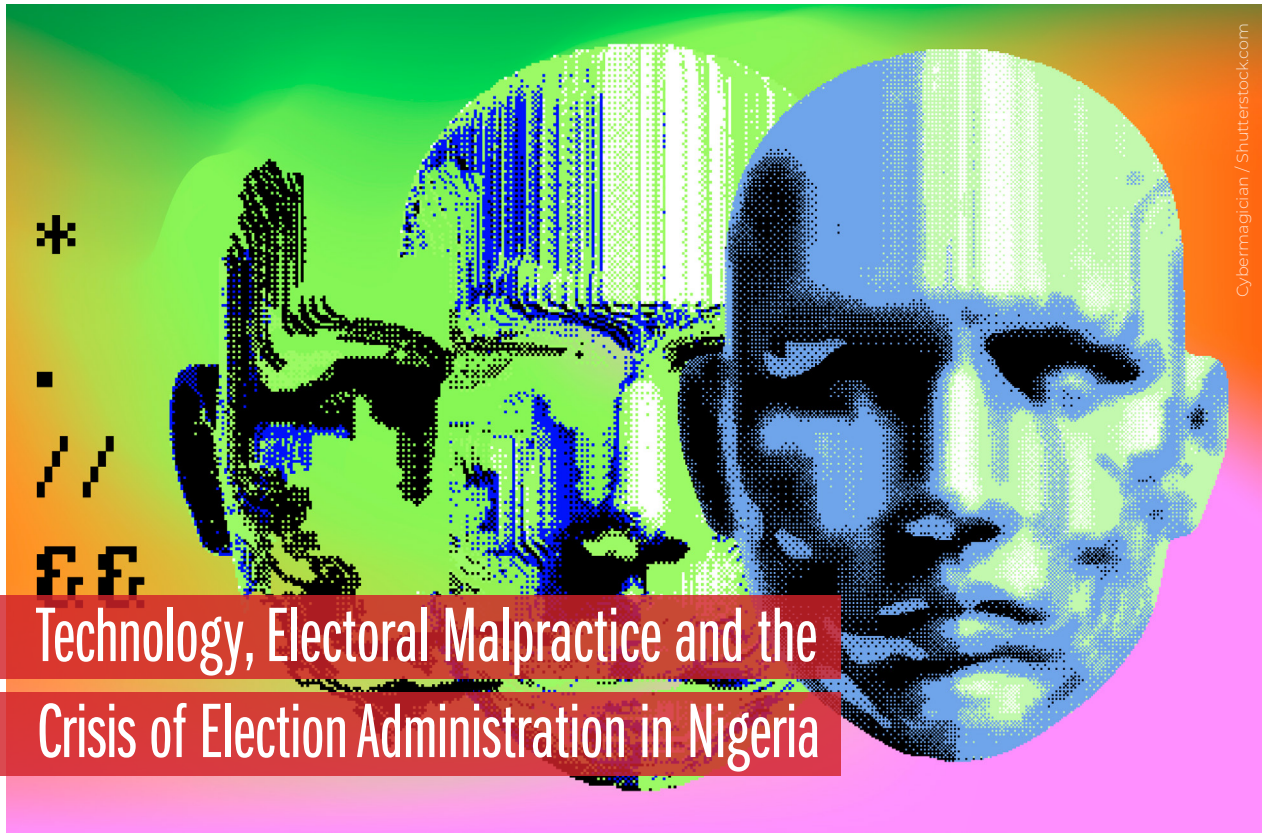

Technology, Electoral Malpractice and the Crisis of Election Administration in Nigeria

