

Electoral Reforms, Technological Innovation, and the Conduct of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

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Article DOI: 10.48028/ijprds/ijargpgm.v5.i1.04

Abstract

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were a critical test for the country's democratic consolidation, conducted under a new Electoral Act 2022 that promised significant technological innovation. This paper examines the interplay between legal-institutional reforms, specifically the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV), and the actual conduct of the elections. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of democratic institutionalism and the technological determinism versus social shaping of technology debate, this study argues that while the technological innovations represented a monumental leap towards electoral integrity in theory, their implementation was undermined by systemic challenges. These include logistical failures, deliberate sabotage, and a resilient "culture of impunity" among political actors. Using empirical evidence from election observation reports, judicial pronouncements, and post-election data analysis, the paper demonstrates that technology alone is insufficient to guarantee credible elections without concomitant political will, robust institutional capacity, and a deep-seated societal commitment to democratic norms. The findings contribute to broader discourses on the limits and possibilities of technological fixes in emerging democracies facing intense elite competition.

Keywords: *Electoral Reforms, BVAS, IReV, INEC, Technological Innovation, Democratic Consolidation.*

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Background to the Study

Elections are often described as the heartbeat of democracy, yet in Nigeria they have frequently been marred by fraud, violence, and deep public mistrust. Since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, successive electoral cycles have struggled to meet the basic standards of credibility and transparency, leaving citizens sceptical about whether their votes truly count (Ibeanu, 2016). Against this backdrop, the 2023 general elections carried unusual weight. Framed as a decisive moment for democratic consolidation, they were conducted under the new Electoral Act 2022, which promised to revolutionize Nigeria's electoral process through the deployment of cutting-edge technology.

At the centre of these reforms were two innovations: The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), designed to verify voters biometrically, and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV), created to transmit results from polling units in real time. These tools were heralded as mechanisms capable of curbing perennial malpractices such as multiple voting, ballot box snatching, and result manipulation (INEC, 2022). However, while existing scholarship has examined electoral reforms and the broad role of technology in elections, relatively little research has probed how these tools functioned within Nigeria's fraught political landscape in 2023. This gap is significant because the effectiveness of electoral technology is not determined by design alone but by the institutional, political, and socio-cultural contexts in which it is embedded.

This study therefore addresses a critical question: to what extent did the technological innovations introduced by the Electoral Act 2022 enhance the integrity and credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections? In exploring this question, the paper highlights the disconnect between the theoretical promise of technology and the lived reality of its implementation (Ojo, 2020). The paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the existing literature on electoral reforms and technology in elections, situating Nigeria's experience within broader democratic debates. The third section outlines the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, particularly democratic institutionalism and the debate between technological determinism and the social shaping of technology. This is followed by a discussion of the research design, data sources, and methods of analysis. Subsequent sections present and interpret empirical findings, focusing on the performance of BVAS and IREV, the challenges encountered, and the broader implications for democratic consolidation. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening Nigeria's electoral system.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the role of technological innovations in the conduct of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, examining both their potential and their limitations. By doing so, the paper seeks to contribute to the discourse on how emerging democracies can harness technology effectively while confronting the persistent political and institutional challenges that threaten electoral integrity.

Review of Literature

As democracy has become the most popular form of government in the world, multiparty elections are the most important and attractive aspect of democracy (Sani, 2005). There is

