



ICT AND ELECTION MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: THE IMPLICATION FOR 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The paper ascertain ICT and election management in Nigeria: the implication for 2019 general election. The use of information communication technology has reduced incidence of electoral malpractices such as ballot stuffing, result sheet manipulations, over voting, alteration of result sheets and hijacking of ballot boxes in the history of Nigeria elections. These forms of electoral malpractices were subject to litigations for years after the election and this led to overturning electoral victory at the court of competent jurisdiction with tendered evidences before tribunals and other appellant Court. INEC employed a number of innovative approaches to improve on managing some past elections in Nigeria. As years pass by, INEC become more sophisticated with technologies to meet up with the demands of international standard. The paper argued that INEC took a bold step in 2011 elections to guard against multiple registrations by introducing data capturing machine. The introduction of Electronic Voters Register (EVR), Automatic Finger prints Identification System (AFIS) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) all reduced multiple registrations and voting to the barest minimum while e-collation platform reduced result manipulation at collation centers. Since the inception of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria electoral system has improved and foster credible elections in the country. It is the opinion of this paper to trace the history of election management in Nigeria and adopt documentary method concluded that ICT device can discourage multiple voting especially in 2019 general elections to guarantee voters confidence in the poll free from malpractices.

Keywords: Election, Management, ICT, Smart Card Reader & Electronic Voters Register

Introduction

The most significant feature that accords any nation a democratic statute is the concept of periodic elections, as no political entity can be described as democratic if it is devoid of elections. Among other things, elections create a channel for competitiveness that allows public offices to be keenly contested for by qualified candidates with a view to rendering selfless services to the people. Election Management in Nigeria from 1999 till date has continued to recycle in violence and unimaginable manipulation especially from the political elites; this has



attracted the attention of local and international community (Onu, 2005, Suberu, 2007). This factor is embedded in the inability of the electoral system to organize and conduct free, fair and credible elections since independence. The first republic elections conducted in Nigeria post-colonial era was marred by diverse irregularities ranging from manipulating election results among political elite, systemic disenfranchisement of eligible voters, rigging and use of thugs to snatch ballot boxes from electoral officers, multiple registration and voting, killing or maiming of opponents to intimidate supporters, under-aged voting, vote buying for unregulated voting, hiring of machinery from neighboring countries and post-election litigations among others (Nwagwu, 2011). The history of election management has been threat to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnic mechanism to acquire political power by political class. The nature of political institutions is orchestrated with poor democratic culture among Nigerian (Omodia and Egwemi, 2011). In the words of Okwesilieze Nwodo at (2011) People's Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential convention, Eagle square Abuja after litigations restraining him as national chairman, aptly describe election as the birth of the future not the glories of the past. Nigeria has witnessed four general elections in from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 election around the corner, it appears that power of incumbency by the ruling party is a factor to this malady (Chukwu, 2007, Ajayi, 2006, Amucheazi and Ibeanu, 2008). The emergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) gave birth to social networking sites that brought another paradigm shift in electioneering process. Since Barak Obama set world record with ICT for political purpose in 2008 United States presidential elections, many politicians globally have continued to embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in political process. Nwafor et al (2011) posits this media of communication have helped communities to be aware of one another. Baran (1998), submits that as the technology continues to shrink the world, people increasingly involved in one another's lives as people come to know more about others who were separated from distance to form new beneficial relationships. It is relevant to discourse what ICT is doing in the area of human communication, especially in fostering relationships and interactions among people. ICT is interactive and



participatory medium that engage youths, elites and other internet compliant individuals to build their lives around it. People now wake up now to search for news, gossips and other social and business engagements. In 1999, Nigeria witnessed a paradigm shifts from the status quo of military hijack in politics to a new dawn of democratic journey. Modern electoral management has not been imbibed, but 2011 and 2015 political dispensation brought the use of ICT in electioneering. Some parties, candidates, civil society organizations, INEC, security agencies and voters use this to enlighten, canvass for votes and support where necessary, while the voters become a major stakeholder on ICT to educate and mobilize them to support their course.