By Daniel Godwin

Abstract

The integration of technology into the various elements of the electoral value chain has contributed significantly to election administration both in established and transitional democracies of the world. In Nigeria, the integration of technology into the electoral process began in 2011 and has continued since then with significant positive impact on the outcome of all the elections held since 2011, especially the 2023 general elections. However, the outcome of the 2023 presidential election has been enmeshed in controversies and criticism from various stakeholders including local and international observers. One of the leading reasons for the controversy was attributed to technology (technical glitch) by INEC. This paper argues that the lack of transparency by INEC as revealed in its failure to electronically transfer results as promised and its refusal to upload results in real-time undermined the integrity of the 2023 presidential election. The paper examined the strategic contributions of the technological innovations used in the 2023 general elections. Principal-agent theory provided the framework, while a qualitative desk research design was adopted for the study. The paper relied on secondary sources of data. Findings showed that the introduction and integration of technologies into the electoral process cannot deal with the problem of electoral malpractice as a standalone initiative without the complementary uprightness from the EMBs. The paper concluded that the failure by INEC to keep to its guidelines as provided has to some extent compromised and eroded the confidence of Nigerians on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election.

Introduction

The integration of technology into the various elements of the electoral value chain has contributed significantly to election administration both in established and transitional democracies of the world (see for example: Castells 1996 and 2000; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Webster 2014; and Zuboff 2019). The increasing explosion of

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technologies and increasing access to these technologies by both citizens and election administrators is partly because of rising concerns about the sanity of elections around the world. For instance, the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee report showed evidence of Russian interference and media manipulation of the U.S. presidential election in 2016 (United States Senate Intelligence Committee 2019a and 2019b). There are instances from some other democracies suggesting manipulation and fraud in their electoral process which is beckoning the electoral management bodies to up their games to tackle the menace of electoral malpractice (Garnett and James 2020). In Nigeria, the integration of technology into the electoral process began in 2011 and has continued since then with significant impact, though sometimes controvertible, on the outcome of all the elections held since 2011, especially the 2023 general elections. Historically, elections in Nigeria are rarely said to be perfect. Elections in Nigeria can at best be described as a work in progress marked by different shades of fraud and malpractice (Olivia 2011; Sulaiman 2022). In a bid to check the menace of electoral malpractice, the electoral management body decided to improve the electoral laws by progressively introducing innovative ideas that will enhance the capacity of election administration and the general management of the electoral process. It was this effort that led to the introduction and integration of technology in the electoral value chain in Nigeria. Technology has proven to be one of the emerging responses to the problem of electoral fraud and malpractice especially in developing democracies like Nigeria (Ogwu 2016). The spread and application of technology to governance has gained and continues to gain attention.

The future of democracy in Africa is threatened by the level of electoral malpractice experienced in recent times. This has in part, accounted for the surge in the number of military coup on the continent. As a result, some African countries, including Nigeria, have introduced technological reforms in their electoral management laws with the aim of enhancing the quality of elections and to minimize the incidents of electoral malpractice. Sulaiman (2023) captures some of the areas in the electoral value chain where policy response is targeted: gender inclusion, voter registration, participation of people living with disability, and the participation and inclusion of marginalised groups. In Nigeria, the electoral Acts of 2015 and 2022 made salient provisions for the adoption of technology in the electoral process. Specifically, Sections 47 and 50 of the 2022 Electoral Act made provision for the use of technology for voter accreditation and electronic transmission of results. On the other hand, Section 62 (2) gave INEC the mandate to maintain an electronic register of votes. The 2022 Electoral Act gave INEC the requisite legal to adopt, use and apply technology as may be appropriate for the enhancement of their duty. The intention of these provisions in the Electoral Act was to address, in most cases, the intractable problem associated with election administration in Nigeria. Electoral malpractice in Nigeria happens in various forms such as ballot snatching/stuffing, falsification of results, over-voting, and multiple registration/voting, which usually results in a lack of confidence in the election management body, among others (Godwin 2016). It is against this backdrop that this paper examined the strategic contributions of the technological innovations used in the 2023 general elections with a view of exploring the fact that lack of transparency by the Independent National Electoral Commission as revealed in its failure to electronically transfer results as promised and its refusal to upload results in real-time undermined the integrity of the 2023 presidential election. The study engaged this objective by adopting a qualitative research design. This design is favoured due to its capacity to utilise in-depth and clear secondary sources of data for analysis. The paper was divided into the following sections:

introduction, conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, literature review, technology and election administration, the application of technology and the 2023 presidential election, INEC/technology and the outcome of the result, and finally conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

Technology: In the context of this study, technology refers to the technical software and hardware designed for the organisation and implementation of elections. It includes such front-end technology as vote scanning machines and back-office equipment like voter registration database software.