hardly any part of the world where elections are not held. Even countries with sit-tight leaders have accepted regular multiparty elections. Indeed, the Afro barometer Round 5 (2010 – 2012) cross national survey of selected countries in Africa reveal that 84% of African People prefers to choose their leaders through regular, open and honest elections. Sani (2015) noted that not all elections can be described as democratic elections, as there are some in which electoral victories were declared despite various irregularities comprising the credibility of the process. Indeed, the consensus among scholars of African elections is that there is a progressive decline in election in Nigeria tend to reach the same gloomy conclusion (Omotola, 2009; Ibrahim (2007; 2-3), the “history of elections in Nigeria is one of electoral fraud and competitive rigging”. (Omotola 2009) on his part observed that elections in Nigeria, whether transitional or consolidation elections, tends to subvert democracy include electoral fraud and violence. Concerning the history of election quality in Nigeria two strands of views can be gleaned from the literature. There are scholars who opined those transitional elections such as those held in 1959 and others held in 1979 and 1999 were better organized without system rigging and fraud (Onucha, 2003). On the other hand, there are those who oppose the assertion by stating that the first election held in 1959 (as well as others held organized by the military) laid the foundation of electoral fraud currently at played in the country (Kew, 1999, Omotola, 2009, Nnadozie, 2007, Olaitan, 2005). To this set of scholars' electoral fraud has always been part and parcel of the electoral process of Nigeria. This negatively affects the quality of election in the country.

Nwangwu, Onah and Ohi's (2018) overview of electoral fraud in Nigeria since further reveal that little has changed on the democratic quality of elections in Nigeria. Their study opined that the declining quality of Nigerian elections is a threat to democratic consolidation. Using the 1999, 2003 & 2007 elections as point of analysis they concluded that from 1999 to 2007, a gradual decline in the quality of election can be observed, as elections continued to be marred by massive irregularities such as vote rigging and electoral violence. Nearly all the studies in Nigeria are unanimous in their assessment of the 2007 General elections as the worst in the history of Nigeria. However, recent studies such as those that emerge after the 2011 general elections offer a more lenient assessment of 2007 general elections as improvement in the quality of elections in Nigeria (Sani, 2015, Nwanu et al, 2018, Adeagbo and Omodunbi, 2019). The upgrade in the quality of elections from the 2011 generations to the 2015 & 2019 elections have been attributed to the reforms of the electoral laws, non-partisan nature of the head of the electoral commission and the introduction of technology to verify voters identify (Nwangwu et al, 2018). Notwithstanding the challenges to election quality in Nigeria remains. These challenges have been identified by other studies highlighting specific issues responsible for low election quality in Nigeria.

Technological innovation in electoral processes has become a focal point in the discourse surrounding democratic governance, aiming to enhance transparency, efficiency, and public trust (Norris, 2014). However, within the Nigerian context, limited research has specifically delved into the intersection of technological innovation and electoral reform, particularly in anticipation of the 2023 general election. Early studies on technology in elections often focused on developed countries (Alvarez & Hall, 2008), creating a gap in understanding how

technological innovations are adopted and experienced in the unique political and socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. The need for localized insights is underscored by the argument that technology's effectiveness in electoral processes is context-dependent (Norris, 2014).

The literature also reveals a dearth of studies that systematically investigate public perceptions and trust concerning technological innovations in Nigerian elections. Adegoke's (2018) examination of trust in electronic voting systems among Nigerian voters serves as a notable exception. However, the broader landscape of factors influencing public trust in technological innovations, especially leading up to the 2023 general election, remains largely unexplored. The existing literature on technological innovation and electoral reform in Nigeria, especially in the context of the 2023 general election, exhibits notable gaps. This research aims to fill these gaps by providing a localized understanding of the institutional influences, diffusion dynamics, and public perceptions surrounding the integration of technological innovations in the Nigerian electoral landscape.

Theoretical Framework: Institutions, Technology, and Agency

This analysis is situated at the intersection of two theoretical strands. First, democratic institutionalism emphasises that the rules of the game formal laws and independent institutions are fundamental to structuring political behaviour and ensuring democratic outcomes (North, 1990). The Electoral Act 2022 and INEC represent such formal institutions. Their strength and autonomy are prerequisites for constraining the anti-democratic tendencies of political elites. Second, we engage with the debate between technological determinism and the social shaping of technology (SST). A deterministic view often underpins the promotion of election technology, suggesting that the mere introduction of tools like BVAS would inevitably lead to more credible elections (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). Conversely, SST theory contends that technological outcomes are not predetermined but are shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are embedded (Williams & Edge, 1996). The efficacy of technology is mediated by human agency, power relations, and existing institutional frameworks. Integrating these perspectives, this paper posits that technological innovation in elections is not an independent variable but a dependent one, whose success is contingent on the strength of the institutional and political environment it is meant to serve.