Meanwhile, before the coming of ICT, the mainstream for media is radio, television, newspapers, and magazines reigned in their own way has directly or indirectly blocked popular participation in electoral process. There is always scarcity of space and airtime given by the conventional media to citizens to have say in governance and other electoral process. Conventional media critics believe that voters were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans that makes them disinterested and cynical (Abubakar, 2011). They argued that absence of serious debate in the conventional media could make people to learn the substance of issues and policies proposed as well as related arguments but this disallows citizens from participating actively in political discourse. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) explained that web-based media are interactive in nature; they belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information as well as publish their own views on internet. The ubiquitous access of these online devices no doubt, has democratizing effects as they offer citizens opportunities to engage fully in political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages. Electoral act 2010 serves as a legal framework that governs the conduct of elections in Nigeria has not provide specific guidelines on the use of ICT in elections. Instead, it contains a number of sections that made references to the use of electronic media in the conduct of elections. A close look at the way the term electronic media was used in the electoral act indicates that the act is mindful of the opportunities provided by the electronic



media (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2011). The act envisages the role electronic media play in campaigning, monitoring, educating and involving the masses in electoral process. The place of ICT in the political circle cannot be ignored; it is significant to ensure an effective and inclusive system. However, its applications are not without challenges especially the low level telephone penetration and uneven access appear to be insurmountable. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to investigate ICT in election management in 2019 general elections in Nigeria and the challenges that confronting its application.

Clarification of Concepts

Information Communication Technology

Globally, ICT cover any product that receives stores, retrieves, manipulates or transmits information electronically in a digital form such as personal computers, digital television, email, robots (Afriyie, 2012). It embraces all the uses of digital technology that exist to help individuals, businesses and organizations use and manipulate information. It concerns the way these different uses can work with each other. Broadly, ECA (1999) see ICT as covering internet service provision, telecomm equipment and services, information technology equipment and services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centres, commercial information providers, network-based information services, and related information and communication activities. More so, ICTs offer major opportunities to advance human development from providing basic access to education or health information to making cash payments and stimulating citizen involvement in the democratic process (Yonazi, Kelly, Halewood and Blackman, 2012 in Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015). ICTs facilitate efficient administration, citizen services, transparency, accountability and formal political participation (e-governance), provide means for social movements, activist groupings or minority groups to engage with these processes on a global level. The three levels ICT use in government is to improve efficient information flow in government MDAs (Association for Progressive Communications, 2009).

The platforms provided by ICT are Internet, Facebook, Twitter and mobile applications. These platforms strengthen the capacity of individuals; reinforce civil society, aid communication and



mobilization. It help citizen to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation and expand the horizons of freedom (Diamond, 2010). For instance, Diamond (2010) affirms that the Internets decentralized nature and capacity to reach large numbers of people instantaneously is well suited to grassroots organizing. In contrast to television and radio, the new ICTs are two-way and even multi-way communication. Thus, users are not just inert recipients but journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organizers (Diamond, 2010). According to Kroecker, (2010) & Yonck, (2010), the use of information and communication technology in recent times has become inevitable and fundamental to operations and activities of organizations and societies. E-governance is the integration of ICTs in the process of governance and delivery of quality public services to the people. The use of information and communication technologies in elections has become pertinent since the manual method is fraud-ridden and practically becoming clumsy for government to manage. In order to control the atrocious level of electoral fraud, information communication technology is a viable tool for election management in Nigeria.

Election Management

Management has been popularly defined as the efficient utilization of resources. Leslie and Byars (1977) argued management is a process that involves the direction of a group of people towards organizational goals or objectives. Management involves the marriage of labour, infrastructure and other resources, and the effective supervision of that marriage to produce results (NIM, 1992). Management is an act of persons controlling and directing the affairs of an institution or business (Encyclopedia, 1994). The concept of election management is the process of conducting free, fair, credible and transparent election. The starting point of the managerial process is the determination of the goal and objectives of election management. The goal is service-oriented designed to give the electoral body and members' direction and purpose in serving the country better and more efficiently. In the words of Ekpundayo (2015), election



management is the process of arriving at free and fair election of candidates to fill public positions. It encompasses activities before, during and after proper or actual casting votes and announcement of results. The overall objective of setting up an electoral body is to ensure a viable electoral system and a hitch free and electoral management (Ighadalo, 2008). The election management is the totality of the electoral cycle such as functional party system, nomination of candidates, conduct of free, fair, and credible elections, declaration of election results and free conduct of post election activities such as election petitions and independence of the judiciary in the dispense of tribunal matters. Issues involved in election management are:

