

**THE BIMODAL VOTERS ACCREDITATION
SYSTEM (BVAs) AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN
NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE 2023
GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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Abstract

Since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigerians have been yearning for free, fair, transparent and credible election. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has adopted one reform/innovation or the other to improve the process and outcome of elections in Nigeria. Amongst these innovations is the introduction of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) in 2021. The study therefore, will assess the BVAs and management of credible elections in the 2023 General elections in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive research design. Data for the study were collected using the secondary instruments of data

collection. The researcher adopted the cybernetic communication theory as its theoretical framework for analysis. The major findings of the study are that despite the huge resources committed to acquiring the device (BVAs), it did not guarantee the credibility of the 2023 General Election especially, since not all the results were electronically transmitted in real time. The device did not also prevent electoral fraud like mutilation of results, vote buying, uploading of blurred result sheets, amongst others in certain areas. The study therefore, recommends amongst others, that the electoral law be further reviewed to specify electronic transmission of election results as the only recognized means of collating electoral results, declaration of blurred and mutilated uploaded results as void, and an emphasis shift from mere technological innovations with the BVAs to the human infrastructure who operate/handle these devices if the most populous country in Africa will achieve her dream of a peaceful, transparent and credible election in the nearest future.

Keywords: BVAs, Credible Elections, Electoral Fraud, Assessment, Nigeria.

Introduction.

The return of democracy in Nigeria was heralded by many as a gateway to achieving the most desired peace, stability and prosperity that has eluded the country following many years of military rule. Democracy which is majority rule was only possible through elections. As a result, the Independence National Electoral Commission

(INEC) was established in 1999 (the 1999 Nigerian Constitution Section 153(1) F). INEC conducted the 1999 elections, the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections. However, the 2011 general election was adjudged as the most violent of all these elections. According to the United States Institute of Peace (2011), the Nigeria's 2011 elections were the most violent, claiming 800 lives in three days. To restore hope, confidence and trust in the electoral system, there have been series of attempts in the past to strengthen the INEC through reforms. The first was under former president Olusegun Obasanjo's administration in 2002 which resulted in the electoral Act used in the conduct of the 2003 and 2007 general elections (Edwin, 2023). The second reform occurred under the President Goodluck Jonathan's administration in 2010, culminating into the 2010 electoral Act which was used for the conduct of three national elections viz the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections respectively (Edwin, 2023). Then, the 2022 electoral act which went through rigorous legislative processes with many critical reviews of past electoral Act as well as other political antecedents that were not fully captured in the 2002, and 2010 electoral acts.

Some of the reforms introduced by the electoral Acts include the Smart Card Reader introduced in the 2015 General election and the Biometric Voters Accreditation System (BVAS), introduced in 2021 and used in the last 2023 general election. To make Nigerian elections more credible and

transparent, the Independence National Electoral Commission introduced the BVAs which were captured by the 2022 electoral Act sections 47 and 50(2). (The 2022 electoral Act, sections 47 and 50(2). The BVASs was first used and tested in the Isoko South Constituency bye election in Delta State on September, 10, 2021 and subsequently deployed in the Anambra State governorships election on November 6, 2021. It was again used in the Ekiti and Osun governorship elections (Onyenike, 2023).

Nations in the world have adopted the innovations in the telecommunication sector to embrace the place and utility value of technology as a veritable tool for transparency, accountability, free, fair and credible elections in the world. Nigeria is not left out in her quest to achieve this feat. Therefore, the Federal Government, through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAs) to address the challenges witnessed in past elections in Nigeria which includes registration of under aged voters, falsification of votes at polling units, falsification of number of accredited voters, falsification and announcement of false results and computational errors, swapping of result sheets, forging of result sheets, making declarations and return while result collection is still ongoing, violence and ballot box snatching by thugs, etc. These and many more led to lack of confidence in the electoral process, long circle of post-election

litigations, lack of credibility of the electoral outcomes and other sundry issues.