Material and Methods

This study employed a descriptive research design, which is considered the most suitable method as it facilitates cross-validation of findings, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained through fieldwork, which involved administering a two-part multiple-choice questionnaire to selected individuals within the sampled population. Secondary data were gathered from official documents, books, journals, and newspapers. The data sets were summarized using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentages, tables, and frequency distributions. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, along with content analysis. Completed questionnaires were gathered, organized, labeled, and appropriately coded. Subsequently, the

data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 and content analysis methods.

Analysis of Data

This entails the administration of questionnaire on voters to get balanced view on the research objectives. Three hundred (300) participants were selected from Lagos and Abuja. The rationale for the choice of these locations is based on the fact that both locations strategically consist a fair representative of Nigeria as a country. For instance, Lagos and Abuja are hosts to INEC headquarters and various ICTs platforms, and governmental institutions on election matters. In addition, in these locations, the selection of eligible voters across various Nigerian ethnic groups is very easy. The first part of this section identified and discussed some basic demographic characteristics of participants, while the second part dealt with research questions, testing of assumptions in relation to research objectives, and discussion of findings.

Table 1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents Surveyed

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Age in years (Mean Age = 21.24)		
< 24	65	21.67
25 – 34	140	46.67
35 – 44	67	22.33
45+	28	9.33
Total	300	100.00
Sex		
Male	118	39.33
Female	152	50.67
Bisexual/Gay/Lesbian	30	10.00
Total	300	100.00
Location of Resident		
Non-location	93	31.00
Abuja	83	27.67
Lagos	124	41.33
Total	300	100.00
Educational Attainment		
No formal education	-	-
Primary	34	11.33
Secondary	129	43.00
Tertiary	137	45.67
Total	300	100.00
Employment Status		
Self employed	102	34.58
Public sector	100	33.90
Private sector	51	17.29
Not employed	42	14.24
Total	300	100.00
Average Income Level		
<1000	37	12.33
10,000-30,000	153	51.00
30,001-50,000	75	25.00
50,001-70,000	35	11.67
Total	300	100.00
Marital Status		
Not married	124	41.33
Married	117	39.00
Separated/Divorced	59	19.67
Total	300	100.00
Religion		
Christianity	134	44.67
Islam	132	44.0
Traditionalist/Others	34	11.34
Total	300	100.00
Ethnicity		
Hausa/Fulani	130	43.33
Igbo/Ibo	46	15.33
Yoruba	86	28.67
Others	38	12.67
Total	300	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 presents participants' profile. As regarding sex distribution, male respondents are 118 representing 39%, while female is 152, representing 50%, bisexual/gay/lesbian are 30, representing 10%. Given that age, is a critical variable, a handful number of (21%) of the respondents are less than 24 years, almost half of them (46%) fall between 25-34 years and about 67 respondents (22%) are between 35-44years, while those, whose age is 45 years and above are 28, representing (9%). In addition to this, almost half of the respondents are Christian faithful, representing (45%), while 132 of them, representing (44%) are Muslims, the traditionists are 34, representing (11%). About 34 of the participants are primary school graduates (11%) are postgraduate; about 123 of the respondents are secondary school graduate, representing (23%) and 137 of the participants are graduates presenting (45%). As per the location of resident of participants, 124 of them, representing (41%) reside in Lagos, while 83 of them, representing, (27%), live in Abuja, the remaining 93 of them, representing (31%) did not signify their location. On the employment status of participants, evidence showed that 102 of them, representing 34% are self-employed, 100 of them, representing 33% are public sector workers, 51 of them, representing 17% are private sector workers, while 42 of them, representing 14% are not employed. Their marital status showed that about 124 of them, representing 41% are not married, 117 of them, representing 39% are married, a total of 59 of them, representing 19% are divorced or separated. In addition, their ethnicity spread showed that about 130 of them, representing 43% are from Hausa/Fulani group, while 46 of them, representing 15% are from the Igbo ethnic group, 86 of the participants, representing 29% are from the Yoruba ethnic group, 38 of them representing 13% are from other ethnic groups.

