

Digital Electoral Reforms and Democratic Consolidation: A Critical Assessment of BVAS and IReV in the 2023 Nigerian General Elections

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Abstract

This study critically examines the implementation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal during Nigeria's 2023 general elections, assessing their effectiveness in promoting electoral credibility and democratic consolidation. Anchored on Democratic Consolidation Theory and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The study employs a qualitative research design combining participant observation, media analysis, expert commentary, and secondary data sources. Findings reveal that while BVAS and IReV represented technological milestones, their deployment was undermined by institutional weaknesses, political interference, inadequate training, and compromised transparency. Although the technologies succeeded in reducing some electoral malpractices, challenges such as BVAS malfunction, irregular accreditation, delayed or falsified uploads to IReV, and systemic political violence significantly affected the quality and perception of the elections. The study concludes that technological innovations alone cannot guarantee electoral credibility without simultaneous reforms in political culture, institutional independence, and democratic values.

Keywords: Bimodal Verification Accreditation System (BVAS), INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal, democracy, general elections, Electoral Violence

1. Introduction

Elections are fundamental to sustaining democratic governance, and the global trend toward digital transformation has emphasized the importance of

technological innovation in enhancing efficiency across various sectors, including electoral systems. Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide are increasingly incorporating technology to streamline election processes (Cheeseman et al., 2018; Mude, 2022). These technologies span from basic digital tools like word processors and spreadsheets to sophisticated systems such as database management software, optical scanners, and geographic information systems. A key advancement in this context is electronic voting (e-voting), which involves using electronic methods for casting and/or counting votes. Although e-voting has the potential to increase participation and promote transparency, it also presents new risks that could be exploited by state and non-state actors, thereby threatening the integrity of elections and democratic practices globally.

In many African nations, including Nigeria, the credibility of elections has been a persistent concern, often contributing to democratic backsliding (Odozor et al., 2022). To improve electoral processes, Nigeria has introduced various reforms, including the integration of technological solutions. While there is substantial global scholarship on the intersection of technology, democracy, and elections, debates continue. Advocates argue that ICT is essential for strengthening electoral credibility (Alebiosu, 2016; Olurode, 2017), while critics point to the risks and potential failures associated with digital election systems (Cheeseman et al., 2018; Mude, 2022). Others urge a more cautious and context-sensitive approach to implementing electoral technologies, emphasizing that success depends on multiple factors beyond just the tools themselves (Iwuoha, 2018; Fatai, 2020; Idowu, 2021). These varied perspectives reflect the broader theoretical discourse on electoral integrity and democratic development. However, despite the growing body of research on election technology in Nigeria, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the use of the most recent innovations introduced during the 2023 general elections (Thompson, Idris et al., 2023).

This study offers a critical assessment of the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Result Viewing Portal (IReV) during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It seeks to explore three key research questions: What historical experiences have shaped the use of electoral technologies in Nigeria's past elections? What were the notable achievements and shortcomings associated with the use of technology in the 2023 elections? What core factors contributed to the difficulties encountered in implementing these technologies? By examining these

questions, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, non-governmental organizations, and development partners.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined democratic consolidation, Nigerian elections, and the advent of digital voting technologies (Schedler, 1998; Valenzuela, 1990; Beetham, 1994; Thompson, Idris et al., 2023; Thompson, Adebisi et al., 2024; Thompson, 2025), as well as the successful deployment of electoral technologies in Western democracies. Yet, significant gaps remain regarding Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Schedler (1997) while agreeing that DC is a technical yet complex term hinged his definition on five notions which are avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion, institutionalizing democracy, completing democracy, and deepening democracy.

Valenzuela (1990) argues that a "consolidated" democracy is one so stable that it appears resistant to disintegration—characterized by uninterrupted civilian rule and the absence of destabilizing factors over time. Nigeria, however, continues to struggle with democratic consolidation: its recent elections have been marred by irregularities and spurred widespread calls for reform (Thompson, Idris et al., 2023; Thompson, Adebisi et al., 2024; Thompson, 2025). Despite policy initiatives, programs, and the introduction of technologies intended to strengthen electoral integrity, progress has been limited. Given the stark contrast between Nigeria's 2015 and 2023 polls, it is imperative to juxtapose the technological experiences of established Western democracies with those of developing contexts.

Technology should not be viewed as an end in itself; it carries inherent risks such as hacking, technical glitches, and system errors. Nonetheless, its adoption and the benefits it has yielded indicate that foundational structures and the prevailing political environment in some countries are conducive to such innovations. Effective implementation of electoral technologies should be guided by several key principles: adopting a holistic approach, evaluating impacts, maintaining transparency and ethical standards, addressing cybersecurity issues, ensuring the accuracy of election results, promoting privacy and inclusivity, assessing cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and efficiency, aligning with electoral regulations, and building user trust in the system. Crucially, the political culture of the adopting country plays a major role in the success or failure of these technologies.

