

The adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and integrity of the 2023 presidential election in South East Nigeria

¹Onyebuchi Johnpaul NDUBA, Martin Ifeanyi OKEKE, Nnaemeka Gabriel OBIEGBUNAM, ²Ekene Benjamin AKAM

¹Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra – Nigeria

²Department of Political Science, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra – Nigeria

jo.nduba@unizik.edu.ng; mi.okeke@unizik.edu.ng; nnaemekaobiegbunam@gmail.com; akambenakam@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0006-7334-2011 (Corresponding Author)

Abstract: The integrity of electoral processes is central to democratic consolidation, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. The study interrogates the adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and its influence on the integrity of the 2023 Presidential Election in South East Nigeria. The introduction of BVAS by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was designed to enhance voter authentication through biometric verification and electronic transmission of results, thereby curbing electoral malpractices. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the study draws on data from election observers, accredited voters, and electoral and party officials across selected states in the South East geopolitical zone. Data analysed reveal that the adoption of BVAS contributed to greater transparency and limited incidences of double/multiple voting and result manipulation. However, challenges such as device malfunction, inadequate technical support, and limited voter awareness hindered its optimal performance/use in some areas. Despite these limitations, BVAS represents an important step toward restoring public trust in Nigeria's electoral process. The study argues that while technology can improve electoral integrity, its success depends on strong institutional frameworks, stakeholder training, and sustained civic education. This paper contributes to discussions on electoral reforms and democratic deepening in Nigeria.

Keywords: BVAS, electoral integrity, 2023 Presidential Election, South East Nigeria, INEC, election technology

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, democracy is widely regarded as the most participatory system of governance because it enables citizens to influence state decisions. One of the key foundation stones of democracy is periodic free, fair and credible elections which gives the citizens the chance to regulate the activities of government vis-à-vis supporting a particular government or to change it (Itodo, 2022). Therefore, election gives the people the opportunity to hold government accountable as well as facilitate the expression of public opinion.

Various bodies legally charged with the management or administration of election around the world have in different eras of their development been saddled with the duty and responsibility of conducting elections for which the outcome reflects the will of the people, and to do so, they have come up with innovations to improve this process. Overtime, Election Management Bodies (EMBs) have increasingly integrated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into their operations to improve efficiency. Scholars argue that these digital innovations can enhance the credibility and transparency of elections when appropriately applied (Gelb & Clark, 2013). This prominently appears true in underdeveloped countries that still grapple with challenges of electoral irregularities despite the high costs of biometric devices (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). In Africa, for example, nearly all the recent general elections have seen the utilization of different kinds of ICT enabled devices. Studies show that more than twenty-five

countries in Sub-Saharan Africa – including Kenya, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and several others have adopted one form or another of ICT-based technology in their electoral processes (Piccolino, 2015). These devices are used for biometric voter registration, optical mark recognition, direct electronic recording and electronic result transmission (Fatai, 2022). Interestingly, the increased clamour for the adoption and utilization of ICT at various stages of the electoral process is predominantly witnessed in developing countries with cases of irregularities in their electoral space (Itodo, 2022). Thus, electoral irregularities is an anathema to the conduct of credible and fair elections and have consequential effects on the operations of modern democracy.

In recent times, particularly in the last few decades, many countries across the globe have embraced the utilization of ICTs in the management of their elections (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). In Nigeria (as well as other places), elections have become a part and parcel of the democratic process since its emergence as an independent country in October 1960. But from independence till the commencement of the fourth republic in 1999, the country's elections had been undertaken using the manual electoral procedure. These elections were characterized by shady operations in terms of the existence of ghost voters in the register of voters for the purposes of double/multiple thumb printing, manipulation of the voter register, snatching of ballot boxes and other election irregularities. Similarly, elections organized by Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) from 1999 till date (2023) did not comparatively fair better as these elections had traces of the problems earlier witnessed in the previous ones (Utibe & Aluko, 2023).

Nigeria began the journey of incorporating the use of ICT in election administration with the use of automated finger print identification system (AFIS) during the 2011 election season. The AFIS was a fallout of the electoral fraud that characterized elections held between 1999 and 2007. Of particular concern is the unprecedented malpractices that defined the 2007 general election. Although late President Musa Yar' Adua was the biggest beneficiary of the 2007 election fraud, he acknowledged that the elections that brought him in to office were grossly undermined by irregularities. He made a solemn promise to embark on an electoral reform to strengthen the electoral system in Nigeria (Adeniyi, 2011). The late president set the reform process in motion by inaugurating a 22-man Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) under the chairmanship of Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais (ret'd) on 28th August, 2007. The membership of the ERC was drawn from widely-respected members of civil society organizations (CSOs), legal luminaries, eminent traditional rulers, and government representatives. The Committee submitted its report with fine-grained recommendations on how to improve the electoral process in Nigeria. President Yar' Adua accepted nearly all the recommendations and was to implement them before his death (CLEEN Foundation, 2019). President Goodluck Jonathan, who succeeded him, continued from where his predecessor stopped and implemented the policy aspects of the main report. This led to the automated process in the registration of voters in Nigeria with the use of AFIS (Ladipo, 2022). Furthermore, the AFIS prepared the ground for the introduction of two new digital devices during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. These devices are chip-embedded Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs) and Biometric Smart Card Readers (BSCRs). They served as a mechanism for accreditation of eligible voters and intended to discourage double voting. They were meant to function seamlessly to accredit eligible voters and validate their participation in the electoral process.