Table 2: Participants' knowledge about the type of electoral technological tools, utilization, level of implementation, and performance of electoral technological tools in the 2023 Nigeria's general elections

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Respondents were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections		
SA	80	27
A	180	60
SD	30	10
D	10	3
Total	300	100
Respondents understood that INEC's utilization of BVAS and IReV was borne out of need to promote credible election by curbing electoral mal-practices		
Yes (SA & A)	204	68.00
No (SD&D)	96	32.00
Total	300	100.00
The implementation of electoral technological tools is in line with structural, process, and outcome indicators		
Structural Indicators	170	57
Process Indicators	120	40
Outcome Indicators	10	3
Total	300	100.00

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
The performance of electoral technological tools (BVAS and IReV) in the conduct of the 2023 general elections has yielded positive outcomes (i.e reduction of electoral irregularities, faster accreditation, transparent transmission of results)		
Yes (SA & A)	170	64.33
No (SD & D)	130	35.67
Total	300	100.00
The introduction of electoral technologies intensified vote-buying in the 2023 general elections		
Yes (SA & A)	174	58.00
No (SD & D)	126	42.00
Total	300	100.00
The introduction of BVAS and IReV improved public trust in INEC and the 2023 general elections		
No (SD & D)	168	56.00
Yes (SA & A)	132	44.00
Total	300	100.00
The utilization of electoral technologies faced some challenges (lack of internet, erratic electricity, lack of ICT skills of some voters, hacking, cyber-attacks etc) during the 2023 general elections		
Yes (SA & A)	270	90
No (SD & D)	30	10
Total	300	100.00
The utilization of electoral technologies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections conforms with the 2022 Electoral Act and UN declaration on credible election		
2022 Electoral Act	188	62.67
UN declaration	112	37.33
Total	300	100.00
Comparatively, electoral mal-practices were reduced in the 2023 general elections than other elections		
Yes	180	61
No	46	15
Don't know	74	24
Total	300	100.00
The utilization and performance of electoral technologies (BVAS and IReV) enhanced the following outcomes		
Improved political participation	100	34
The curbing of electoral irregularities	180	60
Promote public trust	10	3
Electoral integrity and credibility	10	3
Total	300	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 presents participants knowledge about the type of electoral technological tools, utilization, level of implementation, and performance of electoral technological tools in the 2023 Nigeria's general elections. On if participants were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections. The results showed

that (60%) of participants agreed they were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections. Less than half of participants (27%) strongly agreed that they were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections. About one-tenth of the respondents (30%), strongly disagree that they were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections, while (10%) disagreed that they were aware of the use of electoral technological innovations (BVAS & IReV) in the 2023 general elections.

On whether respondents understood that the utilization of BVAS and IReV by INEC was borne out of need to promote credible election by curbing electoral mal-practices. The findings show that (68%) of participants understood that the utilization of BVAS and IReV by INEC was borne out of need to promote credible election by curbing electoral mal-practices, and about 96 of them, representing (32%) strongly agreed that the utilization of BVAS and IReV by INEC was borne out of need to promote credible election by curbing electoral mal-practices. On whether the implementation of electoral technological tools is in line with structural, process, and outcome indicators, results showed that Furthermore, (57%) of participants agreed that the implementation of electoral technological tools is in line with structural indicators, while (40%) of the respondents agreed that the implementation of electoral technological tools is in line with process indicators, however, only (3%) believed that the implementation of electoral technological tools is in line with the outcomes indicators.