To address these anomalies, restore the confidence of Nigerian electorates, achieve a credible, peaceful, free and fair elections in the 2023 general elections, the then Muhamadu Buhari led federal government, through the independent national electoral commission budgeted 105.25billion naira, representing 34.51% of the commissions total budget for the 2023 elections (Amata, 2022) for the purchase of BVAs. Despite the huge resources committed to ensuring a seamless election, devoid of the relics of past elections in Nigeria, the outcome appears to be that of disaffection, distrust and disappointment. Consequently, the study is an attempt to assess the extent to which the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAs) ensured the credibility of the 2023 General election. This is the problem the study intends to investigate.

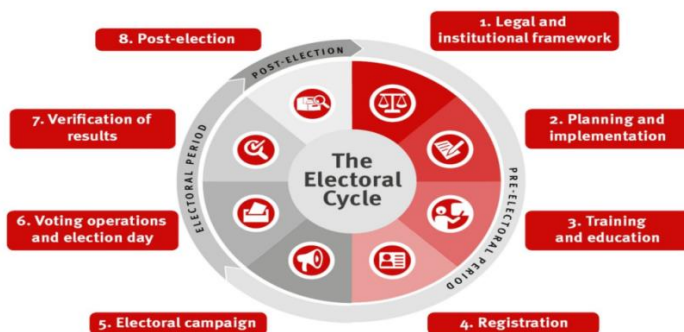
Conceptual Review

Credible elections

Credible elections are characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and competitiveness. Credible elections are always used interchangeably with clean, acceptable, free and fair elections (Gabriel, 2022). These are elections conducted in accordance with the existing electoral rules and in which every contestant is given equal opportunity to win. It is an election conducted without partiality or undue advantage of

any party or candidate (Asadu, 2017). For election to be credible, it must be conducted in a democratically acceptable manner/process. It must provide for equal electorate and freedom which afford the opportunity to make real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation (Eminue, 2001).

According to Seema, Alexander & Michael (2022), in their assessment of what constitutes a credible election, they insisted that for elections to be adjudged credible, it must consider the entire election circle. A credible electoral process reflects respect for and legitimacy of each phase of the circle. Below is a diagram of a credible election circle:



Source: International IDEA

For them, the criteria for a credible election vary by country and by evaluator. For example, some may include an assessment of the inclusivity of the voter's registration process. (Seema et al, 2022). They insisted that the final word on the credibility

of an election often lies with the voters in that Jurisdiction, who require thorough and reliable information to make their assessment.

The above places what constitutes credible election at the doorstep of the voters or citizens who require the relevant information, to make an informed assessment. For Simon and Okonkwo, (2020) they contend that:

Credible election implies the trustworthiness, believability and acceptability of election. These statuses are fundamentally accorded to elections when the laid down rules and democratic processes which revolve around gamut of procedures that enhance mass participation in free and fair elections are followed in the selection exercise. Credible elections are devoid of all sorts of electoral malpractices, intimidations, violence etc.

The above gives credence to the fact that credible election is not an end, but rather a combination of procedures and processes to achieve a generally acceptable and satisfactory result. On their own part, Kesselman & Joseph (2023), maintains that for an election to be credible, there must be procedures in place, guaranteeing candidates the right to compete. All citizens must be entitled to vote and votes must be counted accurately with the

winning candidates selected according to pre-existing rules that determine the kind of plurality or majority required to gain electoral victory.

Election Manipulation: (Electoral Fraud).

Election manipulation is often referred to as electoral fraud, voter's fraud or vote rigging. It involves illegal interference with the process of an election, either by increasing the vote share of a favoured candidate, reducing the vote share of rival candidates or both in an election.

