

BI-MODAL VOTER ACCREDITATION SYSTEM (BVAS) AND CREDIBILITY OF 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A robust democratic society consists of more than just free and fair elections held on a regular basis but also consists of conducting credible elections which should be able to withstand the international standard. When Nigerian elections were conducted manually and tainted by violence, fraud, and electoral malpractice, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced technology into the electoral process. This was supposed to help lower electoral malpractice and increased public confidence in the electoral process. The focus of this paper is to examine the impact of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on the credibility and transparency of 2023 presidential elections. Specifically, the paper examine how BVAS contributes to transparency and credibility and decreases electoral violence in Nigeria. The study adopts the system theory and qualitative method of research. The paper also reviewed secondary sources which include books, journal and online materials. The study found that the 2023 presidential elections were credible and transparent to some appreciable extent. It was also discovered that BVAS reduced electoral violence during and after elections. However, this achievement was marred by INEC's inability to transmit results into its portal. The paper, thus, recommends that INEC should improve and train ad hoc staff properly and educate voters on the use of BVAS machines. It also recommends robust data security measures to protect voter information and prevent unauthorized access to the electorate data.

Keywords: Elections, Credibility, Transparency, Violence

Introduction

Elections can be described as the hallmark of democracy and an integral part of a democratic society's ability to remain stable. Its conduct has remained a challenge to democratic governance not only in Nigeria but almost all over the world. A country cannot claim to be democratic if its political system is not based on democratic elections. The election has a very long history. The word election comes from the Latin word "eligere" which means "to elect", while the word election was part of the political process in ancient Roman and Greek times (Wolff RL, 1954) While the election as a form of democratic polity has been quite new since the mid-18th century, the existence of a competitive and free election means that a democratic polity exists.

According to Heywood (2004), an election is a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people (the electorate). Elections may not in themselves be a sufficient condition for political representation, but there is little doubt that they are necessary conditions. Elections are perceived as the most peaceful means of power transfer in a democratic setting. It enables competitive struggles to secure power under a constitutionally prescribed rule of the game (Heywood, 2004).

The current democratic system that Nigeria enjoys today came to light in 1999. Though the country has witnessed a successful civilian-to-civilian change of government in the past 23 years and counting, the desperation of politicians and 'do or die' attitude toward electioneering have continued to heat up the polity every now and then, with different manipulation forms being introduced every election year (Agah, 2017). This attitude of our politicians made them too ready to apply any means of manipulation in the electoral process in order to secure the position sought in an election. Killings, maiming, character assassination, and buying of voters in the localities with money to vote for a candidate irrespective of their political ideology have been the order of the day in Nigeria since 1999 (Olurode, 2007). The people, no doubt, had lost confidence in the country's electoral process, leading to a high level of political apathy observed among the electorate. A series of elections have been conducted in the country since 1999, and many of them were faulted by different individuals and civil society organizations due to the accompanying fraud that characterizes the elections (Adesola and John, 2014).

Other electoral challenges in Nigeria are registrations, vote buying, rampant bribery, and the vulnerability of election materials and officials to hijacking or manipulation. It also involves poor training of the Ad-HOC staff and the use of incompetent staff. Given the centrality of electoral malpractices in undermining efforts to uphold democratic values and democracy in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) swung into action by making far-reaching policy reforms that focused on and targeted the perennial issues of electoral fraud. INEC is the election management body empowered by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to organize, undertake, and supervise all elections in Nigeria. It began to make sweeping reforms of the electoral system in Nigeria through the introduction or strengthening of new technologies in the electoral process as a bulwark against human fallibility, incompetence, or weakness to irregular inducements. The idea was to prevent electoral fraud, reduce electoral disputes, and encourage voter participation (Bola, 2023).