Regrettably, these devices generated some concerns owing to the failure of the BSCRs to verify and authenticate some eligible voters on the election day. To address the problem and ensure that voting proceeded, the INEC issued a directive to allow the adoption of Incidence Forms in the occasion of device failure. These forms are used for manual accreditation purposes for voters whose biometric details are captured in the voter register, but are unable to be verified with the electronic gadget. However, the use of these forms created the vent for politicians to manipulate the electoral process. Interestingly, it should be noted that

the BSCRs in some Nigerian states relatively helped to curb electoral malpractice, restore the waning public confidence in the electoral process, enhance electoral credibility and widen the acceptability of the election results (Nwangwu, Otu & Onah, 2018). In others, however, the reverse was the case and this was more pronounced during the 2019 elections. The 2019 general elections witnessed an extension of the problems of the 2015 elections. But before the 2019 general elections, INEC together with critical election stakeholders embarked on an electoral reform journey to reinforce the Nigerian electoral system. The reform was to address the problems associated with the dual accreditation of voters (comprising the use of biometric devices and Incidence Forms) and enable the commission to introduce digital technologies to the electoral process in the country. Specifically, the Eighth National Assembly tried unsuccessfully on four occasions to push the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2018 through for presidential assent. On each occasion, President Muhammadu Buhari rejected the Bill and refused to sign it into Law (Ihuoma, 2022). With this rejection, the president truncated the effort to amend the 2010 Electoral Act, which was intended to enhance the electoral system in Nigeria.

After addressing the concerns raised by the president in his various letters to the National Assembly (NASS), the hitherto vetoed Bill was dusted, redrafted as the 2010 Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2021 and represented to the Ninth NASS for consideration in 2021. After a careful legislative deliberation on the Bill, the NASS passed and submitted it to the president for signing. This time, the Bill saw the light of legal existence with presidential assent on 25th February, 2022, on which date it came into operation. Consequently, the 2022 Electoral Act guided the INEC to conduct the off-cycle governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun states on 18th June and 16th July, 2022, respectively. The Act also guided the administration of the 2023 general elections in the country. The introduction of the BVAS and IReV were seen by the people as a paradigm shift and a game changer in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The introduction of these tools were meant to restore the confidence of the people in election administration of government. Some national and international observers like the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, European Union Election Observers Mission (EUOEM) lauded the introduction cum deployment of these devices but decried the ill-use of them during the election process.

The inability of the IReV to function properly with regards to upload and transmission of the presidential election in real-time punctured the confidence the people reposed in the election administration and the promise by INEC Chairman to Nigerians and the whole world at Chatham House that upload of the election results in real-time will

take place and there will not be any going back on that. In line with this, Sulaimon (2023) reported that:

The Independent National Electoral Commission has flouted the promise it made on uploading results of elections in different polling units across the country as they are sorted, counted, and collated. The Punch on November 22 reported that INEC Chairman, Yakubu Mahmood, said there is no going back on its decision to upload the results of the 2023 general elections on its portal to enable Nigerians to have a real view of the results as they are being collated. Mahmood added that with Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, the result would be uploaded on the portal as they come. As of 7:14pm, a check by the PUNCH shows that no result has been uploaded yet on the INEC website except those witnessed and recorded from their respective polling units (pp. 1-4).

Regrettably, as noted, despite the perceived gains of these ICT powered tools (BVAS and IReV), these elections (both the off-cycle governorship and 2023 nationwide elections) were not free from the problems of previous elections in Nigeria. The credibility of these elections was punctured by cases of electoral malpractice, violence and ill-utilization of ICT tools. This development casts aspersions on the use of biometric devices in the management of Nigerian elections. In this context, one can query their usefulness given the fact that they appear to facilitate the problems they were intended to address. Consequent upon this unfavourable situation, this study examined the adoption of BVAS on the integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

Research Question

Taking due cognizance of the problem of the study, this research was anchored on the research question: To what extent did the adoption of BVAS promote the integrity of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Election and Election Management

It is pertinent to attempt a fleeting review of the concept of election before delving proper into election management, as regards to the management of electoral resources, viz: manpower, materials and money. Accordingly, Oddih (2007; p.152) in Jega & Ibeanu (2007), while writing on the concept of election, quoted Gwinn and Norton (1992), stating that “election is the formal process of selection of a person for public office or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting”. He argued further that an election is one of the means by which a society may organise itself and make specified formal decisions, adding that where election is well managed, it acts simultaneously

as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society, and as a method for seeking political obedience (legitimacy) with a minimum of sacrifice of individual’s freedom. He further added that the essence of a democratic election is freedom of choice.

