

Transition to E-Voting: Panacea to Election Challenges in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria's fourth democratic Republic experimentation has been practiced for over two decades. Issues bordering around franchise continue to occupy centre stage in the Nigerian Political discourse. Application of open and transparent voting system in an inevitable determinant for accepting election results and legitimization of the electoral institution. There have been many issues and challenges regarding the processing of the elections conditionalities to be credible and more acceptable by most Nigerians. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has continuously been trying to evolve and introduce new mechanisms that would improve the credibility of elections in order to make the results more acceptable. This paper investigated those issues and challenges using both primary and secondary sources of data. The issues, challenges and constraints that militate against the transition to electronic voting (e-voting) which is panacea to those challenges is the focus of this work. The research found out that the legal framework should be instituted/contained in the Electoral Act to minimize litigations by election losers. The electronic requirements for proper functioning like adequate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) namely availability of adequate networks, steady electricity supply, as well as other environmental issues should be taken into account. It is the conviction of this paper that if the findings in this work are addressed and the recommendations implemented, Nigeria electoral challenges would be drastically reduced and the elections results would become more acceptable.

Keywords: E-Voting, Election, Information and Communication Technology

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria that commenced in 1999 started with manual processing of the elections stages. In Nigeria the representatives of most positions in the three arms of government (Federal, State and Local) are processed through elections. Acceptable methods of voting in Nigeria has been a clarion call that require efforts for improvement and most recently through exploring the use of electronic devices. Also the integrity of election processes is very fundamental to the integrity of the democracy. It is therefore very necessary to have a very transparent electoral processes in order to make the electorate and the candidates to see and accept the electronic processing of election which is the pillars of democracy as credible. Many issues and challenges like missing names of some registered votes, snatching or destruction of ballot boxes, ballot boxes stuffing, multiple and underage voting, destruction of election materials, hijacking of ballot boxes, attack on election officials, vote buying, violence and manipulation/falsification

of election results would be minimized using electronic devices. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) technology in 2007, which produced the Electronic Voters' Register (EVR) and the Smart Card Readers (SCR) which has since been used for all the elections. These were put in place to minimize electoral violence that evade peoples' confident and trust in the nations democracy.

EVR and the SCR improved the electoral process but it is the believe of many Nigerians that it is yet to achieve the expected credible results.

Electronic Voting (e-voting) is an electronic system or computerized voting equipment which permits voters to transmit their secret and secured voted ballot to election officials using the computer.

There are three types of e-voting, namely polling station e-voting, kiosk e-voting and remote e-voting [1]. Polling station e-voting enables voters to cast their votes electronically using

electronic machines within the polling booth. In kiosk e-voting, voters cast their votes at pre-selected stations, using ATM-like terminals.

Remote e-voting enables voters to cast their votes from anywhere within the period, using mobile devices or personal computers with internet connectivity.

Electronic Voting (e-voting) system improves the quality of elections in the country because it alleviates the

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES THAT WOULD FACILITATE THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF E-VOTING PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's election management and supervising body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that is charged with the responsibility of conducting credible elections in the country has been striving to improve its elections credibility and acceptance by creating credible enabling platforms.

However, there have been many challenging barriers to the full implementation and acceptability of its electronic stages. Those confronting barriers include:

- ❖ Lack of enabling laws to back up the utilization of those electronic devices and processes.
- ❖ Lack of adequate network quality
- ❖ Low level of voters sensitization and technology phobia among them.

Lack of enabling laws to bank up the utilization of those electronic devices.

The major problem of the utilization of electronic devices in processing of election issues/stages is lack of enabling laws that would enable the stakeholders to accept the outcome (result of the elections).

It is known that any electronic device(s) that is/are not known by the nation's constitution or Acts that provide legitimacy for the use would be seriously challenged in courts of law.

As we know that in every election just like in every game, there will be a winner and a loser; those that lose usually find fault(s) in the outcome (result). The difficult issue in human activities is "*who will police the police*"

The various decisions of the Supreme Courts regarding the use of the smart card readers are clear indication that deployment and utilization of technological device(s) for the conduct of election that has/have no legal backing would be queried and possibly voided. The card reader, despite its

shortcomings of paper-based method. E-voting also saves the nation from all disadvantages (double voting, underaged voting, ballot box stuffing, hijacking or destruction of ballot boxes, other manipulations etc) of paper based method.