Electoral Malpractice: This is when the electoral process is flawed with irregularities inconsistent with the provision of the electoral guidelines. Electoral malpractice is characterised by manipulation of the electoral process and abnormal behaviour known as misconduct (Alvarez et al. 2012; Birch 2011; Norris 2015). Electoral malpractice can take three principal forms: manipulation of the rules governing elections, manipulation of vote preference formation and expression, and manipulation of the voting process.

Election Administration: This entails and captures how the electoral register is compiled as well as how votes are cast and counted. Election administration is important since the method adopted or employed by the Electoral Management Body (EMB) has implications for the entire process. For instance, if the EMB decides to adopt an automated or manual voter registration system, this will have implications for the number of people that will register, vote, raise or dampen the confidence of people over the process, and possibly the tendency for manipulation (Catt et al. 2014; Wall et al. 2006).

Theorising the Relationship between INEC, Technological Integration and the Outcome of the 2023 Presidential Election.

The theoretical foundation of this paper rests on the major assumptions of the principal-agent approach. The theory deals with the principles of delegation. The principal-agent theory was chosen because it highlights the dynamics of the implications of the configurations of authority, organisational structures and power on the

> “The future of democracy in Africa is threatened by the level of electoral malpractice experienced in recent times.”

integration of technology in election administration in Nigeria. The theory's classical idea rests on the following assumptions: the actions of the agent are critical to the wealth or well-being of the principal, as such, the principal is expecting some payoff from the agent; the agent has some information or abilities that the principal does not have and he (the principal) is compelled to patronise the agent; the principal and agent are assumed to have differing preferences, not a mutual one; the initiative to create contract terms lies with the principal to which the agent agrees or not; finally, both the principal and the agent know the basics on which the agent will be engaged in the contract and how to executed it (Miller 2005).

The principal-agent theory therefore as applied, sees a sovereign state operated under the guise of government as the principal who has the deciding authority to appoint or delegate responsibilities and at the same time has the prerogative to influence political decisions or outcomes undertaken by the agents appointed. From this context, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other public agencies that have election-related responsibilities are seen as agents managing elections in accordance with the wishes of the appointing authority – the government. In Nigeria, there is a tiny separating line between Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and the government that created them. Most times, they serve as institutions with delegated responsibilities. Some of them are labelled with the word *independent commission,* but independence is solely in the name and not in practice. So, it, therefore, follows that the state

will not saddle EMBs with the mandate to conduct elections unless they will serve their interest. Again, it suggests that the democratic ambition that comes with the integration of technology in the electoral process may remain or never go beyond the level of ambition. This is more so because there is no separation of power between the election management body, personnel, and procedures on the one hand and the government on the other hand (Mude 2022). So, the wide-scale integration of technology into election administration will remain an effort in futility insofar as the Nigerian government maintains a culture of interference with INEC. The outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria can be explicitly understood from this lens.

Technology and Election Administration

The integration of technology into government operations, and more specifically electoral management, has gained more attention and acceptance in recent times. For instance, the electoral management surveys gave cross-national data on the use and adoption of technology. EMBs were requested in a study to indicate areas where they use technology in the electoral value chain. Findings showed that the majority of countries surveyed used technology for the tabulation of votes (60%) and voter registration (54%). The application of technology for candidate registration appeared to be common (44%). The report indicated that biometrics, one of the most used technologies, has been in use for just about 25 years (Piccolino 2016). One of the least areas technology has been adopted in the electoral value chain relates to the voting process. From the report, this includes internet voting (7%) and voting machines (14%). The spectrum of technological applications in the electoral process from this report has shown potential for the increasing adoption of technology at the registration, voting and result tabulation stages (Loeber 2017). For Garnett and James (2020), the evolution in the use of technology in the electoral process began slowly but in recent times has experienced what they described as an explosion. They noted that among the new technologies amenable to the electoral process are electronic voting and internet voting, however, technology has been found to be amenable and applicable to all the stages involved in an election.