In developed democracies, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, strong democratic institutions and adherence to the rule of law underpin electoral processes (Gerston, 2014). These countries prioritize civil liberties enshrined in their constitutions, including freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly. Citizens in these nations expect governments to protect these rights, reflecting a political culture committed to human rights and democratic norms (Almqvist, 2005). In contrast, many African countries, particularly Nigeria, continue to grapple with weak institutions, lack of accountability, and limited respect for the rule of law. As noted by Crocker (2019), political interference and widespread corruption often weaken institutional capacity, posing serious challenges to governance and electoral integrity. Furthermore, civil society plays a vital role in strengthening democratic processes in Western democracies. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) exemplify how advocacy, activism, and civic engagement serve as checks on government power and promote transparency (Donohue, 2017; Mueller et al., 2004; Dryzek, 2012). Independent media is also central to democratic governance, enabling free flow of information, fostering public discourse, and holding power to account. In systems like the UK's parliamentary democracy, coalition-building ensures power-sharing and enhances accountability through institutional checks and balances (Smith, 1996).

Western democracies, therefore, thrive on political cultures that uphold democratic values, civil liberties, and pluralism. These elements are essential for sustaining democratic institutions and enabling effective governance. In contrast, the Nigerian context reveals institutional and cultural gaps that hinder the full realization of democratic ideals, particularly in the realm of electoral technology. Notably, there is a significant gap in existing literature regarding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, especially following the introduction of critical digital innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). This underexplored area underscores the need for further research into how these technologies have impacted Nigeria's electoral landscape.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the democratic consolidation theory and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). **Democratic consolidation theory** explores how newly established democracies transition into stable, enduring systems of government. It examines the conditions and processes that lead to a situation where democratic institutions and norms become deeply embedded and

resistant to authoritarian reversal. A consolidated democracy is one in which political actors across the spectrum accept democratic rules as the “only game in town,” refraining from attempts to subvert or bypass institutions for personal or partisan gain (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999). Consolidation involves not only the institutionalization of democratic procedures but also the internalization of democratic norms by political elites and citizens alike (Schedler, 1998). Beetham (1994) highlight four key aspects of consolidation which facilitate democratic consolidation -- the experience of transition itself, a country's economic system, its political culture and its constitutional arrangements. In other words, key indicators include credible elections, rule of law, institutional autonomy, civil liberties, and a vibrant civil society.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al, 2023), which holds that there are four key constructs that influence the construction of a system and the adoption of technology which is the core of our study. These variables are: 1) performance expectancy, 2) effort expectancy, 3) social influence, and 4) facilitating conditions. The first three are direct determinants of usage intention and behavior, and the fourth is a direct determinant of user behaviour. Gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use are posited to moderate the impact of the four key constructs on usage intention and behavior. These factors are moderated by variables such as gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use. UTAUT is especially useful in public sector contexts such as elections where institutional trust, usability, and social perception significantly shape technology adoption (Dwivedi et al., 2019). In the context of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, UTAUT can help assess how stakeholders' voters, INEC officials, political actors accepted or rejected electoral tools like BVAS and IReV.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, enabling an in-depth exploration of human behavior and institutional dynamics during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through participant observation, a well-established qualitative research method that allows researchers to immerse themselves in the natural setting of the subjects under study (Spradley, 1980). In this case, the authors actively engaged in the electoral process in various capacities as INEC ad-hoc staff, party agents, assistant presiding officers, observers, and voters thereby gaining firsthand insights into the conduct and

experience of the elections. Through detailed field notes and reflective documentation, the researchers were able to record their observations, ensuring both the validity and reliability of the data collected. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings', observed data were carefully stored, reviewed, and cross-compared to identify and eliminate potential biases and duplications.

This immersive approach was particularly suitable for examining complex behaviors, power relations, and institutional practices within the electoral setting—an area where quantitative methods may not sufficiently captures the nuanced realities on the ground.

Table 1: Roles of Participant Observers during the 2023 general elections

S/N	Authors	Roles	Location
1	1 st	INEC Local Government Area Collation Officer	Ogun State
2	2 nd	Assistant Presiding Officer (APO) II,	Ibadan, Oyo State
3	3 rd	Voter,	Abeokuta, Ogun State
4	4 th	Election Observer for an NGO	Iyana Ipaja, Lagos State
5	5 th	Party Agent and Chieftain, Osun	Osogbo, Osun State

This was supported with secondary data from the reports of both local and international observers, existing literature, media coverage, and firsthand observations from researchers who served as electoral agents and ad-hoc staff during the general elections. This method cannot be overemphasized in political science research especially in studying political behaviours. Any wonder then that Andra and Michelson (2011) argue that participant observation techniques have played and should continue to play a key role in advancing our understanding of political science.

The data collected were then analysed through content analysis and documentation process and then presented thematically through descriptive narrative.

4. Findings

4.1 History of Technology in Nigerian Elections

Throughout the 20th century, elections and their outcomes in Nigeria have frequently been sources of intense contention, often sparking disputes and outright rejection by opposition parties and defeated candidates. These electoral controversies have occasionally led to widespread irregularities, violence, and

tragic consequences including the destruction of property, loss of lives and livelihoods, and, in some cases, the interruption of democratic governance through military interventions. Notable instances include the abrupt collapse of Nigeria's First and Second Republics and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, all of which significantly disrupted the nation's democratic trajectory and hampered efforts at democratic consolidation.