Okolie, (2004), stated that electoral fraud encompasses all forms of electoral mal-practices, irregularities and rigging which have normal underlying animal intent and purpose. He noted that electoral fraud connotes all forms of illegal activities perpetuated by desperate interest driven actors within the entire environment of electoral process. The various forms of electoral fraud he submits include:

- ❖ Stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers
- ❖ Hoarding of electoral materials
- ❖ Manipulation and fabrication of electoral results
- ❖ Use of law enforcement agencies to intimidate, maim and disenfranchise eligible voters and candidates
- ❖ Murder of political opponents.

For Iwu (2010), cited by Ugwuda, Kalu and Elechi, (2020), he argues that electoral fraud is any

random or organized act or treats to intimidate, cause physical harm, blackmail or abuse of a political stakeholder in seeking to determine delay or otherwise influence an electoral process.

The centrality of the above definitions and positions of scholars is that any act of commission or omission capable of given undue advantage to a particular candidate or group of candidates in any electoral process constitutes electoral fraud. Supporting the views expressed by others, Balogun, (2011) cited by Ugwala, Kalu and Elechi, (2020), posit that:

Electoral Fraud connotes all forms of violence, (Physical, psychological, administrative, legal and structural) at different stages engaged in by participants, their supporters and sympathizers (including security and election management body staff) in the electoral process. These forms of violence takes place before elections, during elections, and after or post elections and could also be intra – or inter party.

The difference or point of departure from Balogun (2011) is that electoral fraud as widely speculated, are in most cases initiated not just by the candidates but also their supporters, staff of the electoral management body, law enforcement agents and all other sundry actors.

Practitioners and academics have generally used either of these two basic approaches to enhance our understanding of the concept of electoral fraud. These approaches are the inclusive and the restrictive approach (Chad and Erica, 2012). From the inclusive lenses, Andreas Schemer, in his paper titled “the menu of manipulation”, cited by Chad and Erica (2012) defined electoral fraud as including the introduction of bias into the administration of elections. It can take place at any stage of the electoral process, from voter’s registration to the final tally of ballot. According to him, it covers such activities like forging voters I.D Cards, burning ballot boxes or padding the vote totals of favoured parties and candidates. However, the restrictive approach focuses only or mostly on the letter of the law. For them, electoral fraud can be identified by whether it violates existing domestic legal provisions. This enables a context specific approach to combating various kinds of electoral wrongdoings.

The manifestation of electoral fraud affects individuals by constraining the electoral choices available and by adding a layer of arbitrariness between citizen preferences and their translation into seats (Jessica, Philip and Sarah, 2017). Under conditions of electoral fraud, Shelder (2006), posits that electoral figures can no longer be considered reliable expressions of the general will but rather becomes a by-product of electoral manipulation. The impact of electoral fraud can only better be imagined as Ani, Emma and Chinedu (2013) avers

that “In national elections, successful electoral fraud can have the effect of a coup d’ etat or corruption of democracy. They insisted that in a narrow election, a small amount of fraud may be enough to change the result. If the result is not affected, fraud can still have a damaging effect if not punished as it can reduce voter’s confidence in democracy.

Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS)

The Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) is an electronic device designed to read Permanent Voters Card (PVC’s) and authenticate voters using the voter’s finger prints in order to prove that they are eligible to vote at a particular polling unit. As a multi-functional device, the technology also allows election result sheets to be uploaded to the INEC result viewing portal (IREV). Supporting the use of the device for the 2023 General election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Chairman, prof. Yakubu puts it thus:

Ruling out the possibility of using an incident form during the 2023 election, Prof. Yakubu insisted that the voters would only be accredited through the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System BVAS... the deployment of technology has significantly improved the credibility

of elections and the electoral process
(Umar, 2022).

He concluded that the commission will continue to leverage technology so as to build confidence in the minds of Nigerians (Umar, 2022).

