

Card Reader Technology and Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Political atmosphere in Nigeria has been comparatively liberalized in contrast to what obtained under military rule. Since democracy became the opium of the Nigerian Political System two decades ago, attempts have been made to deepen democracy and make it take a strong foothold in Nigeria political system. Scholars are of the opinion that the 1999 Political Process leaves much to be desired being that it was horridly packaged by the military. The 2003 and 2007 were worse off. This made the people politically disillusioned and apathetic. Events in the 2011 and 2015 General Elections however have increased political activism in Nigeria. The introduction of technology in electioneering process in Nigeria has brought along with it, a measure of credibility and transparency in elections. Notwithstanding, the inability of the INEC to automate the card reader such that allows voters to vote anywhere they are once they are accredited has disenfranchised many a Nigerian from Political Participation. Democracy is about participation and a product of sweat, toil, creativity, blood, and sacrifice of millions of people across space and time in the human struggles for a better life. Therefore, to negate democracy and freedom of choice of the people is to negate this history of struggle and the contribution of these struggles to human progress and further advancement of these struggles to greater heights. To this extent, until the card reader is automated to allow voter to vote anywhere they are once they are accredited, the publicity on card reader as ground breaking in Nigerian political development is a farce.

Keywords: *Card reader technology, Political participation*

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Background to the Study

The Political environment in Nigeria has been reasonably liberalized compared to what was obtainable in the military era. Ever since democracy became the opium of the Nigerian Political System two decades ago, attempts have been made to deepen democracy and make it take a strong foothold in Nigeria's political system. Scholars are of the opinion that the 1999 Political Process leaves much to be desired being that it was horridly packaged by the military. The 2003 and 2007 were worse off. This made the people politically disillusioned and apathetic. The incidence of apathy to the political process is evident in voter turnout, which has been fluctuating since the return to democracy in 1999. According to data made available by Agu, Okeke and Idike (2013), voters' turnout in the 1999 general election was not quite impressive. In 2003, the number of registered voters increased as well as the number of voters' turnout. But in 2007, despite the increased number of registered voters, the total vote cast dropped significantly. This is for the presidential election. In a similar vein, Afrobarometer (2007) observe that the support for democracy diminished moderately from 80% to 71% and had been relatively steady since 2001. The survey carried out by Afrobarometer (2007) clearly shows that Nigerians consistently support democracy but are much less enthusiastic about the way democracy actually works in their country. From a high percentage of 84% in 1999, immediately after the transition to democracy, popular support plummeted to 25% in 2005 before rebounding in 2007 to 37% according to this report.

However, the introduction of technology in electioneering process in Nigeria in the 2015 general elections has brought along with it, a measure of credibility, transparency and confidence in the electoral elections. Notwithstanding this giant stride, the inability of the INEC to automate the card reader such that allows voters to vote anywhere and everywhere they are once they are accredited has disenfranchised many a Nigerian from the Political process. This again has raised some fundamental questions about the brand of democracy on offer in Nigeria. According to Nnoli (2011). Democracy is about participation. It is a product of sweat, toil, creativity, blood, and sacrifice of millions of people across space and time in the human struggles for a better life. Therefore, to negate democracy and freedom of choice of the people is to negate this history of struggle and the contribution of these struggles to human progress and further advancement of these struggles to greater heights. Based on the forgoing, the problem of this paper is to interrogate carefully, the extent to which the introduction of smart card reader in electioneering process in Nigeria has encouraged political participation and political development and its otherwise has led to the disenfranchisement of many a Nigeria from political process.

The Concept of Political Participation

The concept of political participation is associated with democracy, which is traditionally considered as the government of the people by the people and for the people. Since democracy is the rule by the people, then the question of who, not only participate, but the quality of their participation and its attendant impact in overall political decision making process becomes very relevant here. Political participation connotes the political

actions of the citizens designed to influence the political process. It involves the real or actual involvement of the citizenry to influence directly or indirectly the directions of government or more precisely the output or outcome of the political process (Ikelegbe, 1998). Political participation describes the extent to which individual members of the society shares, take part or get involved in the political life of that society. From the opinions of scholars above, it is clear that participation is central to politics especially in a democratic system.

