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The Role of ICT in Curtailing Electoral Fraud and Violence in Nigeria: A Study of the 2019 General Election in Lagos State

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Abstract

Elections can be described as the hallmark of democracy and integral for a democratic society to remain stable. However, electoral process in Nigeria has been marred with fraud and violence. Electoral violence and fraud remain a major threat to the stability of democracy in Nigeria. To reduce the occurrence of violence and fraud, INEC introduced the Smart Card Reader (SCR) which was used to verify the authenticity of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC). The use of ICT during the 2019 elections limited the extent to which political actors can intimidate or harass INEC officials to commit electoral fraud, it also reduced the number of electoral petitions and in Lagos State, there was a reduction in violence experienced during the elections.

Résumé

Les élections peuvent être décrites comme la marque de la démocratie et font partie intégrante de la stabilité d'une société démocratique. Cependant, le processus électoral au Nigeria a été entaché de fraudes et de violences. La violence et la fraude électorales demeurent une menace majeure pour la stabilité de la démocratie au Nigeria. Pour réduire les cas de violence et de fraude, l'INEC a introduit le lecteur de carte à puce (SCR) qui a été utilisé pour vérifier l'authenticité de la carte d'électeur permanent (PVC). L'utilisation des TIC lors des élections de 2019 a limité le pouvoir des acteurs politiques à intimider ou harceler les responsables de l'INEC à commettre des fraudes électorales ; elle a également réduit le nombre de recours électoraux, et dans l'État de Lagos, il a été noté une baisse des violences pendant les élections.

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Introduction

Elections remain essential in the transitory process from one civilian government to another (Adesote and Abimbola 2014). Elections can be described as the hallmark of democracy and integral for a democratic society to remain stable (Ojo 2007). Free, fair and credible elections are very important in a democratic society. A free and fair election empowers citizens to hold people in public offices accountable. However, holding public officers accountable in Nigeria has not been possible because of the irregularities in elections. Also, 'the democratisation of politics has been unsuccessful in arresting electoral fraud perpetrated by different political parties and megalomaniac politicians' (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018). Elections are democratic only if they are credible, participatory, legitimate, free and fair. Elections are therefore seen to have met these criteria when they are administered by a neutral authority; when the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud; when the police, military and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially; when contenders all have access to the public media; when electoral districts and rules do not grossly handicap the opposition; when the secret of the ballot is protected; when virtually all adults can vote; when procedures for organising and counting the votes are widely known; and when there are transparent and impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes (Diamond 2008: 25).

The electoral process in Nigeria has been marred with fraud and violence (Nwagwu 2016). Though violence has been a longstanding feature of the democratisation process in post-colonial Nigeria, its recent manifestations, especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic, has assumed unprecedented magnitude thus constituting a major threat to the survival democracy' (Adesote and Abimbola 2014: 140). Reif (2009: 5) defines election violence as any 'spontaneous or organized actions by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters, civil society, or other political actors that employ physical harm, intimidation, blackmail, verbal abuse, violent demonstrations, psychological manipulation, or other forms of coercion (or the threat thereof) aimed at disrupting, determining, hastening, delaying, reversing, or otherwise influencing an election and its outcome'.

One of the vital consequences of electoral violence and fraud is the negative effect it has on the public's perception and confidence in the electoral process (Alvarez, Hall and Hyde 2009). Electoral violence and fraud remain a major threat to the stability of democracy in Nigeria. After the 2007 General Elections, 1,527 petitions were lodged at the Court of Appeal (Ubanyionwu 2012) and 560 petitions were lodged after the 2015

General Elections (PLAC 2017). Some of the issues that led to the petitions were spoiled and invalid ballot papers which are grounds for invalidating elections, challenging the election and return of a candidate as Governor-Elect, and breach of regulations by a presiding officer. Section 138 of the Electoral Act, 2010 gives a candidate or political party which participated in the election the right to present an election petition. Therefore, an election may be questioned on any of the following grounds that:

- a person whose election is questioned was, at the time of the election, not qualified to contest the election;
- the election was invalid by reason of corrupt practices or non-compliance with the provision of this Act;
- the respondent was not duly elected by majority of lawful votes cast at the election;
- the petitioner or its candidate was validly nominated but was unlawfully excluded from the election.