It could be recalled that the 1999 election accreditation exercise was done manually, as were subsequent elections. However, in 2015, voters' registration, accreditation, and result transmission were first digitalized. The introduction of technology into electoral processes started with the Electronic Voters Registration [EVR], and then the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) was introduced. Later, the Permanent Voters Card [PVS] was introduced, then the Smart Card Reader [SCR] was also adopted, but recently, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System [BVAS] was adopted (Philip, 2023). The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System is an electronic device created to read Permanent Voter Cards [PVCs] and verify the voter holding the card by using his or her fingerprints and facial recognition. Apart from the above function, the BVAS is also used to transmit a snapshot of the result sheet at the polling units to the INEC portal in real time for the public to see, as long as they log into the portal. Part of the argument for INEC to introduce BVAS is to increase credibility and transparency in elections in Nigeria (Samson, 2022). Although this technology has been around for some time, it was first tested in the Isoko South constituency bye election in Delta State on September 10, 2021. It was subsequently deployed in the Anambra state governorship election on November 6, 2021, and then used again in the Ekiti and Osun 2022 governorship elections (Olasupo, 2022).

Similarly, BVAS was introduced in the just-concluded general elections in Nigeria. The question is: to what extent has BVAS generated transparency in the electoral process in the 2023 presidential election? In what way has the use of BVAS reduced election rigging during the 2023 presidential election? What were the deficiencies of the BVAS during the 2023 presidential election? These questions are begging for answers. This paper is an attempt to provide an answer to these questions. The paper adopts system theory to explain the role of each sector involved in electioneering. After this section, the paper discusses methodology, followed by a theoretical

framework. The next discussion is on the findings about the involvement of BVAS in the credibility of elections in Nigeria. The last segment deals with conclusions and recommendations.

History of Elections in Nigeria

During the pre-colonial Yoruba period, religion was the primary source of political activities, with kings (Oba), Ooni of Ife, and Alaafin of Oyo holding both political and religious authority (Samuel, 2022). These kings were not elected but divinely chosen and respected, owning the land and requiring absolute respect from all subjects. In pre-colonial Igbo people, religion was important but not dominant at the political level (Oladiti, 2014). Priests of divinities were respected but not superior in communal decision-making. They were also not elected. Islam arrived in Africa around the seventh century CE and spread to sub-Saharan Africa and northern Nigeria. Hausa/Fulani adopted the appointment (*Shuura*) method in choosing their leaders, not through elections (Surajo, 2023).

Nigeria's democratic elections date back to the colonial period in 1922, when the government introduced piecemeal elections (Tekena, 1966; Martin, 2005). The introduction of Lagos and Calabar legislative councils led to criticism from the educated elite, leading to the prohibition of elective representation (Martin, 2005). The 1922 representative elective principle was restrictive, allowing only adult males with a gross national income of £100,000 to vote. The 1951 elections saw the Macpherson Constitution replaced by Arthur Richards, restricting popular franchises at regional levels (Tekena, 1966). Voting took place at primary electoral colleges in the East and North. The 1954 Federal General Election in Nigeria was the first under the Lyttelton Constitution, allowing universal adult suffrage for individuals over 21 years old (Ayoade, 1980). The election saw the NPC win 83 seats, the NCNC win two, and the AG win one. The three dominant parties, led by D. Nnamdi Azikwe, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, won seats in their regions where religion dominated (Ayoade, 1980). The final Federal General Election in Nigeria, held under colonial control, saw the NPC win 134 out of 312 seats, capturing 50% of the Federal House (Tekena, 1966).

The 1965 Nigerian elections were a period of brinkmanship and disintegration, marked by events such as the Action Group crisis, treason trial, census controversy, Workers' General Strike, and Federal Elections (Adamo, 2018). The western region hoped to eliminate northern dominance through a census, but the merger of political parties led to a constitutional crisis. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was reappointed as prime minister, and a fresh election in March 1965 saw the Northern People Congress (NPC) still dominate with 162 seats (Kperoji, 2016). The 1965 western elections saw violence, murders, and looting, leading to the collapse of the electoral process. The UPGA and NNA parties contested, and the region became "the cockpit of Nigerian politics" and "the problem area of the Nigerian Federation" between 1962 and 1966. The army took control on January 15, 1966 (Vincent, 2023).