Historically, modern democratic theory owes much to ancient Greek thought. For the Greeks, citizenship and political participation were one and the same thing. One was accorded citizenship as recognition of his worth, and was so expected to perform his civic duty of discussing and deciding public issues. Aristotle is quoted in Rosen and Wolff, (1999:156) as comparing citizens with sailors: The safety of the voyage is the business of them all, for each of the sailors aims at that. Similarly, the citizens, though unlike the sailors, have safety of the society as their business. Maintaining further, Rosen and Wolff, (1999:155), hold that, constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands of the people.... When it is a question of putting one person before another in position of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. Political participation in this case could be referred to as those voluntary activities, by which members share in the formation of public policy which includes voting, seeking information, attending and discussing, political meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives (McClosky 1968).

A critical look at the submission of McClosky reveals that political participation is voluntary though, it failed to state the rationale behind the political actions of people. Furthermore, it failed to state the consequences of such voluntary or involuntary actions of man with respect to politics. Politics as we know can be used to better the lives of people in a political community. Politics opens up a vista of opportunity for the individual to widen and express his freedom of choice; a choice that will further his interests or fetter his ambitions. If there is no motivation and if there is no consequences of action of man then participation in politics is not worth it. Political participation therefore includes those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics consequent upon the benefits of such actions, (Oji & Okafor, 2000).

Political participation could be conventional or orthodox and unconventional or unorthodox. Citing Janda et al (1989) to support this view, Okafor and Okeke, (2002:33) state that, 'conventional participation is a relatively routine behavior that uses the institutional channels of representative government, especially campaigning for candidates and voting in elections. Unconventional participation is relatively uncommon behavior that challenges or defies government channels of political communications (and this is personally distressful to participant and their opponents)'. Connecting to the above therefore, conventional participation is legal, constitutional, acceptable and normal.

Activities here may include: voting, campaigns, attendance to party meetings, expressing political opinions, standing for elections, registration as a party member and as voter for an election, contest for elective offices, and party funding, etc. To Okafor and Okeke (2002), conventional (orthodox) political participation is two-pronged. There could be supportive participation or influencing participation. Under the supportive dimension of political participation, the citizens express allegiance or loyalty to the state and government. Examples include singing the national anthem and pledge or making reverence to such symbols as national flag and the coat of arms, turning out for voting purposes, etc. The influencing dimension of political participation is concerned with efforts to modify or reverse government policy to suit political interests. Example includes trying to secure some benefits from government, asking for special social or welfare services from the government, such as setting up health centre, construction or rehabilitation of roads, siting a public school or police post, and so on.

On the other hand, unconventional political participation includes those activities that are not acceptable, not regarded as lawful or legal, not sanctioned or not normal. They include such activities as riots, strikes, violent demonstrations, arson, boycotts, rebellion, terrorism, cultism, protests and the like (Okafor & Okeke, 2002). To Okafor and Okeke therefore, a higher propensity for the emergence of unconventional participation is accentuated by the existence of narrow as well as very limited conventional modes. For people to express their feelings and be heard under a limited conventional modes make them to resort to violence and unconventional approaches.

Utume (2005), looks at political participation to include a range of actions from the benefits of the outcome. To him, registering and voting at election, campaigning for support of party or candidate at election, holding party offices, lobbying for appointment into offices or for policies and projects in government, etc are part of political participation. To Jibo (2003), political participation is the civic duty of all citizens; its high level is an indication of the political health of a nation while its non-existence for individual citizens is an indication of the political poverty. The assertion by Jibo supports the presentation by Devos (1921) that political participation has to do with creating avenues for people to take part in politics, which to him results in the formation of political parties to serve the interest of the people.

Again, Devos definition of political participation appears to be narrow since it only takes into consideration only the activities of pressure groups as an aspect of participation. The submission by Oji (1997) fills this space created by Devos's definition. According to Oji (1997), political participation includes such actions by private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics. To him, the participation can either be direct in the sense of being involved in governance or indirect by observing and making contribution to the act of governance. It is through this that government can hope to realize its objectives of being responsive to the wishes of the people. Going by the assertion of Aristotle that man is a political animal, it goes to show that man is interested in things that happen around him. For such perceptive attitudes to be properly harnessed,

government ought to encourage its citizens to contribute to its programmes and policies especially by devising means of eschewing apathetic feeling which might arise as a result of its inability to perform or by cumbersome political process that deliberately disenfranchised the citizen. The participation of the people is therefore *a sine qua non* for good government.