To reduce the number of election petitions and irregularities, technology is used during the election process. The use of different forms of technology in the election process has been on the increase and Nigeria has not been left out. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was introduced in the 2011 Nigerian General Election to improve the electoral process and provide a credible, free and fair election. 'For ICT to play its roles creditably, effectively and efficiently, all technological devices in election administration should serve to enhance the cardinal principle of accuracy, accessibility, transparency and informed electorates. ICT (formal technology such as Smart Card Reader and Permanent Voters Card) has reduced the incidence of electoral fraud such as ballot box snatching, manipulation of the results, underage voting and multiple voting which has plagued Nigerian elections' (Ayeni and Esan 2018).

Therefore, 'the need for the electorate to be sufficiently enlightened on the primary roles of ICT in election processes ought to be stressed elaborately' (Nwagwu 2016: 304). Electoral management that will prevent electoral fraud and violence before, during and after the polls as well as achieve governmental legitimacy is of utmost importance to scholars, policymakers and the electorate (Kolawole 2007; Adesote and Abimbola 2014). It is on this premise that the use of ICT was introduced in the electoral process by the Electoral Management Body (EMB) of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Electoral violence is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The First Republic in Nigeria (1960–66) collapsed due to incidents of violence perpetrated by politicians in the 1964/65 General Election. Historians

and political scientists recall the incident tagged as 'Operation We-ti-e'; literally meaning 'Operation spray it!' in the Western Region of Nigeria where notable politicians and their supporters were killed in broad daylight. This largely caused the first military coup of 15 January 1966. With civil rule returning in 1979, politicians resorted to electoral violence and fraud again during the 1983 General Election. The electoral fraud allegedly perpetrated by the National Party of Nigeria in Ondo State led to three days of killings and arson; this was part of the reasons the military took over on 31 December 1983 (Ojo 2018).

The first General Election conducted by a civilian government was in 2003; this election is said to have been the most corrupt and violent election ever conducted in postcolonial Nigeria (Kurfi 2005); 'characterised by different types of electoral fraud which ranged from ballot stuffing, intimidation, killing, and assassination among others. The election was a triumph of violence' (Adesote and Abimbola 2014: 144). The 2007 General Election was no different as it had massive electoral malpractices such as intimidation of voters, declaration of results where elections were not held, and inflation of voting results (Animashaun 2008). IFES-Nigeria recorded 967 incidences of electoral violence during the 2007 election period which included eighteen deaths (IFES-Nigeria 2007). The 2011 General Elections were considered partially fair by international and local observers when compared to the 2003 and 2007 General Elections, but this election experienced electoral violence and fraud during pre-election, election and post-election periods (Adesote and Abimbola 2014).

This article seeks to examine if the use of technology has reduced and/or had a positive impact on the Nigerian electoral process especially as regards violence and voter fraud.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the role of ICT in reducing multiple registration.
- Examine how ICT has curtailed false voter identity.
- Examine how ICT helped track incidence of violence.

Research Questions

- How has ICT reduced multiple registration in Nigeria?
- What ways have ICT curtailed false voter identity during election?
- How has ICT helped track incidence of violence during the election period in Nigeria?

Electoral Violence and Fraud in Nigeria Since 1999: An Overview

Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 was a result of two futile attempts by General Sani Abacha and General Ibrahim Babangida to transition to democracy. The electoral processes in the 1999 General Elections were more acceptable than the electoral process of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018).

The presidential candidate of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, General Muhammadu Buhari, described the 2003 General Election as the most fraudulent since Nigeria got independence (Odeh 2003). INEC officials were also involved in various electoral misconduct such as forgery of results, falsifying results, unlawful possession of ballot boxes and ballot papers and sharing unused ballot papers with party agents for financial rewards (Ezeani 2005). Nigerians hoped that the 2007 General Elections would be different with more credibility and transparency, but the election was not different from the 2003 General Elections as it was riddled with irregularities, fraud and violence which resulted in 1,250 election petitions (Omotola 2010).