- (i) Participation of people in the act of electing their leader and be a stake in governance.
- (ii) Activities before, during and after elections (pre, present and post election)
- (iii) Notice of elections
- (iv) Legal and constitutional framework of elections
- (v) Registration and regulation of political parties and finance their campaigns
- (vi) Authenticity and genuineness of voters register
- (vii) Activities of electronic and print media organizations
- (viii) Independence of the organ, agency, and electoral bodies and other organizations.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts innovation diffusion theory (IDT), the theory was first postulated by Everett Rogers (1962). Since then, diffusion of innovation has been applied in disciplines such as education, sociology, communication, agriculture, marketing, and information technology (Rogers, 1995; Karahanna, et al., 1999; Agarwal, Sambamurthy, & Stair, 2000). Innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption (Rogers, 1995). Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1995). The IDT theory argues that potential users make decisions to adopt or reject an innovation based on beliefs that they form about the innovation (Agarwal, 2000). IDT includes five significant innovation characteristics: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and trial-ability and



observability. Relative advantage is the degree to which an innovation is considered as being better than the idea it replaced. This construct is found to be one of the best predictors of the adoption of an innovation. Compatibility is the degree to which innovation is regarded as being consistent with the potential end-users' existing values, prior experiences, and needs. Complexity is the end-users' perceived level of difficulty in understanding innovations and their ease of use. Trial-ability is the degree to which innovations can be tested on a limited basis. Observability is the degree to which the results of innovations can be visible by other people. These characteristics are used to explain end-user adoption of innovations and the decision-making process (Rogers, 1962). The work posited that Nigeria chooses to adopt the use of ICT in general elections when it saw the observable results or success attained by other nations that were early adopters of e-voting, and its relative advantage as compared to the use of ballot paper, simplicity and ease of use and its compatibility with the existing values of varying cultures in Nigerians. The paper suggests that the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in conducting elections was spurred by the heterophilous nature of Nigerian state.

ICTs and Election in Nigeria Since 2011

The advent of ICTs has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it a mass communicator. Information sharing has greatly improved, allowing citizens to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). With the advent of the new technology, politics also has greatly evolved in recent years. Politicians reach the masses in a twinkling of an eye, with the aim of gauging the political atmosphere even before venturing into the campaign. ICTs are feasibly the best tool to measure the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people and craft the best language to use as a campaign slogan. These information and communication technologies also provide a politician with the opportunity to be informally free with the public. This free connection helps politicians to communicate their humour, indicating their approachability and accessibility to the public. The deployment of platforms of ICTs in general, and the social media in particular, gave



a new lease of life to Nigeria's electoral process in 2015. The INEC, political parties, candidates, media, and CSOs all made the most of technology in carrying out their activities (Agbata Jnr, 2015). This, however, was not a 2015 phenomenon as ICTs had been used in the preceding general elections of 2011 (Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation, 2012). Conversely, the level at which ICT platforms were used in the 2015 elections was unprecedented in the country's electioneering history. In relation to 2011, INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega notes that ICT enhanced transparency of the political process and made INEC more accountable to the public in its conduct of elections; strengthened oversight of the electoral process by empowering the public to alert INEC of incidents requiring swift security intervention; mobilized citizens, particularly the younger generation, to participate at every level of the electoral process; (exemplifying) potential to entrench and deepen our democracy (SMYF, 2012).