On a similar development, in a meeting with all the state's Residents Electoral Commissioners, (REC's) at the INEC headquarters in Abuja Prof. Yabuku insisted that the BVAs devices will be used for the elections, though the devices are being reviewed to avoid a repeat of the glitches recorded with last Saturdays election. On Election Day technology, the BVAS will once again be deployed for voter's accreditation and result management (Friday, 2023). In a similar development, the Executive Director of Yiaga Africa, and the convener of the not too young to run movement made a submission thus:

In election, perception is everything. Introducing the BVAS and IREV into the framework for election results management has transformed the public perception of the accuracy and credibility of election results. It is one of the most significant innovations and reforms of Nigeria's electoral process. Therefore, INEC, civil societies and citizens' insistence on using BVAS and IREV for the 2023 elections are justified (Itodo, 2022).

The hardware components of the BVAs is shown below:

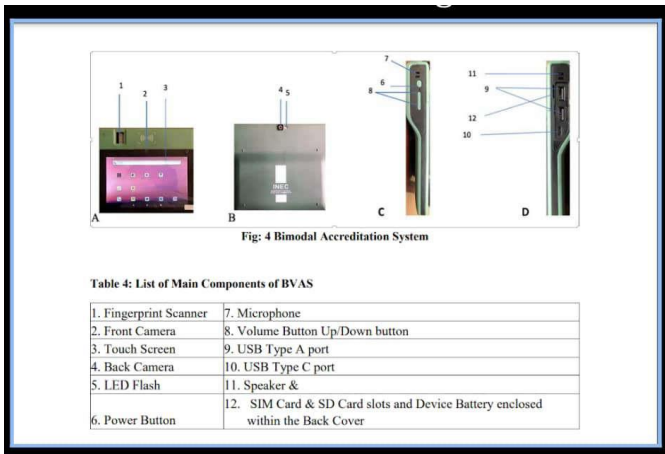


Photo source: INEC election manual.

In conclusion, the INEC chairman, Prof Mahmood has confirmed that the BVAs machine works offline and does not rely on the internet to accredit voters on Election Day. It only needs a network for the transmission of results. (Oyemike, 2023)

Theoretical Framework

Theories are used to explain and guide the work of a researcher. Sodaro (2008) states that theory means a generalization or a set of generalization, that seeks to explain and perhaps predict relationship among variables. Therefore, the researcher adopted the cybernetic communication theory as the most suitable theoretical framework for the study.

The Cybernetic Communication Theory

The cybernetics communication theory is rooted in the writings of the American mathematician, Norbert Wibner, which he coined in his book, “cybernetics” published in 1948. Cybernetics became established during a series of interdisciplinary meetings held between 1949 and 1953. It brought together some of the most important post war intellectuals, including Wiener, John Von Nueman, Waman Mccullach, Claude Shamon, Ifeinz Von Foerster, Ross Ashby, Gregory Safeson, Margaret Mead and Alex Baveals and became known as the Macy conferences on cybernetics (Heims, 1991) cybernetics did not establish itself as a discipline with its own academic institutions. It remained an interdisciplinary that gave birth to numerous specializations for example, mathematical communication theory, control theory, automata theory, neural networks, artificial intelligence, game theory, information systems, family systems theory and constructivism. Today, many of its revolutionary ideas-feedback, digitalization, simulation, autonomy, networks, homeostasis and complexity are now embraced by established disciplines.

Ashely (1956) characterized cybernetics as the science of all possible system, which is “informed” when some of them cannot be built or evolve in nature. This definition departs from the traditional preoccupation of science with generalization from

observational data. Beteson (1972) related this characterization to the theory of evolution. Cybernetics deals with the behavior of dynamical systems with inputs and how their behaviour is modified by feedback. The term was defined by Norbert (1948) as “the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine. Nowadays, the term is often used loosely to imply the “control of any system using technology”. For Werner (2017) cybernetics had existed for centuries before being articulated explicitly to the world by Norbert Wiener. He argued further than in the late 1940’s, cybernetics now largely regarded as dealing primarily with information transfers as represented by the Shannon-weaver model, described in “A mathematical theory of communication” (Shannon, 1949) and ‘communication theory of secrecy system’ (Shannon, 1949). As Wiener (1948) quoted in Johari (2011) ‘the process of receiving and of using information is the process of our adjusting to the contingencies of the outer environment, and of our living effectively with that environment.