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At the dawn of the *third wave* democratisation in Africa, precisely around the 1990s, we could count only a handful of countries that had elected governments. Today the reverse is the case, as we can count only a few countries that do not have elected government. However, this transition was a quantitative one (Ibeanu 2022). Because the interest of African leaders was on the mere increase in the number of countries conducting elections. The increase in the number of countries conducting elections does not automatically translate into democratic consolidation. Again, there is the question of whether election outcomes reflect the wishes of the people or not (Adejumobi 2018). This is so, as elections in Africa are marked and characterised by gross irregularities and open malpractices. One of the options adopted to check election malpractice in Africa is the introduction and integration of technologies. Incidentally, the integration of technology in the administration of elections in Africa has shown mixed outcomes. While technology has improved voter registration and election data clean-up, as seen in some South African countries, it has not been able to deal with the problem of political power configuration in Africa that manifests in breach of the democratic principles of separation of power and separation of personnel (Mude 2022). On the successes, Turque Mude has noted that there is relative success in the application and integration of technology within the South African region. The same cannot be said

of Kenya and Nigeria. The progressive integration of technology in the electoral process in the DRC, Kenya, and Nigeria has shown quantitative progress but not qualitative. Other concerns relate to issues of trust deficit, the technology divide between the young and the old, and the rising cost of technology.

The conduct of a successful election requires some level of preparation and processes. For instance, electoral laws will be presumably passed, voters registered, and an electoral management body will be put in place for the implementation of the electoral laws. Technology is integrated and used throughout these processes. This can be from the adoption of simple computer databases used for the organisation of the polling units to more complex outward-facing systems used for voter registration. There are a variety of new technological innovations designed to improve, for instance, the voter registration system. This innovation is designed to make the voting process more credible for both prospective voters and the EMBs. In this case, biometrics are known to be reputable for registration where biodata such as fingerprints and facial photographs are captured for the purposes of registration and identification of voters (Piccolino 2016). There is also a gradual migration of the registration process to an online platform which can be used remotely (Barreto et al. 2010; Garnett 2019). For the campaigns, new technologies have also emerged. The Internet and social media have brought a new dimension to election campaigns, although introducing new challenges as well. Voter activities online have been found to influence the direction of contestants, political parties' campaigns and other interest groups. It was observed that political parties and candidates during campaign periods, contract firms to collate online information on voters' activities and preferences which is used for targeted advertisement (Persily 2017). During the final stage of the election process on Election Day, attention is shifted to the counting of votes and how these votes can be respected. During this process, the use of technology has also appeared to be useful.

Technology and Quality of Election Administration in Nigeria

The literature on the quality of elections, integration and application of digital technologies in the electoral process in Africa illustrates that elections' credibility is shaped by a number of factors. First, the rules governing elections – they include legislation, regulations and guidelines governing the electoral process of a nation. These regulations must be fine-tuned and finalised in good time. They must be made public for all the parties involved to adhere to. Elections are organised around formal rules which partly determine the quality of an election. Secondly, voters who desire to vote must be allowed to do so through a secret balloting system. Thirdly, the question of the principle of equality arises. All actors involved in an election such as voters, political parties and aspirants must be given a level playing ground. Put differently, the principle of fairness must be upheld to the latter. Fourth, the choices of voters must be respected and treated with sacredness as stipulated by the electoral laws. Put differently, there should be a strong affinity between the votes cast and the outcome of the election. Lastly, there should be genuine and unbiased opportunities for aggrieved parties to seek redress (Ibeanu 2022; Mozaffar and Schedler 2002).