Despite the improvements made for the 2011 General Elections by INEC by introducing ICT to the electoral process, there were still incidences of violence and fraud albeit small compared to previous elections. These included voter intimidation, underage voting, multiple voting, snatching of ballot boxes by party thugs and falsification of results (Oladimeji, Olatunji and Nwogwugwu 2013). The results of the Presidential election led to post-election violence in which lives were lost including members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The National Democratic Institute (2015: 6) stated that the 'violence … caused over 800 deaths and substantial destruction of property'.

Prior to the 2015 General Elections, pre-election, election and post-election violence rocked the country killing one police officer and injuring four at a rally in Rivers State; politicians were kidnapped, campaign vehicles were burnt, and some campaign convoys were stoned including the convoy of the sitting President Goodluck Jonathan (Egobueze and Ojirika 2017). The 2015 elections had issues with inadequate security personnel with some supporting a political party by helping rig the elections and INEC officials getting harassed in some registration centres (Kalu and Gberevbie 2018).

ICT in Elections in Nigeria

INEC, with the intention of improving the outcome of the 2011 General Elections, introduced more digital technologies which were used to curb electoral fraud. These included the Smart Card Reader (SCR) which was

used to verify the authenticity of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and the intending voters' identification (Orji 2017). The 2011 General Election voters register was Nigeria's first electronically compiled register that helped in the production of the PVCs used for the 2015 General Elections. The use of SCRs ensured that electorates only voted in polling units where they registered. The use of SCRs in the 2015 General Elections reduced the occurrence of electoral fraud. Although the use of SCRs was not without hitches such as poor internet connection, non-verification of voters' fingerprints, rejection of PVCs, and inadequate knowledge of the use of the PVC and SCR by INEC officials and voters, the use of these technologies gave the electorate confidence in the electoral process and made it difficult for politicians to rig the elections (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018).

Manipulation by political actors in Nigeria slowed down the adoption of ICT in all areas of the electoral process as Nigerian politicians view elections as a 'do-or-die' affair and would kick against any idea that would reduce the possibility of rigging the elections; illiteracy and inadequate infrastructure also pose a challenge to the full implementation of ICT in Nigeria's electoral process (Aderounmu 2018). The use of ICT in Nigerian elections has stopped multiple registrations by the electorates (Ejikemejombo 2015). The Automated Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) was introduced during the 2015 General Elections to identify similar fingerprints on the 2011 General Election register (Ayeni and Esan 2018).

A study conducted in 2016 showed that electorates believed that use of the SCR during the 2015 General Elections eliminated multiple registrations and the use of the PVC reduced multiple voting (Nwagwu 2016). Due to the use of ICT in the 2015 General Elections, 'the rate of electoral fraud was minimised to its barest minimum. This checkmated post-election violence' (Nwagwu 2016: 315). The successful conduct of the 2011 General Election was a great contrast to previous elections which were characterised by mismanagement and fraud. The use of AFIS in the 2011 General Elections removed 800,000 people for multiple registration (Aziken 2015).

In March 2015, the Chief Press Secretary to the INEC Chairman (Idowu 2015) released a press statement stating that its decision to deploy SCRs for the 2015 General Elections had four main objectives which were:

1. To verify PVCs presented by voters at polling units and ensure that they are genuine, INEC-issued (not cloned) cards.
2. To biometrically authenticate the person who presents a PVC at the polling unit and ensure that he/she is the legitimate holder of the card. Although, the Commission, in agreement with registered political parties, had provided in the approved guidelines for the conduct of the 2015 elections that where

biometric authentication of a legitimate holder of a genuine PVC becomes challenging, there could be physical authentication of the person and completion of an Incident Form, to allow the person to vote.

3. The SCRs provide disaggregated data of accredited voters in male/female and elderly/youth categories – a disaggregation that is vital for research and planning purposes, but which INEC until now had been unable to achieve.
4. The SCR sends the data of all accredited voters to INEC's central server, equipping the Commission to be able to audit figures subsequently filed by polling officials at the Polling Unit and, thereby, be able to determine if fraudulent alterations were made.