There was an interlude of military rules; the military dictatorship in Nigeria began with the 1966 coup d'état, planned and executed by revolutionary Nigerian nationalist officers under Emmanuel Ifeajuna (BBC, 2016). The plot was supported by left-wing intellectuals who sought to overthrow the First Nigerian Republic. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi served as the head of the Federal Military Government but was overthrown in a coup (Emeka, 2023). General Yakubu Gowon held power until 1975, when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup. Olusgun Basanji succeeded him, ending the military regime (John, 2021). The Second Republic of Nigeria was overthrown in 1983, followed by Muhammadu Buhari and General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida ruled for eight years, promising democracy, but eventually ruled for eight more (Festus, 2005). In 1993, General Sani Abacha overthrew the Interim National Government, and in 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar

took over (John, 2021). In 1999, Olusgun Basanj became head of state, ending the junta and establishing the Fourth Nigerian Republic.

Besides the first elections after independence, there were seven other general elections conducted under civilian rules (1983, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023). Nigeria's ruling class has struggled not to respect basic rules since independence, leading to massive vote-rigging and electoral fraud in the 1983 election (David, 2018). The NPN, NPP, and UPN were involved in collusion, leading to governments that could not claim legitimacy. Despite the rigging, dominant parties were voted for based on ethnic-religious loyalties, with the NPN winning in the north, the NPP in the south, and the UPN in the Yoruba-dominated areas (David, 2018). The government was toppled by the military in December 1983 (John, 2021).

In 2003, Nigeria held elections under the Obasanjo government, marking another transition from civilian rule to civilian rule. The Supreme Court ruling against INEC in 2002 led to an unprecedented number of parties contesting elections, with politicians resorting to violence and kidnapping to maintain power (Adekola, 2021). The election was considered one of the most fraudulent in Nigeria's history, with ethnic and religious stigmas present. Observers documented massive irregularities, including "ghost" and underage voting, and political thugs stealing ballot boxes and stuffing them with unlawful votes (Adekunle, 2021). Similarly, the 2007 Nigerian elections were a significant event, following eight years of crisis-ridden democracy and a transition from a civilian to a civilian government. Despite the use of an electronic system, problems with voter registration, security, and ballot paper snatching and burning were still reported (Adekola, 2021). INEC was accused of involvement in rigging and election violence, and opposition petitions were dismissed. The election was deemed the worst in Nigeria's history, putting the country to shame.

The 2011 general election in Nigeria was a significant test for President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. It highlighted the extent of a country's democratic institutions and the strength of the democratic process (John, 2021). However, public outcry and suspicion of the electoral body's leadership, including some members of the ruling PDP, led to systemic breakdown, logistic challenges, funding problems, government interference, and loss of confidence. The local and international community submitted a call for change in the leadership of INEC, led by Professor Maurice Iwu, who conducted the 2007 elections, considered the worst ever elections in Nigeria (John, 2021). Consequently, the 2011 election was marked by openness, transparency, and the registration of numerous political parties, including the PDP, ANPP, AC, CPC, Labour Party, APGA, and NCP. Despite the PDP winning the presidency and majority seats in the national assembly and state assemblies, the fair acceptance of the election from both local and international communities was crucial (Dorina, 2011).

The 2011 general election in Nigeria was praised as a step forward in the nation's march towards free and fair elections, with the Nigeria Labour Congress describing it as the best since independence (Dorina, 2011). The US expressed concern about alleged ballot box snatching and stuffing and called on INEC to take appropriate action on allegations of 'under-age' voters, violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing, and inordinately high turnout in some areas. There were also allegations of manipulation in the collation of results (Dorina, 2011). The nation fared better than in previous elections, with the generally acceptable outcome rekindling new hopes for the democratic future of Nigeria.