The theory is very relevant for our study in the sense that the purpose of using BVAs for the 2023 General Election in Nigeria was to strengthen democratic practices through the introduction and use of technology to restore the lost hope and confidence from majority of Nigerians in the system. The researcher adopts this theory as the most suitable for the study.

Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAs) and Credibility of the 2023 General Election in Nigeria

Before the digitalization of the country's electoral space, national and state elections suffered from integrity deficit associated with fraud and violence prompting INEC to embrace a digital transformation drive that witnessed the introduction of the automated fingerprint identification system in 2011, Smart Card Readers (SCR) in 2015, the Z-pad in 2020, and the BVAs in 2021 (Abowei, 2024). The 2023 general elections in Niheria have come and gone. However, the study shall assess the extent to which the BVAs were able to perform the functions for which it was acquired or otherwise.

To understand the expectations and enthusiasm of Nigerians prior to the 2023 general election, one needs to look at the additional number of registered voters. For Ijaseum (2023), Participation in Nigeria elections had declined over the years from 52.26% and 69.08% of registered voters in 1999 and 2003 respectively to 43.65% in 2005 and 34.75% in 2019, but several factors could lead more people to the polls in 2023. INEC innovations which curtailed rigging in recent gubernatorial elections in Anambra, Ekiti and Osun states have boosted public confidence in the credibility of elections.

The innovation mentioned above, was unarguably, the BVAs. According to the International Institute

for democracy and electoral assistance, Nigeria is one of eight African countries and one of the 47 nations globally that uses technology for voters identification (Ibewuiké, 2023). There are few areas that will assist our study in assessing the success of the BVAs in the 2023 elections. Firstly, there were calls for the cancellation of the election results over alleged malpractices. The opposition parties already called for the cancellation of the election, alleging that it was marred by widespread violence, rigging, intimidation of voters, doctoring of results and violation of the laid down electoral process, which was communicated by INEC (Aghaegbuna, & Edith, 2023). The inability of the INEC chairman, Prof. Mammoud to listen and probably heed to the above call put to question, and neglects the Commission's guideline principles of autonomy, transparency, integrity, credibility, impartiality, dedication, equity, excellence and team work (Aghaegbuna and Edith 2023).

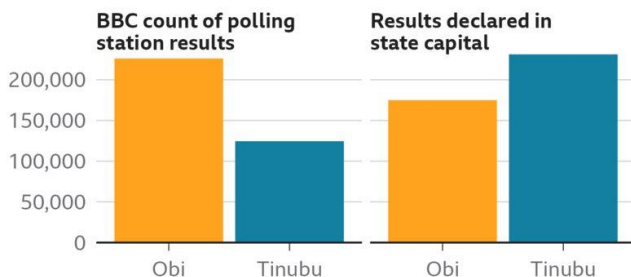
YIAGA Africa, a non-governmental organisation which did a parallel tabulation of the results from many states reported variations between its results and those of INEC in Rivers state and Imo state. These two states were also flagged by the media and some of the opposition parties for significant levels of electoral irregularities. (Premium times Editorial, 2023). According to A BBC investigation, evidence abound that the Presidential election result in Rivers State may have been manipulated. They put it thus:

We added up the voting tally sheets from our 6,000 polling stations in Rivers state, where many of the opposition complaints have been made. While the official result in this state gave a clear majority to Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), our Tally suggested that Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) had actually received most of the votes in the state with wide margin (Chigozie, Peter, & Karina, 2023).