Table 1: Technologies used by INEC from 1999 to 2016 for elections

S/N	Year	Voter Registration	Days For Registration	Data Captured	D-Base	Accreditation/ Voting	Result Collation
1	1999	Pen/Sheets and Typewritters	14 Days	Basic details. no picture or finger prints	NIL	NIL	NIL
2	2003	Optical Magnetic Recognition Form (Omr Form) *Automated Finger Prints Identification System (Afis)	10 Days	Basic details and finger prints only	YES	NIL	NIL
3	2007	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) * (Afis)	4 Months	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	Electronic Voters' Register (EVR)	Excel Sheet/E-mail
4	2011	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) * Afis	21 Days	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	Electronic Voters' Register (EVR)	Excel Sheet/E-mail
5	2015	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) *Improved Afis/Business Rule.	Continuous Voters Registration (CVR)	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	* EVR *INEC Voters Authentication System (IVAS)/Smart Card Reader (SCR)	Election Transparency Administration And Collation (e-TRAC)
6	2016	* Ddcm *Improved Afis *Business Rule.	Continuous Voters Registration (CVR)	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	*EVR *IVAS	*Electronic-Collation Support (E-Collation) * e-TRAC

Source: Ayeni and Esan (2018)

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the diffusion of innovations theory, also known as innovation diffusion theory. It was first popularised by Everett Rogers in his 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers describes an innovation as 'an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption' (1983: 12). Diffusion is 'the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system' (Rogers 1983: 5).

According to Rogers, four main elements influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. The theory posits that 'potential users make decisions to adopt or reject an innovation based on beliefs that they form about the innovation' (Rogers 1983).

This work propounds that Nigeria's decision to adopt the use ICTs was fuelled by its observation of the positive results/success achieved by other nations that had made the adoption earlier. This decision was made after the conclusion of the innovation-decision process described by Rogers (1983: 20) as 'the process through which an individual (or other decision-making unit) passes from first knowledge of an innovation to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision', with steps outlined thus: (1) knowledge, (2) persuasion, (3) decision, (4) implementation, and (5) confirmation (Figure 1).

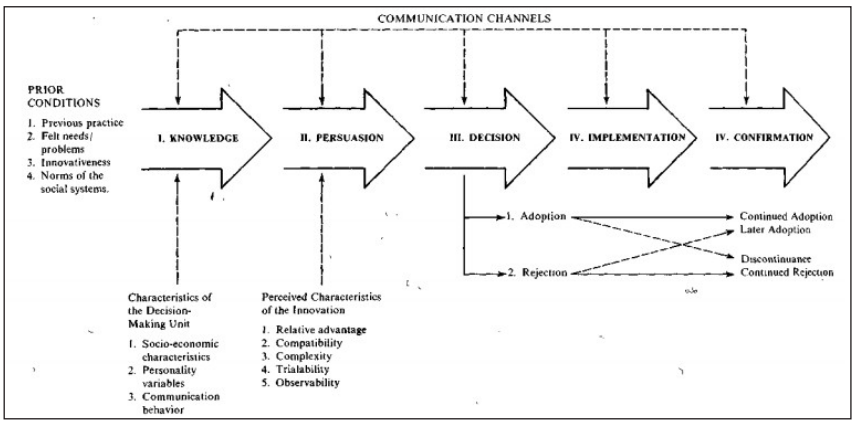

Figure 1: Model of stages in the innovation-decision process
Source: Rogers (1983)

The central goal of adoption of these technologies was problem-solving, necessitated by the constant issues faced before, during and after previous elections. The knowledge and persuasion steps of the above process had to produce conclusions that satisfied this question – would it be reasonable to assume that adopting these technologies would minimise the issues for which innovation was sought, and by what degree? The answer had to be satisfactory based on what had been observed of its use in other countries. The decision, implementation and confirmation steps involved testing these technologies to be certain that factors unique to Nigeria would not strongly affect their efficiency. The fact that technologies worked well in the election cycles of other countries was not conclusive evidence that they would work in Nigeria.

