


Elections Administration and Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) Technology: Interrogating the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election


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ABSTRACT

To mitigate electoral challenges in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deploys Smart Card Readers (SRC) to conduct the 2015, 2019 elections. However, the SCR had challenges, such as the inability to authenticate voter cards and verify biometric data. Hence, INEC introduced Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in 2023. Relying on data generated using the macro qualitative and eclectic approach (Technological Acceptance Model and Innovation Diffusion Theory), the paper assesses the acceptance, challenges of BVAS and the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trial-ability and the observability of BVAS during the 2023 presidential elections. The findings reveal that INEC's failure to upload the election results on the Result Viewing (IREV) portal in real-time was a significant setback, leading to doubt about the credibility of the elections. This failure was not only a breach of the 2022 Electoral Act but also of INEC's guidelines. Therefore, the paper recommends an effective way of administering elections in Nigeria using technology-based devices

KEYWORDS

BVAS Technology, Election Administration, Electoral System, Presidential Election, Technology Acceptance, Improvement, Relative Advantage, Compatibility, Complexity, Trial-Ability, and Observation

DOI: 10.4018/IJPADA.352042

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, elections are the platforms for recruiting political officeholders in a democracy. An election is thus the hallmark of democracy, and it is integral for a democratic society to remain stable (Chukwuma, 2022; Ojo, 2007). Elections allow the electorates to choose who should govern them peacefully (Shaapera & Yusufu, 2019; Yusufu, 2021). Elections also enable the people to indicate their preference among the policies and programs advanced by rival leadership elements contesting for political power (Ayeni-Aleke, 2008). Citing Harrop and Miller (1987), Kassem and Osasona (2020) note that elections are a mechanism through which politicians can be called to account for their actions and be forced to introduce policies that reflect public opinion. Casting votes during an election is a powerful weapon to elect contestants judged to have good track records; it can also be used to vote out those leaders who fail to fulfill their campaign promises (Onah, 2020). In this manner, ultimate ruling power resides in the masses that elect and control their representatives through established modes of accountability (Olisa et al., 1991). According to Obakhedo (2011), an election is an integral part of a democratic process that enables the citizenry to determine who should lead them at every level of government and make decisions that shape a socioeconomic and political destiny; if they falter, citizens still possess the power to recall them or vote them out in the next election.

As important as elections are in a democracy, elections in Nigeria are often fraudulent and violent, which are severe problems for an emerging democracy (Akpan, 2017; Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2016; Etim et al., 2019; Nwagwu, 2016; Shaapera et al., 2014; Shaapera & Yusufu, 2021). Elections in Nigeria have involved a combination of issues ranging from shootings during elections, a resurgence of armed gangs, the carting away of ballot boxes, the buying of votes, an arms race in the electoral process, gangsterism, thuggery, and hooliganism (Olurode, 2013). Elections in Nigeria are thus habitually subverted by political parties and politicians through the illegal use of money, physical force, and governmental patronage, deployed through the intermediary known as the “godfathers” (Adeyemi, 2004). Because of the high premium placed on political power, electoral malpractices have become a feature of Nigeria's electoral process; this has caused a loss of confidence in the democratic process and the erosion of the credibility and integrity of the electoral process (Alvarez et al., 2009; Audu & Akuva, 2020). Given that winning state power gives access to the acquisition of wealth, the capture of this state power has inevitably become a matter of life and death (Ake, 1964, 2001; Obadahun & Nzeako, 2020; Shaapera & Yusufu, 2021). Electoral malpractice has more severe political implications, allowing a party or candidate to take over public positions against the popular will (López-Pintor, 2010). Consequently, in these cases, the democratic process is undermined, which usually leads to electoral violence, insecurity, and political instability (Alebiosu, 2016). This thus constitutes a significant threat to the survival of democracy (Adesote & Abimbola, 2014).

Nigeria returned to democratic governance on May 29, 1999, after over a decade of military rule. Since the 1999 general election, which marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the country's election management body (EMB), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has conducted seven general elections—namely, the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections as well as several off-season elections undertaken in different parts of the country. Most of the polls conducted in Nigeria since 1999 have been marred by fraud and violence and the destruction of the lives and properties of citizens; this has attracted the attention of the local and international community (Nnamani et al., 2019). Such irregularities affect the credibility of elections in Nigeria and sometimes lead to the emergence of unpopular candidates as winners.

Several scholarly works have demystified elections, electoral systems, election administration, and election irregularities in different contexts. For example, Kantack and Lassi (2021), Bali (2007), and Berrebi and Klor (2006) examined the effects of mass shootings and terrorism on electoral behavior and electoral outcomes. Etim et al. (2019) conceptualized the electoral system and court verdict. Others like Benoit (2007), Blais et al. (2012), Cox (1997), Moser and Ethan (2012), and Patrick (2021) have examined electoral systems, elections coordination, and the impact of electoral rules.

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