Nigeria held another general election in March 2015, marking the most expensive election on the African continent. The election was postponed by six weeks due to poor distribution of permanent voter cards and the Boko Haram insurgency (Jidefo, 2015). Opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari won the election with over 2.5 million votes. The Independent National Electoral Commission, led by Prof. Attahiru Jega, introduced innovations to improve election integrity,

including biometric Permanent Voter Cards and card reader devices (Adekola, 2021). The election also saw a high number of election observation groups, including the African Union, Commonwealth of Nations, ECOWAS, and the European Union (EU). Despite concerns about violence, the turnout and enthusiasm of voters were commendable. The Nigerian presidential election was the most expensive in African history, with opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari winning by over 2.5 million votes. Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat, marking the first time an incumbent president has lost re-election in Nigeria (Jidefo, 2015). Buhari was sworn in on May 29, 2015, marking the first time since 1960 that a sitting government peacefully transferred power to an elected opposition member. Security presence was generally positive, but intimidation and harassment were reported (Adekola, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

David Easton's political systems theory, also known as the "Easton Model," is a framework that explains how political systems are complex and dynamic entities. It posits that a political system is a process where inputs from the environment are converted into outputs through the authoritative allocation of values. The theory consists of four key elements: inputs, conversion processes, outputs, and feedback (Agara, 2017). Inputs include citizens' preferences, interests, and values, while the conversion process refers to how the political system transforms these inputs into public policies and decisions. Outputs are the results of the conversion process, such as laws, regulations, and other forms of public policy that address the demands expressed through inputs (Agara, 2017). Feedback mechanisms allow the political system to adapt to changes in the environment and maintain stability. Thus, the introduction of BVAS is a result of people's interests and values, which include credible, free, and fair elections. The conversion process and output represent all forms of processes engaged in by the government before the adoption of BVAS and final approval of the use of machines for conducting elections, respectively. The feedback is assessing the policy of adoption of BVAS after its use. This research uses Easton's theory to demonstrate the introduction of the BVAS machine in the 2023 general elections by INEC, which was driven by Nigerians' demand for a credible election and electoral transparency. And this research is an attempt to evaluate this policy of adoption of BVAS and to serve as a means of getting feedback to guide the Nigerian government in its future policy making.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts secondary sources of data. This involves systematic review of books, newspapers, articles, textbooks, journals, websites, and the electronic media. It also adopts content analysis to analyze the information gathered.

Transition from Manual Voting to the Adoption of Technology in Nigeria Presidential Elections

Elections as a major component of democracy in a country remain weak and undeveloped, with the biggest challenges of a transparent voting system. Nigeria's election has been characterized by electoral fraud and numerous problems from the onset (Festus, 2005). Major among the problems include missing names of some registered voters, intimidation and disfranchisement of voters, multiple and underage voting, snatching or destruction of ballot boxes, miscomputation and falsification of results, to mention but a few (Oyinla and Alaba, 2018). The paramount reason for the introduction of electronic voting is its potential to facilitate higher political participation since it is deemed to be convenient for voting and its ability to enhance electoral credibility, transparency, and integrity (Oyinla and Alaba, 2018).

Massive electoral malpractices that took place in 2007 arose from the desire to reclaim INEC's lost integrity, improve the veracity of election results, and exonerate INEC from public accusations of colluding with the ruling party to manipulate election results (Nasir, 2019). In 2010, President Jonathan formed a committee led by INEC chairman Prof. Atahiru Jega to find a solution to this menace. The committee adopted "Direct Data Capture Machine" (DDCM) equipment. This equipment consists of a laptop, webcam, fingerprint reader, and printer. It was also made in such a way that it has a long-lasting battery for power in cases where energy is erratic, an external hard drive for data storage, and a sturdy, waterproof enclosure for each piece of fragile equipment (Bayo, 2022). Additionally, each DDCM needed a lot of paper for creating ID cards, printer toner, and software CDs. It produced the Electronic Voters' Register (EVR) and the Smart Card Readers (SCR), which have since been used for all the elections.

The conduct of the 2011 election came within adoption of technology to conduct elections. This development also included an improvement in legal parameters which ensured and guaranteed INEC's independence. Indeed, there was a reduction in the number of litigations in the tribunals compared to the 2007 elections (Ayika, 2022). However, there were itches in usage of this DDCM right from names. Abu Bakar, a youth leader, was reported to have rebuked INEC for providing malfunctioning machines (Mathew, 2011).