An example of a factor to consider was the ease of use. If the technologies were too complicated for the INEC staff to use, especially since INEC is known to use ad hoc staff who might not necessarily have the experience,

exposure or expertise to operate complex technologies, then it would have been counterproductive to adopt the technologies. The impact of these technologies would only be felt if INEC staff could learn to use them within a short period of time, especially the ad hoc staff usually enlisted and trained within weeks of the elections.

Methodology

This study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. Use was made of secondary data. Data was collected using records and data from INEC and NGOs that observed the elections. The results of the study were analysed using content analysis.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In Lagos, there were twenty Local Government Areas (LGAs), 245 Registration Areas (RAs), 8,462 Polling Units (PUs) and 6,570,291 registered voters for the 2019 elections. 5,531,389 PVCs were collected before the General Elections, ensuring a PVC collection rate of 84.18 per cent for the state (INEC 2020) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Presentation of data
Source: INEC (2020)

INEC's official report of the elections in Lagos highlighted the following:

1. Violence and disruption of electoral processes were recorded during the Presidential/National Assembly elections in the Okota area of Oshodi-Isolo.

2. The electoral officer of Eti-Osa was also held hostage by men of the Nigerian army during the Presidential/National Assembly elections, just as two Registration Area Technical Support (RATECHs) were detained by the military in Agege and Mushin LGAs.
3. There were also issues bordering on the usage/non-usage of SCRs: a total of 13,325 SCRs were deployed to all the PUs and voting points in the state with 300 SCRs as back-ups. While SCRs were used in almost all the PUs and voting points in the state, there were a few PUs and communities where their use was resisted. In such places, the Commission's stipulated regulations and guidelines were fully enforced.
4. Other issues and challenges faced during the General Election include:
    - Nonchalant attitude and lack of commitment of some transport union drivers;
    - Lack of sufficient data for persons living with disabilities for distribution of assistive device;
    - Attacks on poll officials, snatching of election materials by thugs and hoodlums in some LGAs;
    - Corrupt inducements of voters with impunity;
    - Absence of an adequate number of security personnel in some PUs and registration centres.

According to independent observer IRI/NDI (2019: 21), INEC addressed the challenges of the 2015 election related to the SCRs 'failing to recognize fingerprints in many instances, leading to the manual verification of a significant number of voters' by enhancing the 'smart card reader software to better recognize voters' fingerprints.' There were also innovative steps powered by INEC 'in the Ekiti and Osun off-cycle elections to recapture fingerprints on the spot with the smart card reader if a voter's PVC was correctly validated but the reader could not recognize the fingerprints. Citizen observer groups noted that the smart card reader's technological enhancements overall meant that fewer voters were turned away from the polls than in previous general and off-cycle elections.

The 2019 elections saw a rise in all post-election petitions, from 663 in 2015 to 807 election petitions (AllAfrica 2020). Despite this rise, it is important for some context to be added in order to understand the possible reasons for this. It was reported that there were over 640 incite cases stemming from disgruntled contenders following the completion of party primaries (Imosemi, Taiwo and Nzeribe 2019). This could be a possible explanation for the rise, with many issues leading to the elections that were beyond the scope of the role of ICT. Political scientist, Ibrahim Sani Musa, stated his belief that it had more to do with the attitude of politicians, rather than valid

flaws of electoral reforms (AllAfrica 2020). This is further strengthened by the Supreme Court's observation that 'no matter how well the regulatory authority conducts an election, there are complaints' (Olufunso 2019).

Abdul Mohammed, a law lecturer, also stated his belief that certain politicians come up with petitions in order to 'keep their supporters together' (AllAfrica 2020). Hamid Ajibola Jimoh Esq, a lawyer, added his own perspective that the rise in the 2019 election petitions was 'proof that Nigerian electorate are becoming more democratic in electing their political leaders' (*ibid.*).

Whichever view one decides to adopt, it is clear that the increase in petitions does not automatically translate to inefficiency on the part of ICT. In truth, the evidence suggests exactly that. Of the 807 petitions submitted, 582 were dismissed, 183 withdrawn by the petitioners, thirty for re-run election and twelve for issuance of certificates of return (Oyekanmi 2019).