Nie and Verba (1975) define political participation as consisting of those levels of activities by private citizen which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take. Huntington and Dominguez (1975) define political participation as the activity of private citizens designed to influence government's decision making. According to Shapiro et al (2008), political participation in a democracy can take many forms, ranging from voting for representatives at regular intervals to voting on policies in referenda, forming political groups, and engaging in legal or illegal protest. He opines that individuals who are engaged in such participation expect or at least hope that these actions will have some impact on the content of government policies; however, the effects of political participation might not be limited to outcomes. Political participation might also affect individual life satisfaction and happiness.

From these definitions the following conclusions can be drawn about political participation:

1. It is concerned with influencing the composition and conducts, or personnel and policies of government
2. It is not limited to voting
3. It concerned with the activities of private citizens
4. It could be positive or negative, though only positive is approved and often emphasized, but other nefarious activities aimed at sabotaging the efforts of government such as organized terrorism could be political participation when they aim at achieving political objectives.

The definitions put forward by Oji and Jibo appear to capture more grounds about political participation, it encompasses all aspects of participation, including the active, passive and economic participation which are geared towards development. By the process of political participation, the citizenry are expected to identify with governmental programmes, but where such programmes conflict with the interest and expectations of the people, they can be mobilized by interest groups not to participate in them with the hope that their non-participation will jolt government and influence its position on certain issues.

The reason for such anti-government policy stance can be attributed to the 'trust syndrome' meaning that the people have lost confidence in the government and have therefore adopted the principle of 'efficiency powerlessness' based on their feelings that no matter what they do, government will not take note of their wishes, a situation which if persisted creates apathy and disloyalty among the citizenry. On the whole, political participation include, a variety of behavioral patterns that encompass (a) electoral

activity, including voting, working in campaigns, seeking to persuade others to vote for a given candidate or party, or otherwise trying to alter the outcome of election; (2) lobbying, which means contacting government officials to influence their attitudes and behaviour on issues that affect significant numbers of people; (3) organizational activity other than lobbying that is designed to influence the general climate within which policy making takes place (such as efforts to influence public opinion on a given issue); (4) individual contacting of public officials to express grievances on a matter relating to a single individual; and (5) violence, meaning efforts to influence government decisions by doing physical damage to persons or property, (Clark, 1991).

The belief therefore is that it is more democratic when more participate in public affairs of a state. However, since the times of the ancient Greeks reasons have been found to exclude many from political participation. The problem appears to be far from being overcome. But according to Lively (1975:12) the main thrust of modern democratic thought has been the demand that all be treated as capable of citizenship unless very strong evidence of personal incapacity is produced. Yet, measuring 'very strong evidence' becomes a matter of conjecture.

Models of Political Participation

Ginsberg and Stone (1986) hold the view that political participation is most noticeable at voting in elections. Elections are institutional mechanisms of democracy because it provides opportunity for the citizens to make choices or preferences with regard to the candidates or issues involved. Beside the socializing effect of elections, they equip the citizens with the capacity to avoid unconventional political practices, institutionalize citizens' conviction and loyalty and this makes for a responsible and responsive government. Based on the above, the following models have crystallized: they are: (a) Majoritarian Model and (b) Pluralist Model

Majoritarian Model

Okafor and Okeke (2002:37) hold that it is only through mass participation in voting by citizens that government can respond to popular demands. It is a narrow approach to political participation and favors conventional orthodox pattern of participation. Since it appears circumscribed and limited to voting in elections, it seems to discourage the efforts of individuals that may wish to exercise some influence over the actions of government. In this way, it restricts individual freedom since only mass participation is its concern. The crux of this school of thought is such that seek to evade individual participation. This means issues/policies that do not have direct bearing on the interest of the majority are sidelined by the government. Why we may say that the view of these scholars support conventional political participation, it is also true that it inadvertently encourages unorthodox activities. This is because individuals whose interests are dashed can mobilize the masses to frustrate the genuine plans of the government to help the generality of the people.

Pluralist Model

Pluralism seeks to meet the yearnings of citizens who may wish to seek governments, individuals or private attention. To Janda et al (1989), it is a decentralized and organizationally complex form of government that allows many points of access and is well suited to various forms of conventional participation aside from voting. Related to the above, pluralism provides citizens opportunity to lobby for their interests, allows the government to deal with individuals as individuals and not necessarily as mass. Pluralism holds the sociological character of the state. It recognizes the role of several associations in the society formed by men in pursuance of their multifarious interests. Pluralism point of view of political participation ensures that individuals could influence policy making through their inputs thereby making them realize their potentials through political participation.