Although Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, it has continued to grapple with a legacy of flawed elections. Accusations of manipulated outcomes and backroom dealings have frequently marred electoral credibility. Campbell (2010) notably described these elections as pre-arranged. Electoral cycles were often dominated by threats, violence, and impunity. Following his controversial election in 2007, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua openly acknowledged the irregularities and committed to electoral reform. He inaugurated a reform committee headed by Justice Muhammadu L. Uwais, which recommended critical changes, including safeguarding INEC from political influence, curbing the role of security agencies, establishing deadlines for resolving electoral disputes, and barring candidates from assuming office while legal challenges persisted (Uwais, 2008). Although some reforms were implemented during Yar'Adua's presidency, many remained unaddressed following his death in 2010.

Subsequently, under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, the reform momentum continued with the appointment of Professor Attahiru Jega as INEC chairman and the enactment of the Electoral Act 2010. These developments marked a significant shift toward the integration of technology in Nigeria's electoral system. Innovations such as the Smart Card Reader (SCR) and the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) were introduced in the 2011 elections to detect and eliminate multiple voter registrations. These technologies proved effective: AFIS identified and removed about 870,000 duplicate registrations before the 2011 elections, 80,000 ahead of the 2015 elections, and approximately 300,000 prior to the 2019 polls (Fatai, 2020).

The 2019 elections saw further advancements with the introduction of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) alongside SCRs. While these reforms contributed to improved electoral transparency, the elections fell short of the standards set in 2011 and 2015. Challenges persisted, including device malfunctions, fallback to manual accreditation, SCRs' failure to authenticate some PVCs, and INEC officials exercising discretion in allowing unaccredited voters to vote in certain

areas. Additionally, the lack of full legal integration of these technologies hindered their effectiveness. Nonetheless, the gradual introduction of technological tools since 2011 has bolstered the legitimacy of Nigeria's electoral process and helped reduce the intensity of conflicts that have historically accompanied general elections.

4.1.1 Deployment of Technologies (BVAS and IReV) for the 2023 General Elections

In 2021, Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced two major innovations, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal as part of its efforts to improve the integrity of the electoral process. According to INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, BVAS combines fingerprint and facial recognition to verify voters' identities, thereby preventing impersonation and the misuse of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) through incident forms (Omorogbe, 2021). BVAS was initially tested in off-cycle elections in states such as Isoko in Delta, Anambra, Edo, and Osun, with the expectation that it would significantly shape the conduct and credibility of the 2023 general elections. Alongside BVAS, INEC deployed the Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) to cleanse the voter register by identifying and removing invalid entries, including underage and duplicate registrations. During the registration exercise between June and December 2021, 44.6% (1,126,359 out of 2,523,458 registrants) were flagged as invalid, a reflection of INEC's commitment to sanitizing the electoral process (Gana & James, 2022).

As of November 25, 2022, reports indicated that 24 individuals had lost their lives and approximately 20 others were injured due to pre-election violence. Professor Yakubu expressed concern over the denial of campaign venues, rising electoral violence, and repeated violations of the 2022 Electoral Act by political actors, warning that such actions could further exacerbate the country's insecurity. Nonetheless, he reaffirmed INEC's commitment to credible elections, assuring the public that the use of technology would guarantee that votes count (Ibrahim, 2022). Voter registration figures also rose significantly, increasing by 9,464,924 from the 84,004,084 registered in 2019 to 93,469,008 eligible voters in 2023. To prepare for the elections, INEC conducted a mock election on February 4, 2023, to test the functionality of these new technologies. Over 176,846 polling units were set up nationwide, and 1,265,227 personnel were trained to oversee the

elections, according to Mr. Festus Okoye, National Commissioner and Chairman of INEC's Information and Voter Education Committee:

The commission will recruit 707, 384 presiding officers and assistant presiding officers, about 17, 685 supervisory presiding officers, 9,620 collation/returning officers, as well as 530,538 polling unit security officials, making a total of 1,265,227. All these categories of staff are undergoing training and the training of others will commence in a few day (Akinwale, 2023)

Few days to the election, INEC spokesperson assured Nigerians that all was set and that technology will be fully deployed. He furthered that while the BVAS would be used for voter accreditations, IREV will be live to receive results transmitted from polling units (Thompson et al 2023).

4.2 BVAS, INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal and the 2023 General Elections: Successes and failures

Nigeria held its presidential and national assembly elections on February 25, 2023. The gubernatorial and state assembly polls, initially set for March 11, were postponed to March 18 to allow INEC to reconfigure the BVAS devices used earlier. The election was notable for featuring more than two strong presidential contenders: Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC), Peter Obi (Labour Party), Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP), and Atiku Abubakar (PDP). It was widely seen as a referendum on the APC's eight-year rule under former President Muhammadu Buhari.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election featured the nationwide use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). While some states reported early deployment, others experienced delays, reducing the system's overall efficiency. In some areas, BVAS was not used due to mishandling or intentional neglect. According to the 2022 Electoral Act, BVAS failures must be immediately addressed or the election rescheduled, and results from polling units with over-voting must be canceled. However, in several locations, polling proceeded without BVAS, despite legal implications. Nonetheless, BVAS was effectively used in many areas, though it caused some delays (CDD, 2023). After four days, results declared Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) the winner with 8,794,726 votes, followed by Atiku Abubakar (PDP) with 6,984,520, Peter Obi (LP) with 6,101,533, and Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP) with 1,456,687 votes. Despite 93.5

million registered voters, turnout was only about 27% (25 million). The results were contested by the LP, PDP, and three other parties at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal in Abuja.ⁱ