> "…the choices of voters must be respected and treated with sacredness as stipulated by the electoral laws."

Ibeanu (2022) observed that in Africa, the above-mentioned factors are declining. This is, of course, attributed to a number of factors in his opinion, namely: institutional weakness, poor infrastructure and weak citizen engagement. He further highlighted that the weakness of electoral management bodies in Africa is manifested in the inconsistency of the electoral laws, poor compliance with electoral laws, and a low level of trust in the EMBs by the citizenry. Most of the time, citizens do not trust that the electoral umpire will act fairly without siding or taking to sectional interest.

A critical mass of Nigerian citizens believes that the EMB is always compromised, and this has undermined the level of trust the voters have for them. This is not only peculiar to the Independent National Electoral Commission, but to other public institutions as well. There are several explanations for the issue of the trust gap conundrum in Nigeria. Ibeanu (2022) observed that the history of this problem can be traceable to colonialism which functioned under the principle of *conquering and controlling the people to promote the colonial interest*. That is, Nigeria as a colonial state was from the beginning alienated from the people and never earned the trust of the people and so cannot, at present, serve as a unifying force. Instead, it has continued to serve as an instrument of sectional control and domination depending on the political parties, religious groups, and ethnic groups in power at the time. The lack of trust in INEC by the average Nigerian is further exacerbated by deficiency in their functional capacity. This is most times manifested in administrative deficiency in terms of requisite skills, the presence of powerful individuals who have no respect for the stipulated electoral guidelines and a general lack of accountability to the people.

Another major area of concern is the infrastructural deficit. The requisite quantity and quality of infrastructure needed for the conduct and management of elections in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. This has constituted a major problem in the operational weakness of INEC. A sizeable part of Nigeria as a country is remote without adequate communication facilities. Even in the metropolises, basic infrastructures like transportation, electricity and telecommunications are in a poor state. The combination of these factors has made the conduct of elections in Nigeria a difficult task. Another point of concern that affects the quality of elections in Nigeria is weak civic engagement. Notwithstanding, the role and contribution of civil society to elections in Nigeria are on an appreciable increase. These contributions are obvious in areas of election administration, voter education and electoral accountability (Ibeanu 2022). INEC has leveraged the areas of civil society's expertise in the electoral process such as voter registration, the application of ICT to elections, electoral advocacy and voter education among others. For instance, voter education has resonated as a key area of support from the CSOs to INEC, the other is ensuring accountability through election observation or monitoring. However, when all these interventions by the CSOs are placed side by side with Nigeria's size and population, it will be obvious that there is still much to be done. For instance, the data from CIVICUS on the space of civil society in Africa indicated that no African state including Nigeria was categorized as 'open', and 90% of CSOs in Africa were characterised by CIVICUS as closed, repressed or obstructed.

Given the above challenges, one of the options left for Nigeria is the integration and adoption of technology into the administration and management of elections. The integration of machine or technology options, if appropriately applied, may cover the trust gap and the inefficiency of INEC. It was these claims that led to the progressive integration of technology into the electoral process beginning from the 2011 general elections to the 2023 general elections despite its mixed outcome (Cheeseman et al. 2018).

The Use of Technology in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Essentially, INEC introduced technological innovations to improve the administration and execution of the 2023 general elections. Among the technologies introduced were the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV). The BVAS's role was to first, biometrically verify voters to authenticate that the holder of the card is the original owner, and secondly, electronically transfer a photo of the polling unit result to the IReV – an online portal controlled and managed by INEC. The complementary innovation of both the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) works through a portable technological device that is digitally designed to read the fingerprints of prospective voters captured during voter registration. The device also has a facial recognition capability that can compare the features of voters with those of INEC's database. The BVAS has an inbuilt camera with the capacity to capture polling unit-level results for onward transmission to the INEC's Collation Centre online (IReV). IReV is an online portal designed for the public to access results in real-time. It is designed in a manner that any interested party can access results captured

and transmitted from the various polling units in a PDF format. However, interested users need to create a user account before access is granted to the viewer.