Factors that Affect Political Participation

Factors that affect political participation include political culture, individual's socio-economic status, type of government and party system, and gender. Suberu (1991) notes that the family influences political participation of an individual through (a) authority pattern in the family that socializes an individual on how to relate with authority within a broader society (b) socio-economic status of the family determines an individual's social class (c) level of parents civic orientation or knowledge determines how much they can transfer to their offspring (d) parent's level of political involvement can motivate and serve as role model for the children (e) prevailing political culture. Political culture refers to pre-dispositions that help political actor to understand and interpret objective situations, to develop emotions that move them to act and to provide goals for their actions. The following have been highlighted for discussion.

Economic Factors

As earlier maintained, man as a social being, has the capacity to participate in politics under normal circumstances. But given the low level of productive forces in Nigeria, the people are poor and therefore want to be motivated with economic benefits or the promise of such before they can participate in political activity. The economic factor is therefore an effective strategy for the mobilization of the people for political participation. According to Jack (1983), poverty is the shortage of necessities of life, when things are so scarce and dear that people are unable to obtain sufficiently to satisfy their basic needs. Such needy persons or communities could easily be mobilized by the promise of such and other economic incentives to participate in politics in order to improve their economic wellbeing.

To Makar (1975), the idea of people seeking for material benefits and monetary gains has bastardized the culture and political orientation of the people. Ionem (1993) alluded that all aspiring politicians first of all look at the financial involvement before embarking on any political expedition because money is a tool for mobilization of the people toward political participation. In his contribution, Joseph (1987) maintains that politics is fundamentally about the struggle over the right to allocate the scarce resources of the

society. In Nigeria, however, the state has increasingly become a magnet for all forms of political and economic life consuming the attention of traders, builders, contractors, farmers, traditional rulers, teachers, as much as that of politicians or politically motivated individual in the usual sense of these terms. Also those individuals who support the party in office are often rewarded with contracts for official projects enabling them to pass on largesse to those further down the line that look to them for generosity.

According to Rimmer (1981) after 1945, the prime function of the Nigerian state became that of promoting policy on improvement in the material welfare of the people and as a consequence suasion of the state and or its agencies was critical for all who had welfare to be promoted. Such a consideration applied much to the launching of private business. Political lobbying becomes a condition for commercial success. The fortunes of a business community or occupational group could depend heavily on political favor. This development to a large extent spurs people into participation in politics to realize these benefits. Contributing to the economic factor as a tool for participation, Joseph (1991) says that in Nigeria party politics has become a relentless struggle to procure individual and group benefits via the temporary appropriation of public offices which eventually reduce the electoral processes to Hobessian state of nature (war). This according to him was also responsible for the collapse of the First Republic and its eventual overthrow by the military in 1966.

According to Whitaker (1981), individuals seek to participate in politics because they want people whom they can turn to for help in time of need. Upporting this assertion, Mvendaga (1993) maintains that the Tiv people were mobilized under J.S Tarka on the platform of United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) by the use of economic strategy, because J. S Tarka told them that the Tiv people had a seat in the Northern House of Parliament which had been converted to Sarduana's foot rest because it was empty, and to circumvent this, the Tiv people had to elect a representative to the parliament so that they could also have their share of the national cake. Thus between 1954-59, the Tiv people according to Tseayo, (1975) elected senator J. S Tarka as member of the federal house of representative to represent Jemgbar constituency, E.Y Oradi, Peter Tarkende, V. T. Shirsha, Kundu Swem and Jechira Deem Kpum were elected from Ukum/Shitile, Ihiarev/masev, Ihiarev/Nongov, Kwande respectively to represent their various constituencies by touching their economic life.

The economic factor has also been emphasized by Easton (1908) and to him, the rationale behind politics, is the equitable distribution of resources. To Paulina and Ogogyi (2014), the issue is that politics of wealth distribution normally leads to conflict which might affect the stability of the nation. In order to avoid these conflicts, there is a dire need for the equitable sharing of this resources based on certain modalities agreeable to the people concerned. This supports the submission of Lasswell (1958) who sees politics as, 'who gets what, when and how'. To Leeds (1975) politics as incentive gives money, food, information, job, friendship social standing, privilege and the right to make laws for the improvement of the society. Going by this assertion by Leeds, people participate in politics because they want to have an opportunity to contribute to the political wellbeing of their societies.