In the light of the above therefore, election is a process of conclusive political decision through voting. Chukwu (2007; p.75), in Jega and Ibeanu (2007), posits that, “elections are properly regarded as the central institution of democratic government”. This explains why Heywood (2007; p.253) could not help but to concur that “elections may not in themselves be a sufficient condition for political representation, but there is little doubt that they are a necessary condition. Indeed, some thinkers have gone further and portrayed elections as the very heart of democracy”. The point being made here is the indispensability of election in any democratic and civil dispensation. Albeit, these authors did justice to the concept of election, they appear to have missed a gap, since while they concurred that election is a process, they however failed to identify those processes and steps involved inefficient and effective management of such exercise. Similarly, Egwu (2007) in his contribution in the chapter two of “Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria (A Special Edition of IDASA Conflict Tracking Dossier)” made a brief but interesting submission about the import of election. He did not only make it clear that election offer a way through which the people exercise their right to determine their rulers, but equally stated that election promotes legitimacy and accountability. This informs his subsequent submission that the Election Management Body must therefore be “Proficient and efficient in election management”. To him, election has been defined as “one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind”. He added that “an essential requirement of election in a democracy is that it should be free and fair in both procedures and outcome” (Egwu, 2007; p.11). Also writing on the primacy of electoral exercise in a state, Nnadozie (2007; p.45) in Jega & Ibeanu (2007), captured that election represents “a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government. For Eya (2003), election is seen as the selection of a person or persons for office as by ballot and making choice as between alternatives. The elucidation of Onyeka (2003) complements Eya (2003), when the former averred that election “reinforces the concept of self-rule, celebrates it and legitimises governmental power”. The concern this raises is whether or not an election result that glaringly falls below thirty percent of the entirety of registered voters (majority) is qualified to be said to have enhanced the legitimacy of the government it enthrones, since elections, according to Onyeka (2003), enhance the

amount of popular participation in the political system. Albeit Onyeka (2003), succeeded in illuminating clearly the concept of electoral politics, it failed to point out that it is not all elections that enhances legitimacy, of course, election ridden with apparent inefficiency on the side of the electoral umpire can neither promote legitimacy nor encourage popular participation. This leads the review of this study to literatures bordering on management of election and electoral resources.

Election management has been described as the organisation of all stages of the electoral process, “It involves the planning, organization and the conduct of elections”, (Ajayi 2007; p.144). He further opined that election management can be classified into three stages which include pre-election, election and post-election activities. The pre-election phase involves delimitation of constituencies, registration of political parties and eligible voters. It also includes screening and verification of candidates for elections, (Ajayi 2007; p.144). Election activities includes: voting by eligible and registered voters, counting of votes, collation and announcement of final results, and the declaration of results. Post-election activities according to him includes: attending to election complaints and litigations by aggrieved candidates and parties. To be sure, this view tends to revolve mainly around voting activities. It did not take into necessary cognisance of other aspects of the management of electoral process such as the implementation of certain statutory provisions that spells out the responsibilities of INEC, and how manpower and materials can efficiently and effectively be managed. Accordingly, Adebisi (2015; p.5), observed that election management involves the facilitation of voting and administration of elections at all levels, from local to federal, which according to him includes “the organisation of election agencies, the behaviour and character of state and local election officials, the process of conducting elections and the implementation of election policies”. It further includes according to him, the running election at different stages in relation to activities such as maintaining voters’ registration lists, drawing precincts, selecting polling sites, procuring equipment, recruiting and training poll workers, evaluating and implementing improvements to the electoral process itself. Election management ranges from the maintenance of the state-wide voter registration and the implementation of federal and state laws and policies concerning elections.

Electronic Devices and Integrity of Elections in Nigeria

Outside the conventional election administration tools that are mainly based on human interface, modern administration of elections is usually embedded in electronic technologies. These technologies are variously referred to as automated, digital, biometric, electronic, or

new technologies. Electronic technologies are facilitated through computer-driven instruments and interfaced with computer systems. The administration of elections based on these technologies has become the popular way in which political leaders are mostly chosen in modern electoral democracies. Thus, it implies the use of technological devices to manage elections in terms of voter registration, identification and accreditation, as well as electronic balloting, recording of votes and transmission of election results. These devices are of various types from across the world. They include Nigeria’s chip embedded Permanent Voter’s Cards (PVCs), Biometric Smart Card Readers (BSCRs) and recently introduced Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). Election administration based on these new technologies is undertaken with the aid of electronic systems such as biometric voter identification and accreditation gadgets, electronic voting devices, and digital tools for vote counting and result-management. The case for these new technologies is partly that they mitigate problems that accompany human elements such as election manipulation and fraud in the electoral process, thus ushering in the much anticipated integrity in elections.

Interestingly, the practice of representative electoral democracy has recently witnessed an increase in the deployment of various forms of biometric technologies to election administration. This upsurge is mostly prominent in semi-democratic settings in such continents as Africa and Asia where elections are usually characterized by recurring cases of electoral fraud. In Africa, for instance, most recent general elections are administered with the aid of modern technological tools (Fatai, 2022). Today, such activities as biometric registration of voters, digital verification of information domiciled with the electoral commission using authorized voter cards, electronic balloting, online voter education, and web or computer-based transmission of election results are carried out using electronic devices. Thus, one important application of technology to elections is the use of electronic devices to cast or count votes. This technology is called electronic voting, abbreviated to e-voting. The EMs can use e-voting in many ways to increase participation among voters abroad and make elections more inclusive for voters with disabilities.

Again, International IDEA (2022) acknowledges that new technologies play an integral role in organizing elections from across the world. Earlier, International IDEA (2018) lays emphasis on information and communications technologies (ICTs) and views new technologies as ICT-related projects that ensure credible elections by achieving the following:

- a. A continued focus on the integrity and security in elections

- b. Increasing political participation and citizen engagement through technology
- c. The role and potential regulation of digital campaigning
- d. Increasing participation for absentee and out of country voters and in party primaries through ICTs, crypto currencies in campaigns financing, and the cost and sustainability of elections and technologies.