The foregoing was possible by the strategy of INEC in establishing new and strengthening existing communication channels with other stakeholders. INEC introduced various innovations through which it sought to curb irregularity and ensure credibility. Among the novel ideas introduced by INEC was E-TRAC, a project that enabled signed polling unit result sheets (as pasted at the polling unit) to be accessible on the commission's website. E-TRAC aimed at building trust and ensuring transparency in the election process (INEC, 2015). The commission employed ICT tools to guard against cases of multiple registrations that had marred previous elections. Specifically, INEC introduced AFIS Automated Finger Print System, the device helped to identify and eliminate confirmed cases of multiple registration (Nwafor, 2015). Parties and their candidates also used ICT platforms to garner support for their cause. Indeed, political actors realized the enormous power of ICTs in general, and the internet in particular, optimizing the platforms to advance their electoral fortunes (Ikhariale, 2015 in Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015), thus, short documentaries and animations on YouTube, mini-online conferences, the use of Twitter hash-tags, and sponsored posts on political and lifestyle blogs expanded the online space (Owen and Usman, 2015). The benefit of internet, websites, twitter and face-book, as noted OpCit (2013), is that as well as sending information to potential voters, politicians become



part of the mediated lives of those voters, proactively arriving in their Twitter feeds and Facebook new streams without their needing to actively seek them out; thus enabling a much human person to emerge and build reputation, fostering a much more interactive relationship (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2012).

ICT in 2011 and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria brought Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the history of electioneering process, while 2015 elections experienced an explosive use of it. President Goodluck Jonathan and other contestants made extensive use of the platforms enabled by ICTs in the campaign process. Some key players who were active in the 2011 and 2015 general elections are political candidates, civil society organizations (CSO), INEC, volunteer groups, security agents and electorates.

Political Candidates Various politicians have known the importance of digital media and as a result opened twitter and Facebook accounts to reach out to electorates. In 2011, President Jonathan himself made use of his twitter handle @presgoodluck. But in the last general election, he left this twitter handle in the hands of Doyin Okupe and Reno Omokri. Muhammadu Buhari of (APC) also made use of new media platforms for his campaigns. Now, the trend of using ICTs by politicians is on the increase as they have not been using the platforms for electioneering campaign only but also as a way of maintaining their followership by keeping them abreast of their various activities or achievements (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). The websites of parties and candidates were used to relay election-related information, among the critical information on party websites are manifestoes and campaign promises of candidates. In Nigeria, parties are often accused of incoherent manifesto and specified ideologies; this represents a hoard of information to glean from. The leading opposition party in 2015, APC uses ICTs platforms to raise fund through crowd-funding. The party launched an online donation platform that gave opportunity to its supporters to contribute to its campaign fund through a designated account made popular on social media (Fadoju, 2015). This was in addition to ringtones, premium SMS, scratch cards as well as e-transaction used in sourcing monetary contributions



from fans (Fadoju, 2015). As noted by Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015), parties also set up digitized and ICT compliant situation rooms tracking events especially on Election Day. They monitored results of election from polling units, collaborating with their agents and citizen journalists on the ground. This was made easier by citizens armed with smart phones who sent results and images from their polling units and environs. For none smart phone users who could not be reached through the internet, bulk text messaging and automated voice calls were also placed through to subscribers (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). Some of these were effective where the telecom subscriber does not use a smart phone. Instructively, ICT platforms reduced the link-up gap between parties/candidates and the people. Most of the accounts were not run personally by the politicians, most of who are not well versed in operating the devices and navigating their ways on the platforms. They engaged users of the social media who have amassed huge following on the platforms as consultants to run their accounts, with a view to getting issues to trend by bringing it to the consciousness of the public and influencing opinions and perceptions in their favour (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015).

INEC The independent national electoral commission use ICT to educate and enlighten the electorates on the need to get their Permanent Voters Card (PVC), where to get it and how to use it on the election day. INEC, also educate the electorate via their social media platform on how to use the card reader during the voting process. ICTs helped the way INEC communicated with the public in 2011 and 2015 general elections. Through its enhanced communication channels, reports from distant polling units easily reached INEC officials and responses received within a reasonable time. INEC made use of ICTs platforms in enhancing effective flow of information making broad use of its website, Facebook page and Twitter handle. Its website had different sections providing valuable database of information for aspirants and candidates, election officials, voters, the media, as well as links to its Citizens Contact Centre and Registration Area Centres Nationwide (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). The website had information on all the 28 registered political parties in relation to their top officials, address and contact telephone numbers. This is crucial to the electoral process and information sharing. According to Odeyemi