The point here is that political power gives economic power. Mvendaga (1993:19) agrees that the appointment of Akaahan, J as the army chief of staff though under the military era, pleased the Tiv people because it further brought them nearer to the locus of national power. With Tarka in the federal executive council and Akaahan as army chief of staff, the Tiv felt that if they did not get their fair share of the 'national cake' they would at least receive explanation for this from their kinsmen who were strategically placed in government. He avers further that with the appointment of professor Tseyayo as federal commissioner for Mines and Power, he would hasten the electrification, of Gboko and Katsina-Ala which had been denied these amenities. In this vein, the Idomas were rewarded with ministerial and other political appointments and provision of social amenities for their support of the NPC government (Ukpoju, 2003).

Gordon (1977) is therefore of the same view with Mvendaga(1993), Joseph (1991) and Tseyayo (1975) that the main task of the government is to reduce inequality by leveling development and controlling taxation for the benefits of the common man. These economic benefits motivate many people to participate in politics. The case of Obafemi Awolowo and Shagari during the 1979 campaigns is a typical example because most people gave them support because of their promise for the education and tax abolition policies respectively (Kpandegh, 2003). The point therefore is that, once this economic factor is denied the people or that the people have no access to the means of survival, they tend to become apathetic to politics. Hence, economic factor is key to political participation.

Cultural/Religious Factors

According to Kpandegh, (2003), the Tiv people have a political culture chequered with a mixture of sectionalism and the fear of *Tsav* and *lyuhe*; factors which combine to influence their voting behaviors. This means therefore that mobilization and participation can be easily achieved in this part of Nigeria through the use of those central values to influence their participation in politics. To Sorkaa (1993) as quoted by Kpandegh, (2003), political culture refers to values and their place in politics. It includes the belief and attitude to politics. Political values, ideologies, general cultural ethos, substantive forms of politics, sentiment and cognition. It also includes that which socializes the individual such that incorporate into him the knowledge and feeling, which concern the politics of his place. This means that a political strategy aimed at mobilizing the people through the use of such values as enumerated above promotes greater participation.

To Jibo(1993:59) Tiv politics is full of *lyuhe* (Jealousy) which is inherent in their blood. He attributed 'pull him down syndrome' to intolerance to issues, and further blamed the killing of Jonny (Unongo's nephew) to the sentiment of a Tiv man. This means that the strategy aimed at plotting against the Tiv man who is at the top is capable of recruiting a good percentage of the average Tiv man into active participation in politics. Also Leeds (1975:92) comments on the issues of political culture as a factor that could influence political participation. According to him, political culture consists of behavioral patterns, artifacts, etc which influence political decisions. These attributes give meaning to the

political system and provide the underlying assumption and rules that govern political behavior manifested in their demand to government. Henslin (1992:29), Ojo (1973), Mvendaga (1993:18) and Bascorn (1978) support cultural and religious factors as determinant of political participation in Nigeria and Africa.

To buttress the above point, Ball (1978:52) observes that all countries have their political cultures which influence their level of participation in politics. According to Ball, this culture may be homogenous which may call for a sub-culture. Citing Britain as an example, he said that in Britain there is wide spread acceptance of the belief that socially superior individuals are best suited to political decision making and this has formed their political culture upon which people are better mobilized for political participation. Other scholars like Joseph (1991) who see culture as playing a determining role on political participation maintain that Nigerian politics is a characteristic of cultural units and no spirit of nationalism. Parties have become inevitably identified with sectional groups. The victory of one group in election is therefore perceived as leading to the domination of the unsuccessful ones and this perception is usually reinforced by the misuse of state power.

To Joseph therefore, the struggle for political power and leadership go along ethnic lines. Individuals mobilized their people to capture political power in order to seek access to places of employment, taxation, education and political positions which widens the geographical range of competitive interaction. He expresses fear over the nature and dynamics of the Nigerian society with regards to the phenomenon of ethnicity and religion which for example was the reason that scared the Idomas from joining the NPN which according to them was capable of resurrecting the issue of Sharia and hence not considered Christian counterparts into position of responsibility. This fear of religious domination could constitute a good strategy for mobilization by political actors to achieve participation. Though one may be tempted to draw hasty conclusion by ones religious bias, it is a clear fact that leaders have mobilized under religious group to canvas for support in Nigeria.