Under its institution-wide initiative and programmatic activities, International IDEA (2018) identifies and focuses on two pillars of the ICT, Elections and Democracy initiative. These pillars are:

- a. Elections and ICTs as an already well-established area of International IDEA's work, including topics such as electronic voting, digital disclosure systems, election integrity and security in the face of misinformation, trust and transparency of election technologies as well as the role of technology in electoral campaigns
- b. Participation and Representation through ICTs covering International IDEA's work on technologies for citizen 'participation, such as public consultations in constitution building, increasing participation in government at the national and local level, and digital tools for political parties and political actors in general.

Today also, many countries have turned to a variety of technological solutions in a bid to make elections more efficient, more cost-effective and to strengthen stakeholder trust at each of the electoral cycle (International IDEA, 2022). These technologies range from the use of basic office automation tools such as word-processing documents and spreadsheets to more sophisticated data processing tools such as database management systems, optical and geographic information system (Administration and Cost of Election, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research designs as it utilized survey and in-depth interview respectively. The population of the study constituted the total number of adult citizens (age bracket of 18+) of the South East geopolitical zone. From the 2006 Nigeria Population census, the entire population is 16,395,555 while those of voting age were 8,472,162 and thus, the target population of our study is 8,472,162. The sample size for the survey data (questionnaire instrument) was determined using the William Cochran's sample size determination formula. The sample size for the in-depth interview was based on reaching the point of saturation. This was reached after six persons were interviewed. The interviewees cut across various individuals representing

various segments of stakeholders cum participants in the election process. These included, accredited election observers, INEC staff (Presiding Officers), party agents, and media crew who covered the election. Sampling procedure was through the multistage sampling technique. The data generated for the study were carefully analysed using the quantitative descriptive statistics as well as thematic analysis. This corresponds to the nature and source of data generation which was through the questionnaire and interview.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the cybernetics model of communications theory as an analytical tool to explain the role of ICT in curbing electoral fraud and ensure electoral credibility during nationwide elections in Nigeria. The communications theory was developed through the pioneering research on computing programmes by first-generation pre-war French scientists like Ampe're (1834) and Guilbaud (1954) and post-war theorists like Couffignal (1961), Wiener (1948) and Deutsch (1963). These scientists and theorists made several important contributions to the development of the theory. However, it was Deutsch's work on *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control*; with a new Introduction that gave the cybernetics model its analytic posture. The theory was further popularized by emerging scholars like Winner (1969) in the sociological context. Nwangwu, Onah and Otu (2018) extensively applied the model to offer explanation on the role of digital technology as an elixir to electoral fraud in Nigeria. Nwangwu, Onah and Otu (2018) observe that cybernetics has become a conceptual relic of communications theory in the field of computer technology. Deutsch's significant contribution to the development of this theory is the first attempt to formulate a fully developed theory of politics based on communications model. He particularly introduced the techniques of cybernetics to the sphere of political analysis. Earlier, Wiener (1948) popularized the social implications of the model. He drew analogies from the relationship between automatic systems and human institutions in his: *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*.

Cybernetics is the branch of science concerned with the study of systems of any nature, which are capable of receiving, storing and processing information so as to use it for control. According to Gauba (2003, p. 98), "cybernetics is the study of the operation of control and communication systems; it deals both with biological systems and man-made machinery". Similarly, Varma (1975, pp. 432-433) asserts that "the term...covers not only the versions of information theory...but the theory of games, self-controlling machines, computers and the physiology of the

nervous system". The model is based on a multidisciplinary approach, which arose as an offshoot of the Eastonian systems analysis and seeks to explain how actions within a given system generate some changes in its environment (Nwangwu, 2015). Thus, "the system codes incoming information, recognizes patterns, stores the patterns in its memory unit... recalls information on command, recombines information in new patterns, and applies stored information to problem-solving and decision-making" (Winner, 1969, p. 9). According to Gauba (2003), communication problem may be studied in three contexts: (a) Communication within the political system, communication between political system and its environment, and communication between two or more political systems. Its analysis involves the study of several components like: the structures meant for sending and receiving messages; (b) The channels used for the purpose of communication (along with their capacities and rates of utilization, expressed in terms of their load and load capacity, rate of flow, amount of lag and gain, that is delay or promptness in responding to the information that is received); processes of storage of information, and (c) Feedback mechanisms: the codes and languages applied for the purpose of communication, and the contents of the messages transmitted, and so on. Arising from the foregoing, the basic assumptions of the model are:

- i. It is information that triggers off the change in the suitable receiver, which can be compared with the information required for turning the gun to a particular target.
- ii. Society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communications facilities, which belong to it (Wiener, 1948).
- iii. If the information flow is smooth and the decision-making system is in a position to respond and react to it in a constructive manner, many problems can be resolved.
- iv. If governments are constantly looking for the communications channels and linking them up with information they are receiving, they will be able to do more than other governments, which are not aware of the existence of the working of these communications channels in the political system.
- v. A political system goes through the process of innovation, growth and self-transformation when it moves beyond mere adaptation to drastic change, but it has to be extremely tactful both in

supervising the mechanism it adopts for the change as well as the strategy with which it wants to bring about the change.