Similarly, there were arguments against DDCM because it could not meet the expectations of Nigerians. For instance, in the 2015 general elections, DDCM triggered national outrage and embarrassment when the then president, Goodluck Jonathan, his wife, and mother could not be accredited at the polling booth for half an hour due to the malfunctioning of the Independent Electoral Commission's (INEC's) Smart Card Reader (SCR) (Vincent, 2023). Likewise, in the 2019 general election, there were reports of the failure of smart card readers to function in various parts of the country, which delayed the conduct of the election and the announcement of the final results. The INEC itself disclosed its disappointment with the card readers in many places, despite the several assurances that it has tested their efficiency and expressed confidence in them (INEC 2019). Many observers expressed their dismay in their reports on the failure of card readers in many parts of the country during the process of election conduct in 2019. The INEC provided standby, but still, the problem could not be addressed accordingly. In some places, the card readers worked at inception but later developed defaults along the line. In other places, card readers failed to operate completely. One of the regulations for the conduct of the 2019 general election by INEC was that any voters must be accredited by the card readers before casting their votes (INEC 2019). Consequently, in some places, the election had to be postponed and re-conducted the following day after backups were supplied. In some areas, since elections commenced lately, their results were equally delayed, which in turn delayed the overall final announcement of the results. In fact, the voters were totally disenfranchised in some polling booths across the country (Adekola, 2021).

In response to the above challenges over time, an electoral bill was sponsored and passed. The passage of the electoral bill into law in 2022 did not only solidify INEC legally but also empowered INEC's usage of a more powerful electronic machine, the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS), in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. In other words, the passage of the 2022 electoral bill into law by the President Mohammed Buhari government gave INEC the legal and constitutional backing to use BVAS and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) in the electoral process (James, 2021). This is another new dawn in the use of technology for electoral processes. It is believed by the electoral stakeholders that BVAS would reduce excessive electoral fraud, promote credible elections, reduce voter apathy, and promote voter participation. Thus, in the 2023 general election, BVAS was used in conducting the elections.

The Roles of BVAS in Ensuring Credible Election in the 2023 Nigeria Presidential Election

It is a truism that the world is moving geometrically toward the usage of technology in almost all spheres of human life. Thus, the usage of BVAS in the last general elections has called for proper assessment in order to identify the areas of strength to build upon and areas of weakness to improve upon. This paper has identified three major areas of assessment: its operational efficiencies, its contributions to ensuring transparency, and its role in reducing electoral malpractice.

The BVAS machine could be assessed as being more efficient in the 2023 elections than in the previous elections, where it was used (Toba and Opani, 2023). It was very efficient in terms of accessing the data of electorates since it has two ways of retrieving information from the INCE server. Unlike card readers, which were failing during the process, BVAS was said to have gone beyond this level. General comments from electorates, observers, and political parties are that BVAS is a step forward in planning for electronic votes. INEC scored BVAS's performance in the 2023 elections at 98% (Qosim, 2023). "Our records show that the success rate for BVAS accreditation stands at 98% compared to the Smart Card Reader's 29.2% during the 2019 General Election," he said" (Qosim, 2023). The Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) also corroborated the above assertion by scoring INEC high in the 2023 election (Bolanle, 2023).

However, despite the magnificent purpose of BVAS, it was not without criticism, as there was a controversy over the use of BVAS in the 2023 election conducted in Nigeria. Firstly, there were cases of BVAS failure to accredit voters due mainly to technical issues relating to login details, configuration, or internet connectivity. For instance, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) noted that the poor functionality of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) hampered the flow of election exercises across Nigeria. (Punch 2023). According to Luminous (2023), BVAS failed to authenticate the biometrics of voters despite having their names on the register. Also, there have been reports of various glitches during the accreditation process, which contributed to delays in voting in places such as Borno State. The Common Wealth Report corroborated this finding. Observers reports,

While the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) functioned satisfactorily in most polling units, our observers reported that the BVAS was faster on facial recognition than on detecting the fingerprints of the voters during the accreditation process. The requirement to first try fingerprint recognition slowed down the process, as did issues of connectivity and training. There was general trust by officials, agents, and voters in the integrity of the BVAS (Common Wealth 2023).