Kukah (1993) is of a similar view. According to him, Nigerians discriminate according to tribe and religion. Nigerian politics according to Kukah is ethnocentric to the extent that families have become the basis for decision making with regard to feelings of nationalism. This is also seen in their comment about political figure. To him, no one ever become a leader without appealing to the religious bias of the people connectedly, Ehiedu (1996) crowns it all by saying that culture/religion and democracy are intertwined. The culture of a society plays a motivating role in membership drive of any party anywhere in the world as this explains the difference in the practice of democracy among countries.

According to Ubwa (2000), religion is understood to be a kind of belief in God or gods which entails supper natural actions of such God or gods as forming and or influencing peoples' values which values continue in the midst of other alternatives and among a people. To Lessa and Vogt (1958) religion is a system of belief and practice directed

toward the ultimate concern of the society. The above definition makes religion a central tool for the mobilization of any society whose main aim is to democratize its citizenry. In Tiv society, for example *Tsav* is part of the belief in supernatural potency personalized and internalized in man. The use of *Tsav* has in the past influenced political participation of Tiv politics. The '*Mbatsav*' were feared for the terror they brought in the forms of diseases or even death. The fear therefore becomes a strategy whereby owners of *Tsav* (witch craft) could easily mobilize people by way of intimidating people to do their will. According to Mwendaga (1993), political participation in Benue is deeply influenced by religion and culture. He cited the first and second republics as typical examples of the use of culture and religion as a strategy of mobilization and therefore included offensive songs where the Muslim supporters among the Tiv were referred to as *MbaonTswar* (people who wash anus).

To Makar (1994) *Akombo* and *Tsavare* are the centerpiece of religion of the Tiv people. Since *Akombo* is given by *Aondo*' (god) its rituals must be carried out till death. And the power to manipulate *Akombo* is vested in the elders, most of whom were members of the *Mbatsav* organization, possessing mystical powers over the affairs of the society. Elders therefore had ultimate powers to control the people. They had the view that they were the representatives of *Aondo*' on each and everything had to be channeled through them. An elder can therefore readily tell the young, I am your *Aondo* (God). Observably therefore, 'there is thus an overlay of religion and ethnicity that intensifies the north-south cultural splits, and the case can be made that the most sensitive issues now involve religion rather than ethnicity. This, is more dangerous because the north-south sharp divide is blurred by multiple ethnic identities, but is focused by the Christian –Muslim dichotomy' (Okafor & Okeke, 2002).

We believe strongly that popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structure and in designing policies and programmes that serve the interest of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in its benefits. Therefore, there must be an opening up of political process to accommodate freedom of opinions, tolerate differences, accept consensus on issues as well as ensure the effective participation of the people and their organizations and association. This requires action on the part of all, first and foremost of the people themselves. But equally important are the actions of the state and the international community, to create effective popular participation in societal and economic life. This requires that the political system evolve to allow for democracy and full participation by all sections of our societies.

Card Reader and Political Participation

The adoption of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) into the electoral process particularly in Nigeria has generated mixed reactions amongst both the voters and concern stakeholders in the political architecture of Nigeria. Global events have witnessed most Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) around the world adopting innovations and technologies with the aim of improving the electoral process. These

technological software and devices include most importantly the Smart Card Reader. Good deployment of these devices will lead to efficiency and effectiveness in elections. For example, the smart card reader played a very significant role in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, there is need to guarantee that the issues and challenges which confronted the use of the device before, during and after the elections do not reoccur in future elections especially the 2019 elections. One of such was the inability of voters to vote anywhere of their choice upon accreditation. This led to the disenfranchisement of many a Nigerian from participation in the electoral process. The 2015 election was a litmus test for the Independent Electoral Commission to take care of especially of people who may have had reason to move from one place to another because job transfer, marriage, retirement and relocation voters. This to some person have had disenfranchisement by disempowerment

When the electoral process is transparent and it is beyond any reasonable doubt, it reduces or mitigates incidences or occurrence of crisis and possible violence that characterizes elections. In order to improve upon previous election, INEC introduced biometric measures to detect fake and multiple registrations which usually create room for the perpetration of malpractices and fraud on the Election Day. The government of Cote d'ivoire, Peru and Serbia all fell in the year 2000 as a result of popular rebellions against fraudulent elections. Similarly, the so called "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004 caused presidential elections to be completely re-held after extensive fraud was demonstrated (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2015). Because the negative impacts of electoral malpractices, global attention is now focusing on how to mitigate this undemocratic behaviour and improve on the electoral process. One of such strategies to combat electoral malpractices is the introduction of information and communication technology into the electoral process. It was based on this assumption that card reader was introduced in the Nigeria electoral system in 2015 general election and it became the greatest innovative technology in Nigeria electoral system.