The growing complexity of the world has made the use of ICT for administrative purposes a desideratum. Accordingly, Winner (1969, p. 3) argues that "in a world which has become increasingly complex and bureaucratized, 'information' may well provide a form of theoretical shorthand useful for the understanding of how regimes operate and how they tend to break down". It is pertinent to note that this model is designed to elucidate an expectation that the application of ICT to election administration would help to achieve credible electoral democracy. This expectation hinges on the recent advancement in the security technologies against cybercriminal activities. Also, these technologies have relatively improved the transparency and credibility component of the Nigerian general elections, particularly since the adoption of biometric devices like BSCRs and PVCs in 2015. Through such technological tools like Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger, YouTube, Skype, global system mobile and short message service, many voters, especially the youths, were mobilized and sensitized on the need for registering, collecting their PVCs and voting for candidates of their choice. Additionally, Nwangwu, Onah and Otu (2018) carefully noted that these platforms were used to frustrate, criminal attempts to disrupt elections in polling units and collation centres. Thus, relying on election rigging is becoming both obsolete and increasingly difficult, as social media and mobile telephony are breaking down the walls that aided electoral malfeasance in the recent past. More significantly, the use of computer-based authentication devices like BSCRs and BVAS for verification of the biometric PVCs, accreditation of voters and counting of votes during the elections are intended to boost the overall credibility of the exercise, restore the confidence of most Nigerian voters and international partners in INEC and reduce the volume, of election petitions file at various tribunals that herald every election season in Nigeria.

However, the issue of failure of digital technologies to verify and/or accredit eligible Nigerian voters, which impedes transparent management of election in the country is very disturbing. This failure largely emanates from such problems as unsteady electricity, weak internet facilities, and poor knowledge base of most poll staff on the functionality of these gadgets.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation and Interpretation

Table 1

Gender/Sex of Respondents

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	249	69.4	70.7	70.7
	Female	103	28.7	29.3	100.0
	Total	352	98.1	100.0	
Missing	999.00	7	1.9		
Total		359	100.0		

Note. Data adapted from Field Survey (2024)

One can aptly deduce from the above table that the total number of respondents is three hundred and fifty-nine (359), out of which two hundred and forty-nine (representing

69.4%) were males and one hundred and three (representing 28.7%) were females, while seven respondents (representing 1.9%) didn't indicate their sex.

Table 2

Age Distribution of Respondents

		Age Distribution			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-29	139	38.7	40.3	40.3
	30-39	111	30.9	32.2	72.5
	40-49	68	18.9	19.7	92.2
	50-59	15	4.2	4.3	96.5
	60\$above	12	3.3	3.5	100.0
	Total	345	96.1	100.0	
Missing	999.00	14	3.9		
Total		359	100.0		

Table two (2) shows the age distribution of respondents. Out of the three hundred and fifty-nine respondents, one hundred and thirty-nine (representing 38.7%) are aged between eighteen to twenty-nine years, one hundred and eleven (representing 30.9%) are aged between thirty to thirty-nine years, sixty-eight (representing 18.9%) are aged

between forty to forty-nine years, fifteen (representing 4.2%) are age between fifty to fifty-nine years, twelve (representing 3.3%) are aged sixty years and above as fourteen (representing 3.9%) didn't indicate their age bracket.

Table 3*Respondents' Marital Status*

		Marital Status			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	141	39.3	39.7	39.7
	Married	205	57.1	57.8	97.8
	Divorced	3	0.8	0.8	98.3
	Widowed	6	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	355	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999.00	4	1.1		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2024

Table three (3) shows that out of the three hundred and fifty-nine returned and valid questionnaires distributed, one hundred and forty-one (representing 39.3%) are single, two hundred and five (representing 57.1%) are married, three

(representing 0.8%) are divorced, six (representing 1.7%) are widowed, while 4 (representing 1.1%) chose not to give out that information about them.

Table 4*Educational Qualifications of Respondents*

		Educational Qualification			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	FSLC	40	11.1	11.3	11.3
	SSCE	107	29.8	30.3	41.6
	First Degree	163	45.4	46.2	87.8
	Higher Degree	38	10.6	10.8	98.6
	None	5	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	353	98.3	100.0	
Missing	999.00	6	1.7		
Total		359	100.0		

Table four (4) shows that forty of the respondents (representing 11.1%) possess only First School Leaving Certificate, one hundred and seven (representing 29.8%) possess Senior Secondary School Certificate, one hundred and sixty-three (representing 45.4%) possess First Degree

certificate, thirty eight (representing 10.6%) possess degrees higher than the First Degree, five (representing 1.4%) do not possess any degree, while six (representing 1.7%) opted not to give out that information about them.

Table 5*Occupations of Respondents*

		Occupation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	75	20.9	21.1	21.1
	Public Servant	109	30.4	30.6	51.7
	Self Employed	142	39.6	39.9	91.6
	Unemployed	30	8.3	8.4	100.0

Total	356	99.2	100.0
Missing	3	0.8	
Total	359	100.0	

Table five (5) clearly shows that seventy-five of the respondents (representing 20.9%) are students, one hundred and nine (representing 30.4%) are public servants, one hundred and forty-two (representing 39.6%) are self-

employed, thirty (representing 8.3%) are unemployed, while three (representing 0.8%) elect not to give out that information about them.

Research Question: To what extent did the adoption of BVAS promote the integrity of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria?