In addition, it can be concluded that the trust of the electoral stakeholders in the integrity of the process, due in no small part to the infusion of ICT, has certainly made them more willing to state their disagreements through official channels rather than resorting to violence. While this is not particularly provable, the trends certainly suggest it.

Independent observers at EU EOM (2019: 14) noted that 'INEC made efforts to strengthen integrity in the process through making the use of smart card readers mandatory to accredit voters. Measures specified in INEC's guidelines included stopping polling in case of malfunction until a new smart card reader is provided, or the process postponed to the next day. In addition, polling would be cancelled in polling units where there was over-voting, with more votes than people recorded on the smart card readers.'

Role of ICT in Reducing Multiple Registration

INEC's use of ICT in the registration process included the capture of biometric data which was embedded into the PVCs that would be collected later as well as an automated fingerprint identification system (EU EOM 2019). These were put in place to minimise incidences of multiple registration of voters, which is one of the well-known irregularities in Nigerian elections. This was evident back in 2011 and ICT was introduced and had an almost instant impact. The removal of 800,000 people, from the database (Aziken 2015), who were products of multiple registration, not only showed the scale of the irregularities from past elections but also the fact that this was indeed a huge problem.

The General Elections in 2015 saw a repeat of ICT's impact, leading to a further reduction in incidences of multiple registrations and multiple voting (Nwagwu 2016). Despite the milestones and progress record, the ICT infusion still had its critics. There were those who believed that it could all be manipulated to favour one party over the other, ensuring multiple voting on one side (Assibong and Osanisi 2018).

According to Peters (2015), critics of the technologies deployed opined that card readers could be compromised such that a pre-selected winner could be favoured with manipulated removal of purported multiple registrations or incidences of multiple voting, leaving legitimate voters of the opposition disenfranchised. This view told its own story of the distrust that always existed for the electoral process and its stakeholders, due to the way previous elections had gone.

For the 2019 elections, more progress was made. According to INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the technology deployed by the body 'drastically reduced incidences of electoral malpractices' and 'research has revealed that the usage of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in election has eliminated incidents of multiple registrations' (Sobechi 2019). He further stated that multiple registrations are 'one of the main political tools for rigging elections' in the country and added that 'a review of the ICT system in Nigeria has shown that the introduction of Electronic Voters Register (EVR), Automatic Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) have reduced multiple registration and multiple voting' (*ibid.*). This is confirmation of the role that ICT has played in reducing multiple registrations and multiple voting in Nigeria.

ICT and Curtailing of False Voter Identity

The independent observers at IRI/NDI (2019: 28) noted that

> 'PVCs were verified using the smart card readers and names were checked against the voter register. In most cases when fingerprints were not verified by the smart card readers, voters' details were checked in the voter register, as prescribed by the guidelines.'

According to them,

> 'smart card readers were functioning in most polling units. In the few instances where they malfunctioned, the problem was immediately reported and voting was suspended until the smart card readers were replaced' (IRI/NDI 2019: 31).

There were widespread positive reports about the card reader during the elections, with ad hoc staff interviewed on the ground stating their satisfaction with how efficiently it worked and how helpful the presence of the RATECHs had been in the event of rare malfunction (Olukomaiya 2019).

The role of ICT in curbing false voter identity in the 2019 elections in Lagos is clear. A lot of the complaints regarding ICT following the 2015 elections, as mentioned earlier, had to do with the SCRs malfunctioning (Assibong and Oshanisi 2018), thereby causing either a suspension of voting at a PU or the sole use of the voter register. INEC fixed this problem by sending RATECHs to all RAs, to sort out any issues regarding malfunction and the presence of the RATECHs proved to be a masterstroke (Olukomaiya 2019). The inclusion of the double process – card reader verification and voter register verification – also massively minimised the incidences of fraud.