The graphic representation of the above claim is shown below:

Peter Obi received more votes in Rivers state, but Bola Tinubu was declared winner

Number of votes for each candidate



Note: Only top two candidates shown

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (Inec)

B B C

The International community was not left out in expressing their worries over the 2023 elections and the outcome. According to Kingsley, etal (2023),

48 hours after the Presidential Election, and National Assembly Elections ended in many parts of the Nigeria, there have been criticisms by the United States, the European Union, Common Wealth and International Observers Groups about the exercise and allegations of widespread irregularities, rigging and manipulations of the results. The International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) joint election observation mission noted that inadequate communication and lack of transparency by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) created confusion and eroded voters trust in the process. Prior to the announcement of the winner of the Presidential election of 2023, noting the direction of a likely winner, agents of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Senator Dino Melaye, his Labour Party counterpart Hon. Umar Farrouk Ibrahim, Action Peoples Party (APP), Chinemela Ubah and the African Democratic Congress (ADC) staged a walkout at the National collation centre in Abuja, alleging that the electoral process was flawed.

There were also contrary opinions to the above expressed by politicians, citizens, etc. As Alake (2023) succinctly captures it thus:

Contrary to the innuendoes and aspersions being cast on the election by organisations such as financial times, Economist, New York Times, among others, we make bold to say that the 2023 presidential election is the most credible, most free and most fair national election in Nigeria since 1999.

The Nigerian masses (majority) would have canvassed similar opinion and defend it but for one reason. The inability of INEC to electronically transmit the 2023 election results to the IREV in real time. Prominent amongst the voices condemning this was that of former President, His Excellency, Oulsegun Obasanjo and the former military Head of State, Abdulsalami Abubakar, who was also the leader of the National Peace Committee. The former Head of State have faulted the manual transmission of election results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as against the electronic transmission which it ought to be (Onyebuchi, Emmanuel, & James 2023). Obasanjo in his exact words advised:

Let me appeal to the Chairman of INEC, if his hands are clean, to save Nigeria from looming danger and disaster, which is just waiting to happen. If the Chairman can

postponed election four days to the election, he can do everything to verify the errors of the last two days. No Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, no result to be acceptable, and no upload through server, no result to be acceptable (Onyebuchi, Emmanuel & James, 2023).

Where BVAs and servers have been manipulated, or rendered inactive, such results must be declared Void and inadmissible for election declarations (www.channelstv.com/2023/02/27/.don't-set-nigeria-on-fire-obsanjo-rejects-manual-transmission-of-results).

Again, the joint election observation mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), led by former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda declared that the election fall short of the reasonable expectations of Nigerians. According to the 40 member delegation of the two United States Institute, “At the close of the polls, challenges with electronic transfer of results and their upload to a public portal in a timely manner undermined citizens confidence at a crucial moment of the process” (Azimezi, et al 2023).

According to Paul (2023), five days after the 2023 Presidential election and 24 hours after declaring the Presidential candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu as the winner of the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission is yet to upload all the election

results. So far, INEC have uploaded 147,578 results from 176,846 polling units, representing 82% of results from all the polling units. The analysis therefrom supports the claims from many quarters that the transparency and credibility of the 2023 Presidential election result was affected largely by the non-transmission of the Presidential election results to the IREV in most places in the country.

The study therefore submits that the introduction of BVAs did not ensure the credibility of the 2023 Nigerian General elections.

Bimodal voters Accreditation System (BVAs) and Electoral Fraud in 2023 General Election in Nigeria

That the 2023 Nigerian General Election was marred by incidences of electoral malpractice is not in doubt. The study shall however, discuss notable observations to support the claims. According to the final report of the European Union observation mission on the Federal and State Elections of 28th February and 18th March, the Chief Observer, Barry Andrew, who is a member of the European Parliament noted:

In the lead up to the 2023 general elections, Nigerian citizens demonstrated a clear commitment to the democratic process. That said, the election exposed enduring systemic weaknesses and therefore signal a

need for further legal and operational reforms to enhance transparency, inclusiveness and accountability (The European Union Election Observation Mission report, 2023).