The introduction of IReV after the 2019 general elections has served as a major improvement to the electoral process in Nigeria. Specifically, in the lead towards the 2023 elections, INEC had consistently reassured Nigerians and the world that the measures it has employed to make the poll more credible are reliable and will be upheld. This singular assurance by INEC restored the already fragile confidence that the people had in INEC and the entire process of electioneering in Nigeria. The huge financial investment in technology by INEC further boosted the confidence of the citizens. This was followed by multiple press briefings by INEC reiterating its confidence and justification for the procured technology. INEC profoundly told Nigerians that the procured technology has the ability to enhance transparency in the process and the general outcome of the election. This came at a time when Nigerians were desperately looking for a change in the history of electioneering and have been victims of electoral fraud repeatedly. Now technology holds the answer to free, fair, and credible elections. Concerning the 2023 general elections and the use of technology, the expectation is that free, fair, credible and verifiable elections supported by technology which guarantee transparent accreditation and uploading of polling unit results for citizens to view in real-time on election day will make the difference (Suleiman 2022). The intention is that technology will ameliorate the pervasive falsification of votes at polling units, and the inflation of both accredited voters, and collated results. It was also expected that technology would reduce computational errors, the issue of swapping result sheets, and poor recording by INEC staff (Itodo 2022). There were indeed high hopes for INEC and its technology before the 2023 general elections.

INEC, Technology, and the Outcome of the 2023 Presidential Poll

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria has consistently recorded a low level of electoral integrity over time. This situation explains the explosion in the adoption and integration of technology in the electoral process. The Nigerian 2023 general elections can be described as the most technologically advanced poll held in the Fourth Republic. However, the outcome of the elections, especially the presidential election, challenged the much-touted credibility guarantee that the adoption of such technology had promised.

For instance, voter participation in Nigeria since the Fourth Republic has been declining. Voter turnout in the 2023 presidential election declined to just 29 per cent. This is a gross reduction from 53% in 1999, 69% in 2003, 53% in 2007 and 53% in 2011, 43% in 2015, 34% in 2019. This is against the fact that voter registration has been on the increase since 1999. The data from INEC has shown a steady increase in the number of Nigerians who indicated interest in registering to vote and did so as indicated by the table below:

Table 1 shows the number of registered voters in each election since the beginning of the Nigerian Fourth Republic.

	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
In millions	58m	61m	61.5m	73m	68m	82m	87m

Source: Compiled by the Author.

The disparity between the number of registered voters and the declining voter turnout during elections can be explained by the general distrust in the electoral process and in INEC. The record brandished by INEC with respect to the 2023 presidential election has been received with scepticism from several quarters. For instance, the EU Election Observation Mission in their report noted that:

> The 2023 general elections did not ensure a well-run transparent, and inclusive democratic process as assured by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Public confidence and trust in INEC were severely damaged during the presidential poll and was not restored in state level elections, leading civil society to call for an independent audit of the entire process (EU EOM Report 2023, p. 7).

It was actually in response to the incessant and reoccurring electoral fraud that the Commission with the support of other actors decided to integrate digital technology to: one, enhance transparency and integrity in the electoral process,

and two, increase citizens' confidence in EMB – INEC. The integration of digital technology in the 2023 general elections was expected to guarantee a more credible electoral process by ensuring a hitch-free voter accreditation process and public access to electronic results in real-time. However, the administration and handling of these technologies by INEC fall short of its promises and citizens' expectations. The European Election Observation report noted that:

> Lack of transparency in the implementation of election technology used and failure to promptly upload the presidential elections results on IReV contributed to decreased public trust in the credibility of the elections (EU EOM Report 2023, p.18).