Few days after the election, the INEC chairman, Professor Yakubu Mahmood acknowledged the challenges in the presidential election and promised to improve on the gubernatorial elections. He stated:

As we approach the Governorship and State Assembly elections, we must work harder to overcome the challenges experienced in the last election. Nothing else will be acceptable to Nigerians. All staff found to be negligent, whether they are regular or ad hoc officials, including Collation and Returning Officers, must not be involved in forthcoming elections. RECs must also immediately initiate disciplinary action where prima facie evidence of wrong doing has been established (Yakubu, 2023).

The gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections took place on March 18, 2023, across Nigeria's 36 states, with 28 governors completing their terms. In states without gubernatorial elections, attention focused on legislative contests. Compared to the presidential polls, this round saw improved logistical preparations, including earlier deployment of BVAS and INEC officials. BVAS was widely used for voter accreditation, and results were largely transmitted directly from polling units, marking progress. However, the elections were still marred by violence, voter suppression, over-voting, and ballot snatching. Despite technological improvements, around 30 people reportedly lost their lives during the process (Nwafor, 2023).ⁱⁱ The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) echoed similar concerns in their report, aligning with observations from the US mission. The NDI/IRI (2023) report states that despite reforms in the Electoral Act 2022, the 2023 elections failed to meet public expectations as logistical issues, political violence, fuel and currency shortages, and delays in opening polling units hindered voter participation, while overcrowding compromised ballot secrecy and marginalized groups, particularly women, continued to face barriers to political inclusion (NDI/IRI, 2023). The United States Mission Nigeria (2023) strongly condemned the widespread incidents of violent voter intimidation and suppression observed during the gubernatorial elections in Lagos, Kano, and other states, noting that their observers personally witnessed some of these troubling events; despite these

challenges, elections were declared inconclusive in some areas and rescheduled for April 15, 2023.

The supplementary elections held on April 15, 2023, across 23 Nigerian states were expected to address the shortcomings of earlier polls, covering two governorship, five senatorial, 31 federal constituencies, and 57 state assembly contests. However, the elections were marred by widespread violence and irregularities, most notably in Adamawa State, where the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) prematurely announced the governorship results—a responsibility reserved for the returning officer. Despite protests urging adherence to due process, the APC candidate, Senator Aishatu Dahiru Binani, proceeded to deliver an acceptance speech (Odunsi, 2023). Tensions escalated when supporters of the PDP and incumbent governor, Alhaji Fintiri, apprehended a DSS officer accused of aiding the illegal declaration. Under alleged torture, the officer confessed that the REC had accepted a ₦2 billion (approximately US\$400 million) bribe, implicating other officials, including the police commissioner. The incident, described as a "civilian coup," echoed controversies from the February 25 presidential election. Despite the use of BVAS and IReV technologies, election-related disputes persisted, culminating in widespread litigation as many results were legally challenged.

4.2.1 Successes and Challenges

The BVAS (Bimodal Verification Accreditation System) and IReV (Independent National Election Commission Result Viewing Portal) demonstrated effectiveness in their designated roles during the 2023 general elections, contributing to notable improvements. These technologies facilitated enhanced voter verification, identification, and accreditation processes across polling units. They also enabled more efficient transmission of election results, particularly evident in national assembly, gubernatorial, and bye-elections. The implementation of BVAS posed a challenge to election riggers, who had to manipulate results within the confines of accredited voter data captured by the system. In regions like Kano, Rivers State, Katsina, Kaduna, Lagos State, and others known for historically high voter turnouts, reported figures were notably lower than in previous elections. This suggested a more constrained environment for electoral manipulation. The Commonwealth Observer led by His Excellency Thabo Mbeki noted that the Commonwealth Observer Group (2023) reported that while BVAS performed well overall, facial recognition was faster than fingerprint detection, and the mandatory initial fingerprint attempt, along with connectivity and training issues,

slowed the accreditation process and nonetheless, officials, agents, and voters generally trusted the system's integrity (Commonwealth Observer Group, 2023). Similarly, the African Union Election Observer noted that:

The Mission commends the innovation of using BVAS technology to accredit voters. This enhanced the credibility of the process. In 94% of the polling units visited, the BVAS functioned successfully. In some cases, the Mission observed that the process was delayed due to the limited number of BVAS compared to the large number of voters allocated to a polling unit which created frustrations among the voters who had to wait longer in the queues (AU Election Observer, 2023).