The mission also suggested six areas which they identified as priority recommendations to enhance the credibility of future polls in Nigeria. These Six priority areas were summarized below:

- *The need to remove ambiguities in the law.
- *To establish a publicly accountable selection process for INEC members.
- *To ensure real-time Publication of, and access to election results.
- * To provide greater protection for the Media practitioners, address
- *Discrimination against Women political life and,
- *Impunity regarding electoral offenses.

For Ignatius, (2023) quoting the Chairman of Rivers State Coalition of Civil Society Organization (CCSO), George wraenefaa, he submits thus:

for all of us in the Civil Society space, and INEC accredited observers, it is our position that INEC failed in the area of late arrival of materials, inability to upload results on record time on their IREV Portal, announcing results of units not

captured by their BVAS Machine or results clearly mutilated, improper coordination of security for ad hoc staff and lack of logistics like vehicles, food, water, etc for itself.

The Chatham House, where many of the main players involved in the 2023 election spoke, including INEC Chairman, also scored INEC low in its reviews of the presidential election. According to Yusuf (2023),

INEC failed to adhere to its own statements and guidelines, which derive from the laws, that election results would be uploaded to its portal using the BVAs directly from the polling units in real - time for the public viewing.

A political Think Tank, the Centre for Democracy and Development said that data from its 1500 observers deployed across the country showed that there were more cases of vote buying during the governorship election compared to the Presidential poll of February 25 (Friday 2023).

According to the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), quoted by Saheed, (2023,) noted that “instances of violence, ballot box snatching, and the disruption of voting activities by political thugs were reported across the country causing fear and insecurity among voters.

In a study conducted by Geopoll, a mobile surveying platform ,prior to the 2023 election and

a follow up study to learn about the peoples voting experiences on election day, as well as their confidence in the electoral process and results, their findings are detailed below:

- i. Trust in the electoral process: pre- and post elections. Election result acceptance, fraud and violence. The study submits thus:

“Respondent expectations for a Free and violence free election that would be accepted by all Nigerians far exceeded their actual experience. The chat below shows the percentages of respondents that “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with each of the three statements both before and after the election.



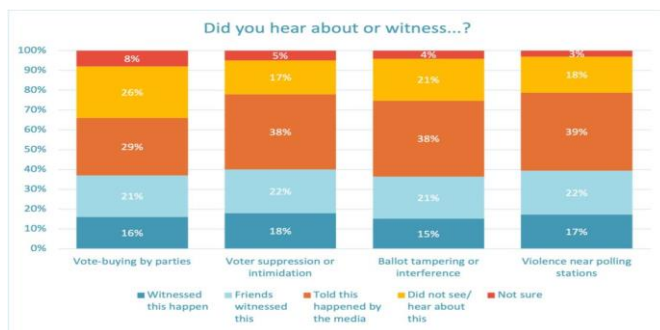
Source: Geopoll Nigerian Pre and Post Election Survey, 2023.

The survey submits that Opposition party led protest have dampened respondents hope that the results of the 2023 general election will be accepted by all Nigerians. The percentage that

disagree or strongly disagree with the statement climbed from 24% in pre-election survey to 64% in the post election survey. Disputes over the electoral Commission handling of the vote also increased perceptions of fraud. Those that disagree or strongly disagree over the elections will be/were free of fraud more than doubled from 29% in pre-election survey to 67% post election survey. Though, the elections were deemed mostly peaceful, voters expected better. While only 33% disagree or strongly disagree over the election would be free of violence and intimidations, before the election, 63% disagree or strongly disagree with the statements now that the election is over the study submits.

