strongly Disagree”.

Research Findings

The study revealed that the adoption of smart technology in the Nigeria’s electoral process has immensely improved on the credibility of the electoral process. This is indicated in the outcome of the questionnaire as 204 respondents which is the highest number of respondents making total of 66.4% of the total respondents held that the introduction of smart technology as “Very high” impact on the credibility of electoral process in Nigeria since the year 2015. This corroborates the argument by Anyanwu (2019) that number of accredited voters reflects the

actual votes counted in election, unlike the experience before the introduction of smart technology where number of votes counted were far higher than number of accredited voters and even higher than registered voters in polling units.

The study through its empirical results finds out that there is high level of acceptability and support for the introduction of smart technologies in the electoral process by Nigerians. This shows legitimacy and encouragement to the actions and activities of INEC. In the survey, 212 respondents which is the highest number of respondents making 69.1% strongly agreed that Nigerians accept the introduction of smart technology in the electoral process. In line with this reveal, Anyanwu, (2019) holds that the element of technology in the electoral process has helped to be trust and confidence in the system as some election results can now reflect the decision of majority of Nigerians.

Conclusion

In spite of the challenges and malfunctioning of the smart devices in some areas during elections, a significant impact of deploying the devices was noticeable. The introduction and use of smart technologies have led to reinforcement of public confidence in the electoral process. It has restored the electoral system to situation where votes of the electorates count and determine who governs them. This explains the reason why there is resurgence in voters' registration and PVC collection. Portraying the repositioning of the

electoral process, it is noted that unscrupulous politicians no longer indulge in ballot box snatching and stuffing, but have resorted to vote buying in elections (indicating that votes now count), which is another electoral monster that needs to be dealt with. At this point, smart technology has proven to be a veritable tool for credible election in Nigeria, the election organizing body (INEC) cannot but improve and consolidate the deployment of the election devices for a more free, fair, reliable and credible election.

Recommendations

Following the findings, the study recommends that:

- 1) Every stage and level of the election process should be carried out using smart devices for reliability and transparency
- 2) The Commission should test-run and understudy the election devices in order to reduce rate of malfunction during elections, and ensure adequate software and cyber security to avoid hacking and corrupting the election server.
- 3) The Media, Civil Society Organization and the Citizens should be properly engaged and educated in introducing and deploying a new electoral device for popular support and acceptability

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