While the IReV portal transmitted most election results directly from polling units, it failed to do so for the presidential election in many areas. As of June 16, 2024, only 94.68% (167,443 of 176,846) of polling unit results had been uploaded, leaving a shortfall of about 5%, which is notable given the four-year preparation period. Despite improvements in operational efficiency, several issues raised concerns about the 2023 general elections' credibility. These included poor image capture by BVAS, device malfunctions, manual voting due to technical failures, insufficient training of INEC ad-hoc staff, and delays or errors in uploading results. Additionally, fake, blank, or incorrect results were uploaded, and many polling unit results remained unsubmitted months after the election. These logistical and administrative shortcomings significantly undermined the transparency and trust in the electoral process, as also highlighted by the EU Election Observer Mission (2023). According to the EU Election Observer (2023) after the March 18 elections, is captured aptly below:

The certainty and integrity of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, promoted as a real-time public viewing platform for results transmitted directly from polling units, was greatly tarnished due to failures of prompt transmission and publication of presidential results. In the run-up to the state elections, information about the functionality and specifics of the use of BVAS and transmission of the result forms remained unclear and non-transparent. INEC missed the opportunity to adequately inform the public on these aspects, although stating in the media that it had reviewed its technology to guarantee that issues with the upload of results on 25

February would not be repeated...Re-transmission of the corrected polling unit result forms from collation centres led to replacement of originally uploaded result forms on IReV, contrary to the expectations and information from INEC that both results forms would be visible. (2023: 5-6).

A public and opinion poll analyst Mr Atedo Peterside described results on the INEC IReV as an insult to anyone's intelligence (Okojie, 2023). Reiterating some of these issues, the Centre for Democracy and Development (2023: 12) noted that the "new electoral technology have not met the promise of INEC and the expectations of citizens on improved transparency in the results collation process in particular." Fasakin (2023: 103-104) describes the situation thus:

INEC failed to align the results at then polling units with IReV at its national collation centres. IReV for the presidential election results was down and there was no way that voters could receive and follow the results from the polling units across the country....Without IReV working fully, the declared results were not accepted by the political parties and many members of the public, challenging the legitimacy of INEC's results and questioning the emergence and presidency of Bola Tinubu.

Figure 1: Some Issues with the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) Portal

SN	Issues	Elections	Source
1	Technical Glitches	Presidential/ national assembly election	Omolaoye, S (2023, February 26) INEC says technical hitches responsible for delay in uploading results. The Guardian. https://guardian.ng/news/inec-says-technical-hitches-responsible-for-delay-in-uploading-results/
2	Wrong Tabulation	All the elections	Ochojila, A (2023, March 16) Lawyer sues INEC over alleged failure to upload election results on IReV portal. The Guardian https://guardian.ng/news/lawyer-sues-inec-over-alleged-failure-to-upload-election-results-on-irev-portal/
3	Upload of wrong image	All the elections	https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/inec-under-fire-for-uploading-picture-of-woman-on-portal-as-ekiti-polling-unit-result/
4	Incomplete Upload	All the Elections	https://inecelectionresults.ng/pres/elections/63f8f25b594e164f8146a213?type=pres
5	Failure to Upload from Polling Units	Presidential/ national assembly election	Ochojila, A (2023, March 16) Lawyer sues INEC over alleged failure to upload election results on IReV portal. The Guardian https://guardian.ng/news/lawyer-sues-inec-over-alleged-failure-to-upload-election-results-on-irev-portal/
6	Upload wrong States of units for another	All elections	Adedeji, T (2023, March 7) INEC uploaded Jigawa results on iREV portal as Imo results-PDP. Daily Post. https://dailypost.ng/2023/03/07/inec-uploaded-jigawa-results-on-irev-portal-as-imo-results-pdp/
7	Upload of personal pictures	All elections	Ariemu, O (2023, February 28). Presidential election: Confusion as INEC uploads female's picture on result portal. Daily Post. https://dailypost.ng/2023/02/28/presidential-election-confusion-as-inec-uploads-females-picture-on-result-portal/
8	Failure to transmit was deliberate by INEC. Thus, a contradiction of statement from INEC and Information Minister	Presidential/ national assembly election	https://saharareporters.com/2023/04/04/buharis-minister-lai-mohammed-contradicts-inec-says-electoral-body-deliberately-didnt

Source: compiled by the authors

The Justice Development and Peace Commission (JSPC) noted that:

The fact that results were not directly transmitted from polling units, nor posted on the walls and the recourse to manual collation

of results has created a huge credibility crisis for the Commission. The high expectations of Nigerians for credible, free and fair elections have not been met by the election held on Saturday, February 25, 2023. Rather than improve the credibility deficits of the 2019 election, the recent election seems to have increased them and weakened the process further (Sahara Reporters, 2023)

The 2023 elections were widely criticized for lacking credibility, marking a decline from previous polls. Presidential candidates Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi legally contested the results, while others like Omoyele Sowore and Rabiu Kwankwaso also questioned the process, withholding congratulations from the declared winner, Bola Tinubu (Isuwa, 2023; Olufemi, 2023). Legal challenges moved from the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (PEPT) to the Supreme Court, where they were dismissed on technicalities. Justice John Okoro noted that failures in the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) could damage public trust in the electoral process (Oyero, 2023).