Secondly, apart from the malfunctioning of BVAS, there were reports about the inadequate availability of machines in all polling units. Luminous (2023) reports that observers' data showed the availability of one BVAS device in only 98.8% of polling units. The remaining 1.2% percentage is still a flaw and clog in the wheel of electioneering that needs to be addressed.

Thirdly, there were issues with the inadequacy of personnel to handle the machine. Shehu (2023) maintained that the training given to ad hoc and INEC staff on the use of the BVAS machines was inadequate. In fact, most of the Presiding Officers (POs) and Assistant President Officers (APOs) in the polling units were not effectively trained in the proper use and handling of the BVAS machines, and some voters were unable to vote as a result of the failure of the machine to accredit them. Another complaint is that most of the ad hoc staff don't know how to upload the results from their polling unit. Consequently, there were reports of some discrepancies between the total

ballot papers cast and the total number of accredited voters in the BVAS machines in some polling units (Shehu, 2023).

Moreover, an important aspect of the function of BVAS is that it transmits results to the INEC portal. This aspect of BVAS failed woefully at that moment since INEC could not display the presidential results on its portal as earlier promised. The failure was attributed to the malfunctioning of BVAS, which did not function as expected. According to Punch (2023), two ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission acting as subpoenaed witnesses of the People's Democratic Party have admitted that the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System failed to transmit the results of the presidential election after the collation. Another person claimed that BVAS experienced a shutdown for nearly seven hours, preventing polling units from transmitting the results electronically (Punch, 2023). Thus, the certainty and integrity of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal were greatly tarnished due to failures in prompt transmission and publication of presidential results.

Lastly, despite the claim of INEC that violence could be cubed with the use of BVAS, there are still records of violence in some places. Koroma (2023), for instance, reports that the head of the ECOWAS electoral observation mission to Nigeria cited attacks recorded in some areas. He noted that other challenges include the snatching of BVAS devices and ballot boxes, which eventually caused the postponement of the elections in some states.

The report of the EU on the February 25, 2023, presidential election in Nigeria is major evidence that BVAS brought about a high level of transparency in electoral processes in Nigeria. It was said to be a major undertaking, representing a key opportunity for the consolidation of democracy (EU, 2023). "The report added that despite a challenging context and operational failures, the Nigerian people demonstrated their commitment to democracy. And that the elections were held on schedule with a high level of transparency" (EU, 2023). Thus, BVAS reduced multiple voting to the nearest minimum. Unlike before, in which some desperate politicians cast votes more than once, in the previous elections before BVAS, dubious politicians used to use more than one card in different voting centers (BBC, 2015). Once they could produce a voter's card and the name on the card tallies with the name on the accreditation broadsheet, the INEC officer in charge would just accredit them. The accreditor might not be able to determine the genuineness of ownership or ascertain the real owner of the card. This challenge was eradicated by BVAS since one must be recognized by the machine before one can vote (Daily Trust, 2022).

Similarly, BVAS grossly reduced the number of multiple votes that were cast in states of federation. Unlike before, when more than one million were brought from some states, in the last presidential election, less than half a million were brought. Meaning that it really reduced multiple votes. For instance, in 2019, Kogi State produced 507,038 votes, while in 2023, only 446,310 votes were brought in (INEC, 2019; INEC, 2023). Furthermore, the table below clearly shows the difference in the aggregate results of the last two general elections. We can see that, despite the fact that there were more registered voters in 2023 (93,469,008) than in 2019 (82,344,107), Yet, only 24,025,940 voted in 2023, compared to 28,614,190 who voted in 2019.