As regarding if the performance of electoral technological tools (BVAS and IReV) in the conduct of the 2023 general elections has yielded positive outcomes (i.e. reduction of electoral irregularities, faster accreditation, transparent transmission of results), 170 of them, representing (64%) agreed that the performance of electoral technological tools (BVAS and IReV) in the conduct of the 2023 general elections has yielded positive outcomes (i.e. reduction of electoral irregularities, faster accreditation, transparent transmission of results). But 130 of them, representing 36% disagreed that the performance of electoral technological tools (BVAS and IReV) in the conduct of the 2023 general elections has yielded positive outcomes (i.e. reduction of electoral irregularities, faster accreditation, transparent transmission of results).

In addition, about if the introduction of electoral technologies has intensified vote-buying in the 2023 general elections the results showed that about 174 participants, representing (58%) opined that the introduction of electoral technologies has intensified vote-buying in the 2023 general elections, while 126 of participants, representing (42%) disagreed that the introduction of electoral technologies has intensified vote-buying in the 2023 general elections. On if the introduction of BVAS and IReV improved public trust in INEC and the 2023 general elections. About 56% of participants objected that the introduction of BVAS and IReV improved public trust in INEC and the 2023 general elections, whereas, 44% of participants believed that the introduction of BVAS and IReV improved public trust in INEC and the 2023 general elections.

On whether the utilization of electoral technologies faced some challenges (lack of internet, erratic electricity, lack of ICT skills of some voters, hacking, cyber-attacks etc) during the 2023

general elections. About 90% participants believed that the utilization of electoral technologies faced some challenges (lack of internet, erratic electricity, lack of ICT skills of some voters, hacking, cyber-attacks etc) during the 2023 general elections. and 10% participants strongly objected the view that the utilization of electoral technologies faced some challenges (lack of internet, erratic electricity, lack of ICT skills of some voters, hacking, cyber-attacks etc) during the 2023 general elections. On whether the utilization of electoral technologies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections conforms with the 2022 Electoral Act and UN declaration on credible election, the findings showed that (62%) of participants agreed that the utilization of electoral technologies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections conforms with the 2022 Electoral Act, while (38%) of the respondents believed that the utilization of electoral technologies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections conforms with the UN declaration on credible election. On whether electoral mal-practices was reduced in the 2023 general elections than other general elections. The results showed that 61% of participants agreed that electoral mal-practices were reduced in the 2023 general elections than other general elections, but about 39% respondents strongly disagreed that electoral mal-practices were reduced in the 2023 general elections than other general elections.

Lastly, on if the utilization and performance of electoral technologies (BVAS and IReV) enhanced the following outcomes: improved political participation, curbing of electoral irregularities, public trust, electoral integrity and credibility, in connection with this, empirical findings ditto this study revealed that (34%) of the respondents believed it improved political participation, and 60% of the respondents, believed that it curbed electoral mal-practices, 3% of them believed it improved public trust and another 3% of the respondents believed it enhanced electoral integrity and credibility.

Bivariate Analysis and Assumptions Testing

This section looked at the analysis of the casual relationship between two variables. The bivariate analysis measures the relationship between the utilization of technological innovations (BVAS and IReV) and the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Over the years, election in Nigeria has been fraught with series of irregularities and mal-practices, which in the long run, have undermined the integrity and public trust in election results in Nigeria. Thus, the basis of analysis here is to ascertain, if any, there is a positive relationship between the utilization of technological innovations (BVAS and IReV) and credibility or election integrity in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The explanatory variable is knowledge or perception of respondents on the utilization of technological innovation, while the dependent variable is the evaluation of how credible was the 2023 general election. The dependent variables are categorized into two assessments of knowledge – based such as yes (strongly agree & agree) or no (strongly disagree & disagree). The relationship test was carried out using chi-square test because variables are categorical.