For this reason, a card reader was introduced in the 2015 general elections. The system recognizes the need for continuous efforts to reduce fraud so that Nigerians can have growing confidence in the fairness of elections.

The PVCs and card readers address three problems that have been a recurring issue. They are:

1. Inflation of the number of voters present in polling units
2. Misrepresentation of whether individuals are truly present.
3. Fake and multiple registrations of voters to allow for inflated turnouts

The evidence of the scale of the problem has been provided by the work of INEC between 2011 and 2015. They have identified more than 4 million multiple registrations in the 2011 register and millions more where incomplete data suggests additional serious fraud. If unaddressed multiple registration alone produces more than enough voters to swing elections. If exploited the 4m multiple registrations from 2011 represent more than 10% of the votes cast that year. This is far more than the gap between the two Presidential

candidates identified by any of the polls released ahead of 2015. The permanent voters' cards contain enough data to confirm the person holding a card is the same person that registered under that name. The PVC and card reader system completes two simple checks on Election Day:

1. That a voter is at the correct polling unit where they registered
2. That their fingerprints match with those on record on their card

Recommendations and Conclusion

The introduction of technology into the electoral process in Nigeria has generated both interests and reservations amongst voters, the public, analyst, politicians and the likes. Smart Card Reader played a significant role in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. However, there is need for the INEC to ensure that the PVC and SCR be automated such that will enable would be voter to vote anywhere once they are accredited.

INEC should make an effort to manage information about the technology and consequent changes that may occur in the process of adaption so that stakeholders do not have any doubt or unrealistic expectations. There is need to strengthen the electoral laws in conformity with the trending technology. In this case, the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) should be amended to include the use of the card reader for biometric verification of voters for the purpose of accreditation in future elections. Therefore, the National Assembly should quickly be approached by INEC to amend the electoral legal frameworks on the use of card reader in order to address the issue of legality which the card reader had generated.

Furthermore, adequate training of INEC staff and ad hoc staff should be conducted in a conducive environment ahead of time so as to give rooms for practical demonstrations of how to use the device effectively. Enough card reader should be made available during the training session. Every one of the trainee should undergo a mock test during training. Strict compliance with all instructions handed down to the trainees should be monitored. The trainees' allowances should be paid in full in order to motivate them in handling the device properly.

There is need for INEC to regularly update and re-examine the relevance of the card reader to future elections in Nigeria because technology is not static and the level of technological change is rapid such that a device used five years ago may not be too relevant to the present day. Therefore, to conduct a credible, transparent, free and fair election in the future with the use of the card reader, INEC must invest in regular staff training and development in order to be in tune with modern day technological changes that is fast occupying the democratic landscape and electoral process. Consequently, future general elections in Nigeria should gradually continue to be technologically driven.

Stakeholders including the media, political parties, civil societies, national assembly and the electorate should be adequately consulted. INEC should partner with them to carryout massive dissemination of information; sensitize them on the need to key into the technology in order to improve the electoral process and deepen the democratic process.

Electoral frauds make the citizens to lose confidence in the electoral process; and lack of confidence by the citizenry in the democratic process is an obstruction to the deepening of electoral democracy because if the citizenry does not believe in the fairness, accuracy, openness and basic integrity of the election process, the very basis of any democratic society might be threatened (Peter, 2015). Electoral fraud accordingly, has more serious political implications, in that it allows a party or candidate to take over public positions contrary to the popular will. The implication is grievous. It weakens the democratic process and usually leads to electoral chaos, political instability and insecurity.

All stakeholders including the media, political parties, civil societies, national assembly and the electorate should be adequately consulted. INEC should partner with them to carryout massive dissemination of information; sensitize them on the need to key into the technology in order to improve the electoral process and deepen the democratic process.

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