To reach a conclusion about ICT's role in curbing false voter identity and voting, one must examine the differences recorded, by percentage, regarding court-ordered re-run elections due to electoral fraud or irregularities. The 2015 General Election held in 1,490 constituencies (excluding the sixty-eight constituencies in FCT where elections were not due as was the case in 2019), and the number of court-ordered re-run elections that held were in eighty constituencies (5.37 per cent) made up of ten Senatorial Districts, seventeen Federal Constituencies and fifty-three State Constituencies across fifteen States of the Federation (Oyekanmi 2019). In contrast, the 2019 General Election was held in 1,558 constituencies nationwide. The number of court-ordered re-run elections that were held consisted of only thirty constituencies, representing just 1.92 per cent of the total number of constituencies (Oyekanmi 2019). This drop in percentage of court-ordered re-run elections from 5.37 to 1.92 is clear evidence of ICT's impact and the progress this electoral reform has ensured between 2015 and 2019.

ICT and Tracking Incidence of Violence

The independent observers at IRI/NDI (2019: 28) noted that 'the overall environment was peaceful and that polling officials generally adhered to voting procedures' and that 'the atmosphere at closing and counting remained calm and orderly, with polling officials mostly following procedures outlined in INEC guidelines'.

The above was true for most polling units, with the only incidences of violence in Lagos noted earlier as follows (INEC 2020):

- Violence and disruption of electoral processes was recorded during the Presidential/National Assembly elections in the Okota area of Oshodi-Isolo.

- The electoral officer of Eti-Osa was also held hostage by men of the Nigerian army during the Presidential/National Assembly elections, just as two Registration Area Technical Support (RATECHs) were detained by the military in Agege and Mushin LGAs.

This consolidated the gains made regarding the incidence of violence in the 2015 elections where ICT's significant impact was noted and acknowledged (Nwagwu 2016: 315). For the most part, it eliminated many of the reasons that typically lead to violence at PUs. In the instances where violence did happen, it was perpetrated by political thugs who sought to disrupt the voting exercise (Shaban 2019) rather than voters disgruntled with the process or practices at the PUs.

Such violence could not have been prevented by ICT or any other factors beyond human security measures. It would be unreasonable to expect ICT to completely eliminate violence. What is clear, however, is that it has strengthened integrity in the electoral process and made the most of the reasons for violence at PUs to be eliminated, as noted above.

Conclusion

The findings in this study show that ICT played a significant role in curtailing electoral fraud and violence in Nigeria. The impact made in 2015 was consolidated in the 2019 election cycle, along with improvements that strengthened the process. The drop in the percentage of court-ordered re-run elections between 2015 and 2019 is evidence that the process was indeed strengthened, and that the rise in petitions did not automatically translate to a worsening ICT-driven process or the impact of ICT being diminished.

The rise in petitions might have a correlation with reduced violence, and one explanation for this could be that those disgruntled with outcomes of the elections sought legal redress rather than settling for violence. This would further confirm that ICT's deployment in Nigeria's elections, has significantly impacted how people respond to elections outcomes. Furthermore, one only has to look at the number of petitions dismissed: 582 of 807 petitions, a whopping 72 per cent of all petitions, to confirm that a great percentage of the petitions were either without merit or couldn't be proven to be merited.

According to the findings of this study, ICT played a significant role in reducing multiple registrations and voting, curtailing false voter identity and tracking incidence of violence. While some of these impacts were evident in the previous two election cycles – 2011 and 2015 – the impact of ICT in the 2019 elections certainly confounded a lot of the critics of electoral technology infusion in Nigeria.

The adoption of ICT, especially the SCR, in Nigeria was initially met with mixed reactions, and still remains a subject of debate. However, the progress recorded in the electoral system since its introduction trumps the recorded challenges it has posed in the past. The use of ICT limits the extent to which political actors can intimidate or harass INEC officials to commit electoral fraud because the digital technologies used for elections limit the influence of human manipulation.

This was quite evident in the 2019 General Elections. In the coming years, the implementation of ICT across all stages of the electoral process including the collation of results is bound to further reduce fraud and violence during elections in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

- The Electoral Commission is to make adequate consultation and carry out sensitisation on all technologies to be used during elections in the future;
- Thorough training of officials;
- Frequent updating and re-examination of equipment.

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