Working Assumption One

There is no significance relationship between the utilization technological innovations and the credibility of election results in Nigeria's 2023 general election. This assumption measured or tested the

relationship between technology use and electoral integrity or credibility in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. This is represented and tested in the table below.

Table 3: Respondents' knowledge about the connection between the utilization of electoral technologies like BVAS and IReV and the credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Variables	Respondents have adequate knowledge that the use of technological innovations (BVAS and IReV) enhanced the credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections		
	No	Yes	Total
** Respondents were aware of the connection.			
Yes	69 (74.19)	24 (25.81)	93 (100.00)
No	119 (57)	68.56	
Total	300	100.00	
$X^2=30.86$, P-value – 0.00			

From the table 3, evidence showed that majority of participants objected the fact that the utilization of technological innovations (BVAS and IReV) improved the credibility of the 2023 elections. This finding from this assumption, is the same with results gathered during interview and focus group discussions sessions, where almost all participants, if not all, disagreed that the utilization of technology enhanced credible general elections in 2023. Rather results showed that its intensified vote-buying, as politicians find it very difficult to tamper with the operation of BVAS and IReV. However, the use of BVAS, IReV, and other technological tool, helped to reduce electoral mal-practices and irregularities, but scholarly evidences and those from the field, established that vote-buying recorded during the 2023 general elections, undermined the credibility of the election. The findings showed that there is no positive or significant relationship between technology use and credible 2023 Nigeria's general elections. Therefore, this can be interpreted to mean that effective utilization of technological innovation, does not in any way guarantee or make Nigeria's 2023 general elections credible. This assumption is valid and accepted as results from the field adequately supported it. Thus, making the first objective and research assumption aligning.

Discussion of Result

The conduct of the elections revealed a stark contrast between theoretical potential and practical execution.

1. The BVAS: A Success in Accreditation, a Failure in Results Transmission?

Empirical evidence from observer reports indicates that the BVAS largely succeeded in its primary function: biometric voter accreditation. Across the country, reports confirmed a significant reduction in overt incidents of multiple voting and impersonation (EU EOM, 2023; NDI/IRI, 2023). This represents a clear procedural advancement.

However, the system's second function the scanning and immediate transmission of the result sheet to the IReV portal failed spectacularly in many constituencies during the presidential

election. Despite a mostly peaceful and orderly voting process, the transmission of results became the epicenter of controversy. INEC officials at polling units reported being unable to upload results, citing "technical glitches" (ThisDay, February 27, 2023). This failure created a dangerous vacuum filled by speculation and mistrust.

2. The IReV Failure: Technical Glitch or Strategic Sabotage?

The non-transmission of results to the IReV portal was the most consequential failure of the election. INEC's explanation of a "technical hitch" due to server overload was met with widespread scepticism (Premium Times, February 27, 2023). Critics and opposition parties alleged a deliberate act of sabotage to manipulate the results during the manual collation process at the Registration Area Collation Centres (RACs) and beyond, where the old practices of altering figures could proceed away from public scrutiny (Punch Newspapers, February 28, 2023).

This allegation gained traction because the failure was not uniform; it disproportionately affected strongholds of opposition parties, while results from the ruling party's strongholds were uploaded promptly (Sahara Reporters, March 1, 2023). This pattern suggests the SST lens is apt: the technology was not a neutral force but was shaped and exploited by powerful political actors.

3. Resilience of Anti-Democratic Practices: Violence, Vote-Buying, and Judicial Reliance

The election also demonstrated the resilience of old malpractices. Vote-buying was rampant and brazen, adapting to the new technological environment by occurring after accreditation but before voting (CDD, 2023). Violent incidents, though less widespread than in previous cycles, still disrupted the process in several flashpoints like Lagos, Kano, and the South-East, disenfranchising voters (CLEEN Foundation, 2023).