The technology procured and deployed by INEC in the 2023 presidential elections proved to be insufficient in providing the required level of assurance. This happened, despite the fact that INEC had repeatedly assured Nigerians, the international community and other local stakeholders of its readiness and that all the resources needed for a hitch-free election had been provided by the federal government. Certainly, there was a substantial budgetary allocation for the administration of the 2023 general elections. The budgetary allocation for the 2023 general elections is double that of the 2019 budget. To be specific, in the 2019 general elections, INEC received N189 billion, while for the 2023 general elections, INEC submitted a budget of N400 billion, a chunk of which was used for the procurement of BVAS. The 2022 Electoral Act provided timely budgetary allocation. This is to facilitate a hitch-free preparation exercise in areas of technological deployment for voter registration, voters' verification and most importantly the real-time transmission of results. Still, the execution of the election was challenged on several fronts. Aside from the problems associated with insecurity and attacks on INEC facilities and staff, majorly in the south-east and fuel scarcity as well as the Naira shortage occasioned by the untimely Central Bank policy on Naira redesign, affected the operational delivery of INEC. There were multiple technical challenges around the technology deployed for the election (IRI/NDI report 2023). As part of its preparation, INEC introduced some new measures which were purportedly meant to improve the general exercise. For instance, INEC increased the number of polling units from 119,974 to 176,846. Yet, it was observed that a number of polling units had registered voters above the operational ceiling of 500 voters per polling unit as provided by INEC. It was also reported that INEC failed in building its in-house capacities which was shown in its administrative and operational weaknesses (IRI/NDI Report 2023). For instance, as part of its preparation for the election, the training of Ad-hoc staff by INEC was reported to have been delayed, in most cases overcrowded, and marked by an insufficient number of BVAS. Other items like manual forms for training were not adequate, and the training was not well focused on the use of technologies deployed for the election, counting procedure, as well as collation procedures (EU EOM Report 2023).

> "The trend of technological integration in the electoral process is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Literature has shown that it's a global trend."

The trend of technological integration in the electoral process is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Literature has shown that it's a global trend. We have seen a considerable move towards the utilisation of technology to improve electoral processes and outcomes in the past decade. This has also been prominent in the sub-Saharan states. We have seen the spread and explosion in the use of technology from fairly established democracies like Ghana utilising biometric technology for voter registration and verification to emerging democracies like Kenya whose digital release of raw polling station results in real time was profound (Crawford 2022).

One may be forced to ask then, why is the case in Nigeria different? Why is the application of technology in Nigeria's case not working? To answer

these questions, I would rather focus on INEC rather than on technology. INEC had piloted both the BVAS and the IReV in three off-cycle elections before applying these technologies in a nationwide election. INEC failed to do a nationwide stress test in advance before the February 25 elections. In my opinion, this act by INEC was not an oversight. It was a deliberate attempt to micromanage the outcome of the elections. INEC ignored all the early warning signs from the off-cycle elections before the February general election. During the off-cycle pilots' elections, there were challenges with some IReV uploaded images. The images were blank, blurry, or for the wrong polling unit. That means the tendency for repetition was high when such technology was used for a nationwide election without adequate reexamination. It, therefore, suggests that the success of these electoral technologies depends on the quality of their administration and application by the institution that deployed them.

The relationship between the deployment of digital technology and its role in checking electoral malpractices has been well-stated by proponents of technologies (Cheeseman et al. 2018; Gelb and Diofasi 2016). The Nigerian experience has shown that technology is yet to eliminate certain pre-election and post-election prejudices. For instance, it was noticed that digital technologies could not deter voter intimidation, suppression and vote buying that characterised the Nigerian 2023 general election. This was not just limited to Nigeria. In Zimbabwe's 2018 elections, Mhaka (2018) observed that similar malpractice was evident in the elections. This position was supported by Gelb and Diofasi (2016, p.15) when they argued that in Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire's past elections, incumbent governments restricted registration centres to areas where parties in power had significant support and deprived areas where they felt the opposition had more control.