Ii.Witnessing Election Day Interference:

The study also asked voters about any personal experience with the claims alleging widespread vote rigging and violence, Below is the chat:

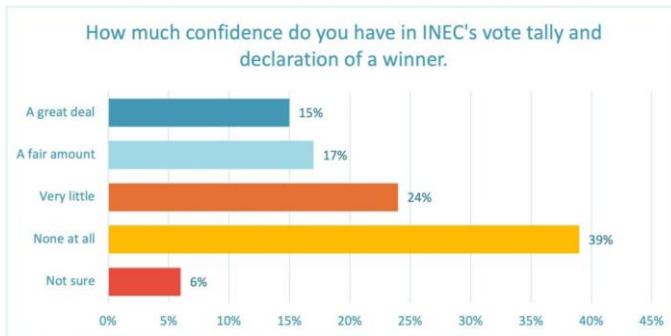


Source: Geopoll Pre and Post Nigerian Election Survey, 2023.

Over all, more than 1 in 3 respondents claims they or a friend personally witnessed incidences of vote buying (32%) voters suppression (40%), ballot tampering (26%) and violence near polling stations (39%) similar percentages said they were told by the media. Smaller percentage said they did not see or hear about these incidences at all.

On how much confidence the electorate had after INEC's vote tally and declaration of a winner, the study chat below summed it up:

63% have very little or no confidence in INEC's vote tally and declaration of a winner.



Source: Geopoll Pre and Post Nigerian Election Survey, 2023.

From the chat above, 63% have very little or no confidence in INECs vote tally and declaration of a winner.

Therefore, Technology alone is not a guarantee of credibility and security. It is also a new frontier for electoral fraud amid concerns over vulnerability to

hacking and manipulation (Ajufo& Hoffmann, 2023).

From the above, the study has been able to establish that the introduction of BVAs did not prevent the incidences of Electoral fraud or votes Manipulation in the 2023 General elections in Nigeria.

Summary, Conclusion and recommendations

Summary

The study assessed the introduction of technology (BVAs) and its use in the Nigerian 2023 elections to ensure the credibility of the process. Technologies alone cannot guarantee credibility in Nigerian electoral process. It is so because other factors also play key roles in ensuring the overall success of the electoral circle. For example, we have the human and material resources. From our study, the needed material resources in terms of funds were readily available and provided for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in 2023. However, what was in doubt was the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the human resources in terms of the INEC staff, INEC adhoc staff, the voting population and the general ecology of voting behavior in Nigeria. Technologies are devices operated by humans. The human interface with the device contributed immensely to the failure or otherwise of the BVAs experienced in forms of technical glitches, inability to upload some election results, especially the Presidential

election in real time, uploading blurred and manipulated results on IREV which was not necessarily the making of the device but that of the human infrastructure employed or contracted to operate them.

The 2023 General election have come and gone. Credible election is not rocket science. The stage has been set. With further reforms of the electoral law to make electronic transmission the only way to collate election results, introducing technologies that can work with little human interface in elections, advocating for all hands to be on deck, Nigeria may be on her way to achieving credible, free, fair and generally acceptable election within the shortest time possible.

Conclusion

The BVAS did not ensure the credibility of the 2023 election from our study. That does not mean that the device did not impact on the outcome of the election. Nigerian electorates may have to wait till 2027 general election to continue their search for a more peaceful, generally acceptable, more technology-driven credible elections in Nigeria.

The resources to achieve this fit are readily available, more in terms of material resources. What is mostly in doubt is the needed communication and human infrastructure needed to make these yearnings a reality. The task of restoring hope and confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) goes

beyond the introduction of the BVAs or other technologies that may be introduced before 2027. The reason is that the device failed to protect the process and the system from similar issues that marred the credibility of the outcome of previous elections in Nigeria like result mutilation, over-voting, violence and manual collation of blurred election results by INEC.

Therefore, credible election is not given; it is a collective effort, especially from the political class and her followership. There is need to change our value system if elections in African most populous country must be free, fair, and credible in the nearest future.

Recommendations

♦There should be an emphasis shift from the device (BVAs) to the human infrastructure that handle/operate or run these devices for the major challenge was with the human operating these devices.

♦The electoral law (2022) should be amended to insist on electronic transmission of results as the only means of result collation rather than empowering INEC to decide the mode of transmission.

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