Table 6

The adoption of BVAS effectively prevented multiple voting in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

		Item1			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	123	34.3	34.6	34.6
	Agree	181	50.4	51.0	85.6
	Undecided	29	8.1	8.2	93.8
	Disagree	13	3.6	3.7	97.5
	Strongly Disagree	9	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	355	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999.00	4	1.1		
Total		359	100.0		

Table six (6) shows that one hundred and twenty-three respondents (representing 34.3%) strongly agree that the adoption of BVAS effectively prevented multiple voting in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, one hundred and eighty-one (representing 50.4%) agree, thirteen (representing 3.6%) disagree, nine (representing

2.59%) strongly disagrees, and twenty nine (representing 8.1%) didn't agree nor disagree while four (representing 1.1%) left theirs unticked. It is therefore obvious from data generated from our survey that, the adoption of BVAS effectively prevented multiple voting in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

Table 7

The utilization of BVAS upheld the integrity of voter verification processes in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

		Item2			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	101	28.1	28.8	28.8
	Agree	198	55.2	56.4	85.2
	Undecided	20	5.6	5.7	90.9
	Disagree	22	6.1	6.3	97.2
	Strongly Disagree	10	2.8	2.8	100.0
	Total	351	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999.00	8	2.2		
Total		359	100.0		

Table seven (7) shows that one hundred and one respondents (representing 28.1%) strongly agree that the utilization of BVAS upheld the integrity of voter verification processes in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, one hundred and ninety-eight

(representing 55.2%) agree, twenty-two (representing 6.1%) disagree, ten (representing 2.8%) strongly disagree, twenty (representing 5.6%) are undecided while eight (representing 2.2%) withheld their answers to the question. From the data generated from our field survey, it is evident that the

utilization of BVAS upheld the integrity of voter verification processes in the 2023 Presidential election in

South East Nigeria.

Table 8

The use of BVAS contributed to ensuring fair and transparent voting processes in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

Item3		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	68	18.9	19.4	19.4
	Agree	181	50.5	51.7	71.1
	Undecided	45	12.5	12.9	84.0
	Disagree	43	12.0	12.3	96.3
	Strongly Disagree	13	3.6	3.7	100.0
	Total	350	97.5	100.0	
Missing	999.00	9	2.5		
Total		359	100.0		

Table eight (8) shows that sixty-eight respondents (representing 18.9%) strongly agree that the use of BVAS contributed to ensuring fair and transparent voting processes in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, one hundred and eighty-one (representing 50.5%) agree, forty-three (representing 12%) disagree, thirteen

(representing 3.6%) strongly disagree, and forty-five (representing 12.5%) are uncertain while nine (representing 2.5%) withheld their answer to the question. From the field survey, it clear that the use of BVAS contributed to ensuring fair and transparent voting processes in the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

Table 9

INEC's employment of BVAS brought confidence of the people in the electoral process of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

Item4		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	58	16.2	16.6	16.6
	Agree	220	61.3	62.8	79.4
	Undecided	36	10.0	10.3	89.7
	Disagree	24	6.7	6.9	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	12	3.3	3.4	100.0
	Total	350	97.5	100.0	
Missing	999.00	9	2.5		
Total		359	100.0		

Table nine (9) shows that fifty-eight respondents (representing 16.2%) strongly agree that INEC's employment of BVAS brought confidence of the people in the electoral process of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, two hundred and twenty (representing 61.3%) agree, twenty-four (representing 6.7%) disagree, twelve (representing 3.3%) strongly disagree, and thirty-six

(representing 10%) are undecided while nine (representing 2.5%) withheld their answer to the question. The implication of this, is that from the field survey, one can conclude that INEC's employment of BVAS brought confidence of the people in the electoral process of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

Table 10

The voters were generally satisfied with the overall performance of BVAS in maintaining integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

		Item5			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	78	21.7	22.1	22.1
	Agree	176	49.0	49.9	72.0
	Undecided	45	12.5	12.7	84.7
	Disagree	43	12.0	12.2	96.9
	Strongly Disagree	11	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	353	98.3	100.0	
Missing	999.00	6	1.7		
Total		359	100.0		

Table ten (10) shows that seventy eight respondents (representing 21.7%) strongly agree that the voters were generally satisfied with the overall performance of BVAS in maintaining integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, one hundred and seventy six (representing 49%) agree, forty three (representing 12%) disagree, eleven (representing 3.1%) strongly disagree, and

forty five (representing 12.5%) are uncertain while six (representing 1.7%) withheld their answer to the question. From the field survey, it clear that the voters were generally satisfied with the overall performance of BVAS in maintaining integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

Table 11

The adoption of BVAS enhanced the integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria

		Item6			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	59	16.4	16.8	16.8
	Agree	215	59.9	61.3	78.1
	Undecided	36	10.0	10.2	88.3
	Disagree	27	7.5	7.7	96.0
	Strongly Disagree	14	3.9	4.0	100.0
	Total	351	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999.00	8	2.2		
Total		359	100.0		

Table ten (10) shows that fifty-nine respondents (representing 16.4%) strongly agree that the adoption of BVAS enhanced the integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria, two hundred and fifteen (representing 59.9%) agree, twenty-seven (representing 7.5%) disagree, fourteen (representing 3.9%) strongly disagree, and thirty-six (representing 10%) are undecided while eight (representing 2.2%) withheld their answer to the question. The implication of this, is that from our field survey the adoption of BVAS enhanced the integrity of the 2023 Presidential election in South East Nigeria.