4.3 Factors Responsible for the Challenges in the Use of Technologies During the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

The credibility of Nigeria's 2023 general elections was not primarily hindered by a lack of technology or its deployment, but rather by deeper structural issues. These included the compromised independence of INEC, political interference, the allowance of unaccredited voters at some polling units, and the state's failure to uphold its own electoral guidelines. The nature of the Nigerian state shaped by its postcolonial origins has historically normalized violence, making it difficult to foster peaceful democratic processes (Ifidon, 2002). As a result, political elites often resort to threats and coercion. For example, a presidential candidate was recorded urging party members to seize power by force (Ajuwon, 2022), while a transport union leader in Lagos threatened non-Yoruba voters (Thompson, Adebisi et al., 2024). Such incidents, particularly following the gubernatorial and state assembly elections, created a tense atmosphere across the country.

Figure 2: Features of Nigeria’s Political Culture in Historical Perspective

S/N	Features	Colonial Period	1 st Republic	Various Military Eras	2 nd Republic	3 rd Republic	1999 to Date
1	Ethnic Politics	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Prevalent
2	Election Rigging	Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent
3	Political Violence	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Very Prevalent
4	Monetization of Elections and Primaries/ Vote Trading	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Very Prevalent
5	Weak Ideological Frame	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Very Prevalent
6	Godfatherism/ Prebendalism	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent
7	Political Assassinations	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent
8	Insecurity/ Terrorism	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent
9	Distrust/ Voter Apathy	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent
10	Fake News/ Misinformation and Disinformation	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent
11	Technological Glitches (Deliberate or undeliberate)	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent
12	Voter Suppression and Threat	Slightly Prevalent	Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent
13	Religious Politics	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Prevalent	Not Prevalent	Very Prevalent
14	Weak Institutions (Religious, Media, Security, Legislature, Civil Society Organisations)	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent
15	Partisan Judiciary and Intervention into Election Results	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Slightly Prevalent	Very Prevalent

Source: Uwais (2008: 102) and other compilations by the authors

Moreover, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) struggled with a lack of autonomy, which significantly hindered the effective deployment of technology. Although it had previously given assurances and successfully implemented result uploads and electronic transmissions during off-season elections in Osun, Ekiti, and Anambra States, INEC was unable to upload complete results even after two months following the general elections. Instances such as an INEC official liking a derogatory comment about a candidate on social media further revealed its compromised impartiality (Osaji, 2023). In addition, the situation in Adamawa State—where the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) bypassed the Returning Officer to declare results—further highlighted INEC's institutional vulnerability and lack of independence. Despite acknowledging technical flaws during mock elections held in February, the commission showed little resolve in addressing them. Equally concerning was INEC's failure to improve cybersecurity measures, even after its servers were hacked during the 2022 bye-elections in Osun and Ekiti. This raised suspicions, especially since it allowed the transmission of national assembly results from polling units, yet failed to do the same for the presidential results.

Third, injudiciousness of INEC officials to allow unaccredited voters to vote in some voting locations. CDD (2023) noted that more than 23 percent of the voters in northwest were allowed to vote in spite of the failure of the BVAS to accredit them. It noted similar anomalies in some other parts of the country during the presidential /national assembly elections. As it notes:

Although less pronounced elsewhere in the country 8.7% of observers witnessed this taking place in south-south, 5.9% in southwest, 9.6% in the northeast, 4.2% in the southeast and 7.7% in the north-central zone. Technical issues were also noted by our observers, with 23.1% having witnessed issues of BVAS malfunction. This was particularly predominant in the northeast, with 42.7% of observers recording a malfunction, but was also high in the northwest (28.7%) (CDD, 2023:4).

INEC's apparent disregard for constitutional and electoral guidelines was particularly troubling, as it repeatedly failed to uphold the rule of law. A striking example was the early declaration of gubernatorial election results in Enugu and Lagos, even in the face of widespread reports of over-voting in several polling units and wards. When such concerns were brought to the attention of Returning Officers, they were often dismissed, with officials advising aggrieved parties to pursue legal action instead. This dismissive stance, summed up in the now-popular phrase "go to court," became emblematic of the political climate at the

time. As a result, despite the introduction of technological innovations, the elections were marred by a spike in litigation arising from these unresolved irregularities.

The appointment and conduct of INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu, coupled with a lack of transparency in the electoral process, drew widespread criticism. Allegations surfaced suggesting that his son had vowed never to return to Nigeria if a particular candidate won, and following the victory of the APC candidate, reportedly congratulated his father for a job well done (Instablog9ja, 2023). Although there was no concrete evidence linking Yakubu directly to any political party, the actions and public statements of his family members painted a picture of political bias. His perceived indifference to the concerns raised by opposition parties during the presidential election often advising them to seek legal redress further fueled suspicions. Accusations also emerged that Yakubu was selected by powerful figures within the ruling party and subsequently reappointed for a second term. These concerns were echoed by former Rivers State Governor and Minister of Transportation, Rt Hon Rotimi Amaechi, who publicly highlighted the political undertones surrounding Yakubu's reappointment when he stated that the person who nominated him for appointment is a member of Tinubu's camp where he worked under the person as executive secretary of TETFUND (Akinsuyi, 2023).