Table 1: Comparison between 2019 and 2023 electoral results

Years of Vote	Total Votes	Registered Voters
2019 election	28,614,190	82,344,107
2023 election	24,025,940	93,469,008

Source: data generated from INEC website but prepared by the researchers on 25th October, 2023

Likewise, reports from local observers also corroborate the above argument that BVAS ensured more transparency in recent elections. Thus, one can argue that despite the fact that there are issues with INEC's transmission of results electronically, the recent presidential and National Assembly elections were still praised by local observers and adjudged to be reasonably transparent. One of the group leaders, told the media in Abuja that INEC held a free, fair, and credible election (Mariam, 2023). According to the association, the BVAS accreditation and vote procedure had an above-85% success rate and operated extremely effectively nationwide. He noted:

It is important to state that all political parties, through their agents, have signed copies of the results, even though it is true that INEC did not immediately upload the results from polling units on the IReV portal as previously announced (Mariam, 2023).

In general, from the report so far and the judgment of both the electoral tribunal and the Supreme Court's judgment, this paper argues that the 2023 election is more transparent than the previous elections since the beginning of the second republic. And these little achievements could be associated with the adoption of BVAS.

BVAS and Reduction in Electoral Violence

To a reasonable extent, electoral violence was reduced with the adoption of BVAS (Ahmad, 2024; Christian, 2023). This is because ballot boxes are no longer snatched on their way to collation centers. In the previous elections, some collation centers used to be set ablaze by the party that felt unfavorable with the results from different voting centers (Nwolise, 2023). This could no longer be done by the politicians with the introduction of BVAS because results must have been snapped and uploaded into INEC servers at polling booths. Though there is still violence in some places, it is minimal. Even when there were observed incidences of ballot box snatching and destruction, there were swift responses from the security forces to save the situation. (Vincent, 2023).

Relief Web (2023) corroborated the above argument that there was a drastic reduction in the level of violence in the last election. It even claimed that there were anxieties before the election that there would be violence because of the peculiarity of the election. This peculiarity could range from muslim-muslim ticketing, ethnic coloration of the three major contenders, and economic hardship in the nation due to cashless policy. Despite all these anxieties, the election went on peacefully with little or no violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In any democratic nation, elections are essential to the survival, growth, and stability of democracy. Thus, the political development and democratic stability of a community are determined by the voting system of that government. This being dovetailed to the Nigerian

electoral process, one may observe that past administrations and elections have been marked, among other things, by electoral malpractices, violence, proclamations of states of emergency, military involvement, and many anomalies. Little can be undertaken with better success without using social networking sites, which were made possible by the introduction of technology and brought about another paradigm shift in the electioneering process.

The country's election offices became more efficient as a result of the inventive applications of pre-existing technology and the adoption of new technology, thanks in large part to the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). With the implementation of BVAS for the general election in 2023, Nigeria's electoral system has been enhanced. Voter enrolment, voter authentication, and result interface functionalities are all combined into one device with BVAS technology. In addition, apart from the presidential election, BVAS is utilized to provide a real-time snapshot of the polling unit result sheet to the INEC site, which the general public may view upon logging in.

Despite the difficulties encountered in operating some of the BVAS during the 2023 general election, the study found that there was a notable effect of device usage following the elections. Firstly, the use of the BVAS increased and strengthened public confidence and trust in the electoral process. This public confidence is contingent upon the credibility and transparency of an election, which the 2023 general election seems to possess. However, there is little apprehension about this achievement of INEC because of its failure to upload, in real time, the results of the presidential election from polling units. Secondly, the majority of Nigerians felt that their votes could count and, consequently, their will could be respected in future elections, and this has reinforced the legitimacy of elected officials in the democratic process. But it should be noted that even with the 2023 presidential election's success, there are still areas of uncertainty that need to be resolved in order to maintain the election's credibility and transparency. This includes, but is not limited to, the inability of INEC to upload presidential results on its portal in real time, as earlier promised and done in preceding elections. As such, it is recommended that the INEC enhance, train, and ad hoc staff on the use of BVAS to eliminate similar challenges experienced in the 2023 presidential elections. INEC should keep its promise to always upload the results of elections on its portal to avoid the reoccurrence of that situation in future elections. Additionally, voters should be educated about the BVAS system, its purpose, and its benefits to increase public trust in the BVAS in particular and the election process in general. Finally, it is important to implement strong data security measures to safeguard voter information and prevent unauthorized access to biometric data, as INEC claimed that these measures led to the manual collation of results.

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