In-depth Interview Responses

The qualitative analysis was done using the data generated from the interviews we conducted. In respect to the research question of the study, the extent to which the adoption of BVAS promote the integrity of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was discussed under this theme. One of the interviewees (an accredited election observer) expressed his thoughts as “largely the major problem we encountered was in the area of network. You should know that BVAS relies heavily on internet

connectivity to function, it requires network to be able to identify and authenticate eligible or registered voters. There were some cases where the network did not come up or work well for some time, but, in general, it really did work and authenticated the voters that turned up enmasse.” Furthermore, he expressed satisfaction with the introduction and use of the BVAS though noting that more sensitization needs be done. He specifically said,

the use of BVAS did not do anything negative to the already battered image of the election administration or elections in Nigeria. On the other hand, it did a lot of good. In the sense that, it made people to trust the process of election more than before now. The only issue with BVAS are network and maybe other man made constraints.

Finally, he noted that the electronic devices may have not been effectively utilized during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria as a way for INEC to rig the election as they failed the public in that regard.

Another interviewee, (a party agent) noted that the staff especially INEC adhoc staff seems not to be well trained for that job giving the way and manner they handled the BVAS and IReV machines. She noted that she was disenfranchised from voting despite being available to vote from morning till late at night when the counting was done. Asked what happened, she replied “The INEC staff did not know that they were supposed to make use of all the BVAS machine given to them.” She emphasized that the BVAS machine were marked in alphabetical order with the machines containing the data of different eligible voters based on the alphabet that starts their surname. She was checked by various machines which did not show her details until someone noted late in the evening that all the machines ought to have been checked, especially to check the one that has an alphabet of her surname. She concurred with first interviewee in response to why the electronic devices were not effectively utilized during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. She noted INEC deliberately wanted to disenfranchise people from the South East in order to get their numbers to be low, hence, the non-appropriate training given to their staff. Similarly, another interviewee (Presiding Officer), responded that some of the hindrances to the effective and efficient working of the BVAS machine was down to logistical hurdles as well as voter and polling staff awareness. He noted that some of the election officials and staff were not fully trained on how to operate the BVAS system effectively, leading to operational inefficiencies. He went further to state that there was a general lack of awareness among voters and some polling staff about the BVAS system, which contributed to confusion and slower processes. On how these affected the integrity of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, he noted that the delays and

disruptions may have contributed to reduced voter confidence in the electoral process in general. When nudged furthermore with specific attention to the BVAS, he maintained that the BVAS system is quite well and in order just that manipulations which are man-made is the only negative aspect of the system, hence, concluded that the adoption of BVAS raised the confidence of the people in the election. The responses of the other interviewees did not markedly depart from the views canvassed above. The conclusion is in line cum similar to the findings of the quantitative analysis of data from our research question.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into election administration in Nigeria represents a significant advancement in the democratic process. The utilization of BVAS in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria marked a crucial step forward in the country’s electoral process. These devices were meant to digitalize the electoral process with the intent to enhancing the efficiency, transparency, and security of the election thereby streamlining the voting process, reduce the incidence of electoral fraud, and provide timely updates to the electorate and others. However, the utilization of this device in the election also highlighted several challenges, including issues related to technical glitches, appropriate training of INEC staff for efficient and effective use of the device, and other man-made setbacks. Addressing these challenges is essential for further improving the electoral process in future elections. Continued investment in ICT infrastructure, coupled with comprehensive training and public awareness campaigns, will be crucial in ensuring that technology can be leveraged effectively to support democratic practices in Nigeria. Overall, the 2023 general election demonstrated the potential of ICT to transform electoral process in Nigeria, setting a precedent for future elections and offering valuable insights into the role of technology in modernizing and securing democratic practices.

REFERENCES

- Adegboyega, Uzamere, Aminu, Amakiri, Onyinloye, & Onibiyo (2023). Impact of incessant violence and bimodal voter accreditation system on Nigeria electoral body’s preparedness for 2023 general election. *International Journal of Social Science, Management, Peace and Conflict Research (IJSMPCR)*, 1(1), 1-13
- Adepetun, A. (2019, February 13). Failing card readers raise fresh concern. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/news/failing-card-readers-raise-fresh-concern/>.