The overall credibility of the election was significantly undermined by the lack of transparency that permeated the entire electoral process. A notable example was INEC's failure to clearly communicate its plan to reconfigure the BVAS machines following their use in the presidential election. This omission heightened public skepticism and cast doubt on the commission's operational integrity. The perceived secrecy and questionable conduct of INEC disappointed both Nigerian citizens and international observers. Allegations emerged during legal challenges to the declaration of Mr. Tinubu, with figures like Omoyele Sowore accusing INEC of manipulating vote counts and fabricating results that did not reflect the electorate's true choices.

Further deepening distrust, INEC was accused of delaying the release of certified true copies of election materials to petitioners, reinforcing suspicions of opacity. There were also claims that the commission either changed upload credentials or intentionally obstructed the transmission of results to its central server. Controversy intensified when former Minister of Communication and Digital

Economy, Mallam Isa Ali Pantami, claimed that INEC's server experienced over 12 million cyber-attacks. Experts quickly dismissed this as implausible, and notably, no credible government authority or private body has publicly refuted their position (Jaiyeola, 2023).

The situation became even more complex when Claretta Ogar, a cloud engineer with Amazon Web Services Inc., testified at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (PEPT) that INEC's server had not been compromised, directly contradicting Pantami's claims ([Onyedinefu](#)). However, her testimony was challenged by President Tinubu's legal team, who argued that she was not an official representative of Amazon but had appeared as a Labour Party affiliate. These developments collectively fueled ongoing concerns about the transparency, integrity, and impartiality of Nigeria's electoral process, ultimately casting serious doubt on the legitimacy of the election outcomes.

The lack of trust and allegations of corruption within the Nigerian judiciary are pervasive issues. Studies have indicated that corruption is rampant within the judiciary, ranking second only to the police among public officials (NBC, 2019; Ejekwonyilo, 2024). This systemic issue likely contributed to Mr. Sowore's decision not to contest the outcome of the presidential elections in court, as he expressed a lack of confidence in both the judiciary and the overall system (Sowore, 2023). He contended that:

A court that gave you a governor that was fourth in Imo state is not likely to be a court that I will be heading to when I am cheated on this scale. The court that has not delivered justice to people like me since I was born in this country is not a court that I can tell you that I have implicit or explicit confidence in. If you go to court, you can almost determine what would be the outcome of the court (Sowore, 2023).

Supporting the views on the judiciary, a public affairs analyst, Mr Fasan also opined that Nigeria's judiciary is widely perceived as deeply corrupt and dysfunctional, as evidenced by Senator Bulkachuwa's public admission of influencing court rulings through his wife and Justice Dattijo Muhammad's scathing valedictory critique of the Supreme Court's integrity as filled with filths and intrigues (Fasan, 2023). A legal luminary, Professor Chidi Anselm Odinkalu captured the state of Nigeria's judiciary this way:

The courts no longer even pretend to tether their pronouncements to any sense of principle, precedent or proportion. To use an expression originated by our neighbours in Cameroon, judicial mercenarism now manifests itself in an open jurisprudence of ‘*buy am; sell am.*’ (Premium Times, 2023).

Finally, a range of structural and systemic problems—such as government neglect, economic hardship, vote buying driven by widespread poverty, weak governance, technological backwardness and underinvestment in local innovations, entrenched corruption, unpopular initiatives like the currency redesign and fuel shortages, low literacy levels, poor infrastructure, politically biased security forces, partisan media, the overemphasis on acquiring political power, ideological disunity among the elite, and fragile institutions—significantly hindered the electoral process. For example, the ruling party curtailed opposition voices by penalizing media outlets that gave them coverage (Thompson et al., 2023). In their analysis of the election, Thompson et al. (2023) highlighted various contributing factors at the micro level (individual behavior and political will), meso level (ineffectiveness of security personnel and flawed recruitment of ad-hoc staff), and macro level (discontent with government policies and widespread distrust), all of which shaped the poor quality of the 2023 elections—characterized by violence, voter suppression, intimidation, and elite-driven political thuggery (EU Election Observers, 2023). The NDI/IRI in their preliminary report surmised that the elections still fell well short of Nigerian citizens’ legitimate and reasonable expectations as there were failures of logistics, challenges with voter registration and voter card distribution, inadequate communication by INEC, lack of transparency in the publication of election data, and unchecked political violence before and during the elections overshadowed incremental administrative gains achieved in the pre-election period, and impeded a substantial number of citizens from participating in voting.

Discussions

Findings indicate that Nigeria's adoption of electoral technology began during the Yar'Adua/Goodluck Jonathan administration, which openly acknowledged the electoral irregularities that brought it to power. In response, reforms such as those proposed by the Uwais Commission advocated for the use of technology to enhance electoral credibility and deepen democratisation. Following Yar'Adua's death, Jonathan sustained these reform efforts. The implementation gained momentum under Prof. Attahiru Jega, who introduced key innovations like the

Smart Card Readers (SCRs) and the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) in the 2011 elections (Fatai, 2020). Successive INEC chairmen built on this foundation, culminating in the 2023 introduction of new tools—BVAS and IReV. Despite widespread skepticism about their reliability, INEC consistently maintained that the technologies would function effectively and address any concerns regarding the electoral process.