Furthermore, the entire process culminated in an unprecedented reliance on the judiciary, with three out of the four first-tier presidential candidates challenging the results. The subsequent court cases and the final Supreme Court judgment, which upheld the victory of Bola Tinubu, further shifted the arena of electoral conflict from the polling unit to the courtroom, underscoring the enduring deficit of trust in the electoral institution itself (The Guardian, October 26, 2023).

4. Interrogating the Gap Between Promise and Reality

The 2023 elections provide a unique case study. The BVAS proved that technology can effectively address specific, localized problems like accreditation. However, the failure of the IReV transmission highlights a critical lesson: technology is most vulnerable at the points where it interfaces with the existing, often corrupt, political structure.

The reforms were designed to eliminate human discretion at the collation level—the historical source of grand fraud. Yet, by failing to transmit results electronically, the process effectively pushed collation back into the opaque, human-controlled domain. This supports the SST

theory, showing that technology is not an autonomous force for change but is susceptible to subversion by actors with the power and incentive to do so.

The experience affirms that technological innovation is a necessary but insufficient condition for electoral integrity. It must be underpinned by:

1. **Unwavering Political Will:** The leadership of the electoral body must be willing to enforce rules impartially, even against powerful incumbents.
2. **Robust Institutional Capacity:** INEC must possess the technical, logistical, and managerial competence to deploy complex technology nationwide without fatal errors.
3. **A Supportive Political Culture:** Political actors must possess a minimal level of commitment to democratic rules, and citizens must be actively engaged in safeguarding the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to evaluate the extent to which the technological innovations introduced under Nigeria's Electoral Act 2022 specifically the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) contributed to the credibility and integrity of the 2023 general elections. At its core, the research sought to interrogate the gap between the theoretical promise of electoral technology and its practical performance in Nigeria's complex political and institutional environment.

1. The findings reveal a mixed outcome. On one hand, BVAS significantly improved voter accreditation by reducing incidents of multiple voting and impersonation, marking a step forward in procedural transparency. On the other hand, the failure of IReV to consistently transmit results undermined confidence in the process and revived old patterns of manipulation at the collation stage. Moreover, enduring challenges such as vote-buying, logistical failures, and electoral violence highlighted the resilience of entrenched practices that technological fixes alone could not overcome.
2. By situating these outcomes within the theoretical debates of democratic institutionalism and the social shaping of technology, the study contributes to knowledge by showing that electoral technologies are not autonomous solutions but tools whose success is mediated by political will, institutional capacity, and prevailing political culture. In doing so, the research addresses the gap in scholarship concerning the contextual dynamics of technological innovation in Nigeria's elections.
3. The implications are clear: while technology can strengthen certain aspects of electoral integrity, it cannot substitute for strong institutions and genuine commitment to democratic norms. Policymakers and electoral stakeholders must therefore prioritise not only the deployment of reliable technical infrastructure but also reforms that safeguard INEC's autonomy, enforce accountability among political actors, and deepen civic education to build trust in the process.
4. This study is not without limitations. Its focus on BVAS and IReV leaves out other dimensions of electoral reform that may have shaped outcomes, and its reliance on observer reports and survey data means that some nuances of local experiences may

- remain underexplored. Nonetheless, the research offers a grounded analysis of Nigeria's most technologically advanced election to date and its lessons for future reforms.
5. In light of the findings, the study recommends: a full independent audit of the IReV system; investment in more resilient and redundant technical infrastructure; stronger enforcement of electoral laws to deter malpractice; and continuous voter education to foster democratic participation. Future research should expand by examining how citizens' trust in electoral institutions evolves over time and by comparing Nigeria's experience with other emerging democracies adopting similar technologies.
 6. Ultimately, the 2023 elections demonstrate both progress and persistent vulnerabilities. They affirm that while technology can illuminate a path toward more credible elections, it cannot by itself transform political culture. True electoral integrity will require not only technological innovation but also the enduring political will, institutional reforms, and societal commitment needed to safeguard Nigeria's democracy.

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