- Amachi, L. N. & Ezeirim, G. (2021). The 2015 Biometric Voting System and the Politics of Free, Fair and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of International Politics*, 3(1), 1-22.
- Asoya, N. P. (2023). The role of electoral commissions in the emergence of legitimate governments: A study of the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. *Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 7(6), 1-19.
- Chukwu, P. (2007). The 1999 Constitution and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): Prospects for impartial supervision and conduct of elections. In A. M. Jega & O. Ibeanu (Eds), *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Nigeria Political Science Association
- Daily Trust. (2022, February 28). A warm welcome to the new Electoral Act. Daily Trust Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/a-warm-welcome-to-the-new-electoral-act/>.
- Egwu, S. (2007). Nigerian elections since 1999: What does democracy mean? *Journal of African Election*, 8(1), 108-144
- Eme, M. (2022, April 26). Nigeria: The Electoral Act 2022: Key changes and impact on the 2023 elections. Online Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/constitutional-administrative-law/1185368/the-electoral-act-2022-key-changes-and-impact-on-the-2023-elections->.
- Fatai, A. (2022, February 13). Digital technology can improve Nigeria's elections: lessons from 2019. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/digital-technology-can-improve-nigerias-elections-lessons-from-2019-17551>
- Gamji, M. B., Kara, N., Nasidi, Q. Y., & Abdul, I. (2022). The challenges of digital divide and the use of web 2.0 platforms as knowledge sharing tools among Nigerian academics. *Information Development*, 38(1), 49-159.
- Gelb, A., & Clark, J. (2013). Identification for development: The biometrics revolution (Center for Global Development Working Paper No. 315). Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. Retrieved from https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/identification-development-biometrics-revolution_0.pdf
- Gelb, A. & Diofasi, A. (2016). Biometric elections in poor countries: Wasteful or a worthwhile investment? Working Paper 435. Washington DC: CGD
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2022a). 2023: Get used to new Electoral Act, we'll scrupulously apply the laws, INEC Chairman tells parties. Retrieved from <https://www.inecnigeria.org/2023-get-used-to-new-electoral-act-well-scrupulously-apply-the-laws-inec-chairman-tells-parties/>.
- Independent National Electoral Commission. (2022b). Remarks by the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mahmood Yakubu. A paper presented at the third quarterly meeting with political parties for the year 2022 held at the INEC Conference Room, Abuja, on Wednesday, 26th October, 2022
- Ihuoma, C. (2022, February 1). Electoral reform: Buhari gets 6th chance as national Assembly transmits amended bill. The ICIR. Retrieved from <https://www.icirnigeria.org/electoral-reform-buhari-gets-6th-chance-as-national-assembly-transmits-amended-bill/>
- International IDEA. (2024). Addressing Nigeria's unresolved electoral reform issues. Commentary presented at the Nigerian Bar Association Annual General Conference. International IDEA.
- Itodo, S. (2022). Inspiring confidence in the BVAS and electronic transmission of election results: Seven urgent actions for INEC. Stockholm: International IDEA
- Iwuoha, V. C. (2018). ICT and elections in Nigeria: Rural dynamics of biometric voting technology adoption. *Africa Spectrum*, 53(3), 89-113
- Jega, A. & Ibeanu, O. (Eds.). (2007). *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Nigeria Political Science Association
- Jimoh, A. M., & Olatunji, K. (2022, September 15). CUPP raises the alarm over alleged adulteration of voter register. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/news/cupp-raises-the-alarm-over-alleged-adulteration-of-voterregister/>.
- Kassem, S. D., & Osasona, S. H. (2021). Smart card reader and election credibility in Nigeria's fourth republic. *Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*, 2(2), 1-10.
- Ladipo, E., & Onyemaechi, F. (2022, March 14). How voting system has evolved since 1999. Retrieved from <https://businessday.ng/technology/article/how-voting-system-has-evolved-since-1999/>.
- Muhammed, U. (2023, April 15). Tribunal receives 18 petitions. Daily Trust. Retrieved from <https://dailytrust.com/tribunal-receives18-petitions/>.
- Ndujihe, C., & Akinrefon, D. (2023, April 11). 2023 polls: Candidates from 10 political parties file 436 petitions. Vanguard. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/04/2023-polls-candidates-from10-parties-file436-petitions/>
- Nnochiri, I. (2023, May 26). Ebonyi Gov Poll: Tribunal receives 3 petitions, begins hearing. Vanguard. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/05/ebonyi-gov-polltribunal-receives-3-petitions-begins-hearing-friday/>
- Nwangwu, C., Otu, O.A. & Onah, V.C. (2018), Elixir of electoral fraud: The impact of digital technology on the

2015 general elections in Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences*, (4), 2-19

Nwonwu, C., Mwai, P., & Igonikon, K. (2023, May 16). Nigeria election: The mystery of the altered results in disputed poll. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/65163713>.

Oddih, M. (2007). Electoral fraud and the democratic process: Lessons from the 2003 election. In A. M. Jega & O. Ibeanu (Eds), *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Nigeria Political Science Association

Onapajo, H. (2020). The tragedy of the umpire: the electoral management body and Nigeria's 2019 general elections. *The Round Table*, 109(4), 368-376.

Onuoha, F. C., Okafor, J. C., Ojewale, O., & Okoro, C. (2020). Militarisation of the 2019 general elections and electoral integrity in Nigeria, *The Round Table*, 109(4), 406-418.

Onyekwere, M. O., Adibe, J. & Nwoke, C. (2020). Nigeria's 2019 Democratic experience: Elections, Politics, Governance and Security. Adonis & Abbey Publishers

Owuoyele, T. (2023). From Obi to Fayemi, the origin of off-cycle governorship elections. foundation for Investigative Journalism, Retrieved from <https://fij.ng/article/from-obito-fayemi-the-origin-of-off-cycle-governorship-elections/>.

Oyero, K. (2023, February 28). PDP, LP, ADC demand fresh election, want INEC chair to step aside. Channels TV. Retrieved from <https://www.channelstv.com/2023/02/28/breaking-pdp-labour-party-adc-demand-fresh-election-want-inec-chairman-to-step-aside/>.

Petitpas, A. Jaquet, J. M., & Sciarini, P. (2021). Does e-voting matter for turnout, and to whom? *Electoral Studies*, 71(10), 2-14

Piccolino, G. (2015). Infrastructural state capacity for democratization? Voter registration and identification in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana compared. *Democratization*, 23(3), 498-519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.983906>

Sulaimon, A. (2023, February 25). #NigeriaElections2023: INEC backtracks on promise to upload results from polling units. The Punch. <https://punchng.com/nigeriaelections2023-inec-reneges-on-promise-to-upload-results-from-polling-units/>

Winner, L. (1969). Cybernetics and political language. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 14, 117