It further produces free, fair, transparent, convenient, confidential, as well as speedy processing of election processes and results.

- ❖ Ineffective means of national identification
- ❖ Inadequate data base of voters
- ❖ Inadequate trial of the technology in non-public election
- ❖ Loss of confidence and trust on the electoral officials.
- ❖ High capital requirements of e-voting project and reliability of the election results.
- ❖ Bad topographic terrains
- ❖ Indifferent attitude of some security agents
- ❖ Recruitment of sets of ad-hoc staff during elections
- ❖ Security threat to both personnel and sophisticated technology
- ❖ Short-changing of trained staff just before the commencement of elections.

contributions in the improvement of

election process was declared illegal by the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

Lack of adequate Network Quality: It is known that many communities in different Local Government Areas in Nigeria do not have access to internet or they have very poor internet and communication network.

In such areas it will be difficult, if not impossible to transmit data/information.

Low level of voters sensitization: In many communities, the voters are not sensitized and many of them are rural farmers that remain politically apathetic. In many rural areas, especially in rainy seasons, the topography and geography of the communities are a great challenge. In such areas the transportation and deployment of these fragile and sensitive electronic devices for the e-voting would be very difficult.

Indifferent attitude of some security agents.

It is known that the security of those electronic devices and election material is very important for the proper utilization of those devices and materials. However, some security personnel feel indifferent about the important roles they should play to ensure the protection of devices, materials and even INEC Staff. This indifferent attitude of some security Staff do encourage various forms and types of election malpractices in those areas. Effective and adequate security services are needed to ensure hitch-free voting and processing of the votes. Further, this adequate security is very important to ward-off the hired hoodlums that could disrupt or hijack sensitive devices.

The recruitment of ad-hoc staff during elections: The recruitment of ad-hoc staff who may not be ICT compliant before an election and the use of National Youths Services Corp (NYSC) members produce inexperienced staff that would conduct the elections. It should be noted that efficient use of technological devices requires constant

RECOMMENDATIONS

The electoral Act should be up-dated and amended to accommodate the use of the modern electronic devices that facilitate election processing including e-voting. That would make the result of the e-voting during elections acceptable the use of those electronic devices should be practiced and perfected so that manual process be discouraged and therefore unacceptable.

It should be noted that the claim of using manual based elections processing on the allegation that electronic processes fail would continually threaten the use of technological devices in elections.

Proper and adequate voters' education with comprehensive down-to-earth demonstration in local languages should be carried out in all parts of Nigeria.

As mobile phones are now being used in villages, those networks should be adopted in dissemination of election information. Further, government should provide basic infrastructure in villages and communities for easy dissemination and access to information.

training and retraining of the personnel in order to master the manipulation of those devices with ease. So, those new staff do not give room for professionalism and may hinder the effective use, implementation and success of the e-voting processes.

Another issue that can adversely affect the electronic processing of elections stages is the epileptic power supply in most towns/villages in Nigeria. We know that it is not new to see regular power outages on daily basis in Nigeria. This situation does not augur well for the use of electronic devices that require steady and uninterrupted electricity supply. This is true due to the fact that in developing countries like Nigeria, advanced technologies are often proposed without pre-requisite complementary infrastructural facilities like steady power supply, literate levels and other environmental factors.

The responses from the respondents in this research (n=600) show and confirm that Nigeria should endeavour to gradually be putting the necessary facilities for e-elections on the ground to enable it change to e-voting in near future.

As More Nigerian are gradually becoming ICT-compliant, regular civil and public servants should be used in processing those electronic devices during elections.

Adequate care and proper checks must be adopted to avoid software attacks, system hacking and fake voting sites; so as to avoid submission of electronically altered election result.

In order to improve the security situation in each stage of election process, the security agents at each polling unit should be made to account for any damage and or loss of electronic gadget(s) at the polling units, they manage during elections.

Helicopters could be used to deploy election materials in areas with difficult topographic terrains.

Conclusion

Majority of Nigerians agree with the finding that as at the present state of affairs in the country, Nigeria is yet to meet with the international standard required for viable, credible, successful and generally accepted electoral system of democracy. Also, government should

start the provision of supplementary infrastructure like electricity in towns and communities network facilities in order to pave way for credible e-voting procedure.

However, INEC should employ electronic voters register, smart card readers, and

election result devices that will be self-auditing. Other advanced procedures would be incorporated in due course, as it is said that a journey of one thousand Kilometers starts with a step.

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