Findings show that the introduction of BVAS and IReV in the 2023 general elections contributed to improving electoral integrity, particularly through enhanced voter verification, identification, and result transmission—especially in the national assembly, gubernatorial, and bye-elections (Alebiosu, 2016; Olurode, 2017). However, despite these benefits, the technologies failed to fully meet the expectations set by the Electoral Management Body (EMB) and its leadership. This was evident even after mock accreditation exercises were conducted nationwide prior to the elections (SBMorgen, 2023). Challenges included poor image capture and pixilation in some BVAS devices, technical malfunctions that led to delays and, in some instances, manual voting, insufficient training of ad-hoc staff, and persistent issues in uploading results to the IReV portal as mandated by the 2022 Electoral Act. There were also reports of fake, incorrect, or blank results being uploaded, with many polling unit results still not uploaded even two months after the election. These issues led to delayed announcements, heightened political tension, and ultimately compromised the overall quality of the elections (Thompson, Idris, Ademola et al., 2023; Thompson, Adebisi, Olise et al., 2024; Thompson, 2025). While technology helped reduce some traditional electoral malpractices, poor execution and non-technical failures significantly undermined its intended impact, triggering widespread legal challenges.

The challenges that marred the 2023 elections stemmed from a range of interrelated factors, including the nature of the Nigerian state, the compromised independence of the Electoral Management Body (INEC), and the misconduct of its officials who permitted unaccredited individuals to vote in certain locations. A pervasive lack of transparency throughout the electoral process further eroded public confidence, compounded by concerns over the appointment and conduct of INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu. Additionally, widespread distrust and allegations of corruption within the judiciary, coupled with deep-rooted structural issues—such as government inaction, economic hardship, poverty-driven vote buying, poor governance, outdated technology, and the failure to invest in local innovation—fueled the credibility crisis. Other contributing factors included

unpopular policies like the currency redesign and fuel shortages, low literacy, inadequate infrastructure, partisan security agencies, biased media coverage, a power-centric political culture, ideological disunity among elites, and weak institutions. Tellingly, even before the elections, official social media accounts of law enforcement agencies shared memes and misinformation about Peter Obi, signaling a compromised and biased institutional framework. These failures reflect the relevance of Beetham's (1994) four pillars of democratic consolidation: the transition process, economic structure, political culture, and constitutional design. The fragility of Nigeria's constitutional and legal framework became more evident in post-election litigation, where gaps between the Constitution and Electoral Act were exposed—gaps acknowledged even by one of the lead lawyers for Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who later called for urgent legal reforms.

The findings indicate that simply introducing technology is insufficient for achieving democratic consolidation. Drawing from Venkatesh et al. (2003), four critical factors influence the development and adoption of technology—performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions—all of which are central to this study. Similarly, Valenzuela (1990) emphasized that true consolidation occurs when key political actors and informed citizens believe in the permanence of democratic processes and when the system is free from “perverse institutions” such as tutelary powers, policy monopolies, manipulation of the electoral system, and the belief that power can be seized through non-electoral means. Therefore, technology can only be effective when supported by the right social, political, and institutional environments.

5. Conclusion

This study critically examines the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal during Nigeria's 2023 general elections to assess their impact on electoral credibility and democratic consolidation. The 2023 Nigerian general elections marked a turning point in the adoption of digital electoral technology, with the introduction of BVAS and IReV offering promising steps toward electoral transparency and voter authentication. However, despite these innovations, the elections were deeply marred by systemic failures rooted in weak institutions, political interference, inadequate training, poor communication, and a culture of impunity.

The recommendations of the study include institutional reform and INEC independence which can be achieved through constitutional amendments and

legislative safeguards to protect it from political influence and ensure impartiality. Second, local technological innovation and capacity building through periodic training and retraining of staff and ad-hoc staff. Third, transparent communication and public engagement: INEC must improve public communication strategies to clarify electoral procedures, particularly regarding result transmission and technological updates, to build public trust. Also, there should be cybersecurity and data Integrity which will prioritize cybersecurity measures and establish independent audits of INEC's digital platforms to prevent tampering and enhance the credibility of uploaded results. Fifth, judicial reforms to address the systemic corruption within the judiciary so as to restore public confidence in legal redress mechanisms and electoral dispute resolution. Others are civic and voter education which will help improve the political culture, accountability and legal enforcement, media and security sector neutrality, constitutional and Electoral Act reforms. These recommendations, if implemented, will not only enhance the efficacy of technological interventions like BVAS and IReV but also foster the kind of political and institutional environment necessary for genuine democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The study concludes that while the introduction of BVAS and IReV represented important strides toward improving electoral integrity in Nigeria, their impact was limited by systemic institutional failures, political interference, and poor implementation. Technological innovation alone cannot guarantee credible elections; meaningful democratic consolidation requires strong institutions, transparent processes, and a supportive political culture.

Notes

ⁱ These are the Action Alliance (AA), Action Peoples Party (APP), the Allied Peoples Movement (APM) and their candidates.

ⁱⁱ This figure may be more as some cases remained unreported. CDD reports that 109 people had died between January 1 and March 10

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