Like in the cases cited from Zimbabwe and Cote d'Ivoire, the Nigerian experience was not different. It could be attributed to the character of the political system as managed by INEC to twist the outcome of the 2023 general election, especially the presidential election. Like the previous elections since 1999, the contestation of the 2023 general elections results in Nigeria was, indeed, a product of a political system badly damaged with deliberate undemocratic tendencies and authoritarian practices. In the case of Nigeria, these practices are considered deliberate. This is because of the way the political system is pre-configured and pre-designed. The political system is designed in such a manner that it works by using all means, including state institutions, apparatus and resources to sustain the governing political party. However, we saw an incumbent party conceding to the opposition after the 2015 presidential election. Again, this is quite rare in Nigeria. Ideally, the integration of BVAS and IReV into the electoral system was to in all honesty minimise electoral malpractices, which it did at several points such as registration, voter identification, checking over voting etc. But due to INEC's institutional weakness, the final stage of the presidential election appeared illusory and failed promise. This was why Russel and Zamfir (2018, p.4) argued that even though digitalised voter registration lessens the scope of human error, it is not equal to instantaneous solutions to the elimination of electoral fraud from a corrupt political system. Russel and Zamfir's submission aptly summarises the conditions that dashed and rendered worthless the hope of Nigerians for the 2023 general elections, the use of digital technology, and a shift towards an ideal democratic election. The contention here is that the contestation around the presidential election result is not to be attributed to election technology as opined by INEC. Rather, the nature of political power concentration and the configurations of political structures in the Nigerian political systems. It is the interplay of these dynamics that constrained INEC from keeping to its promises.

The strategic role of civil society in monitoring the use of technology

The African political space is marked by weak civic engagement. Ironically, there is an increasing demand for the role of civil society in the electoral process in Africa. For instance, some of the traditional areas of demand include voter education, support for election administration, and electoral accountability. CSOs can be instrumental to election administration in many ways. For instance, CSOs are found to have expertise in voter registration, expertise in applied ICT, legal issues, and constituency delimitation (Ibeanu 2022). INEC can galvanise and leverage this poll of knowledge

to improve the quality of elections in Nigeria. Again, CSOs can mediate effectively between political parties, the government, and INEC. CSOs serve to absorb the excessive pressure generated by political parties and governments against INEC through their strategic advocacies. To be sure, CSOs, through their advocacy, have contributed to creating an enabling environment for INEC to retain the independence necessary to conduct free, fair, and credible elections. The pivotal role of CSOs in voter education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Their role is necessary in boosting the level of voter turnout during elections. On accountability, CSOs are always instrumental in election observation or monitoring, which leads to the boosting of confidence or otherwise in the electoral value chain.

Conclusion

The paper aptly concludes that the integration of technology into election administration in Nigeria has appeared to be counterproductive to the envisaged role of election technology in curtailing electoral malpractice. From the outcome of the 2023 presidential election, it is glaring that digital technologies do not have the capacity to limit electoral malpractice without the support of EMBs and other agencies charged with electoral responsibilities. This is attributable to the nature of the Nigerian political system. The Nigerian political environment is characterized by unprofessionalism stained by corruption. The study observed that, in its present form, INEC's ability to act independently is in doubt. The appointment of INEC personnel by the executive has remained a point of worry. The failure by INEC to electronically transmit the photo sheet of the polling units' results in real-time as promised further questions INEC's autonomy. INEC claimed technical glitches were responsible for its failure to upload results in real-time. Some crucial questions may be raised as follows: At what point did INEC notice that there were technical glitches on the IReV? A glitch of a proportion that was capable of jeopardising the outcome of an election of that magnitude was not detected until days after the election. It took INEC three to four days to inform Nigerians that there was a technical glitch with the IReV. Such a delay by INEC eroded the already feverish trust Nigerians had for them. Hence, with the outcome of the 2023 presidential election, it is glaring that digital technologies do not have the capacity to limit electoral malpractice without the support of EMBs and other election-related institutions. It has been repeatedly recommended that the appointment of the INEC Chief should be taken away from the executive and given to the Judicial Council of Nigeria, this will limit the influence of the Executive on INEC and will enhance INEC's autonomy.

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