and Mosunmola (2015), among the other critical resources downloadable from the INEC website prior to the elections was code of conduct for Political Parties, Political Parties Finance Manual, Political Parties Audit Report and Political Parties Handbook. Post-election, the INEC website has list of elected senators, members of the House of Representatives and the result of the presidential election. In 2011, more than 70,000 people were able to contact INEC directly to report incidents and have their questions answered, while the commission also received about 4,000 Tweets and 25 million hits on its website in three days during the presidential election alone (Asuni and Farris 2011). INEC use ICTs in 2011 and 2015 general elections significantly to strengthen the commission's capacity to receive and respond to the concerns of election stakeholders during the general elections. The willingness of INEC to receive and act on information encouraged Nigeria to participate actively in 2011 and 2015 elections respectively. The INEC website becomes critical that it was hacked for a couple of hours on presidential election day by a group known as Nigeria cyber army, it created anxiety across the country and beyond (Abimboye, 2015). INEC's technical staff however restored the website thus calming frayed nerves. INEC's Twitter handle, created since December 2010, was used in an unprecedented manner to relay information before, during and after the elections. The verified account boasts 9,380 tweets, 385,000 followers and information links to other INEC platforms including its website, contact email address and telephone number (twitter.com/inecnigeria).

Electorates The electorates in various elections world over states in the electioneering process. Because of the expensive nature of traditional media of communication in buying air time and space in the media, the masses have taken solace with the alternative opportunities provided by digital media. ICTs are predominantly used by youths and elites all over the world. It is through these communication platforms electorates get to inform, interact and influence themselves in regards to taking informed voting decisions. During electioneering process, the masses bare their minds on bad government or governance. Through use of ICTs, overwhelming number of videos, tweets and comments are shared. According to Omokri (2011), the use of these real time media severely limited electoral malpractices because we found that people were aware that they were



on camera and this made them operate at their best behaviour. Professor Atahiru Jega, the then INEC Chairman as noted by Amuchie (2012), agrees that the use of ICTs during elections enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections. The electorates have also engaged themselves in citizen journalism, where they use their mobile digital gadgets to take pictures in form of I-reporting and send on various ICT platforms and even traditional media; this is common with channels television. The electorates in Nigeria use ICT heavily during elections with particular reference to 2011 and 2015 elections. The electorates disseminated messages through various electronic channels mobilizing the citizens to participate in the electoral process. One posit that ICT is becoming the media of the people, by the people and for the people. Many Nigerians cannot utilize the privilege in ICT due to infrastructural deficit and high level of illiteracy and many localities are not covered by telecomm network in Nigeria.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) One of the major duties of CSOs in elections is to educate, enlighten and advice electorates to ensure they participate in the electoral process and ensure they protect their votes, make it count and report voting irregularities to appropriate authorities (PLAC, 2012). In line of this, several CSOs in Nigeria created ICTs platforms through which they shared information and engaged with the electoral process. One significant innovation by the CSOs is the creation of crowd-sourcing platforms that allow users to share information during elections using electronic messaging tools like email, text messages, or web contact forms. In 2011 elections, Reclaim Naija was set up by community life project in Lagos as an election incident reporting system built on the Ushahidi platform. The Reclaim Naija platform allows Nigerians to report incidents of violence and electoral malpractices through text messages. The messages received were to be plotted on an interactive map. Between the National Assembly elections of 9 April 2011 and the presidential election of 16 April 2011, citizen observers submitted 6,000 incident reports to the platform (Harwood 2011, OPAC, 2012). The Reclaim Naija website serves as a one-stop online resource for information in 2011 elections. It features in all polling units, senatorial districts and wards, the Nigerian Constitution, information



on candidates, the 2010 electoral act, the election timetable, guidelines, certified voters' figures, political parties as well as voter education modules. Besides the Reclaim Naija project, a coalition of internet-savvy Nigerians known as enough is enough (EiE) initiated a number of projects to mobilize young Nigerians through electronic platforms to demand for credible elections. The core of EiE's activity is the Register, Select, Vote, and Protect (RSVP) campaign which is designed to mobilize the youths to participate in the 2011 elections by using Tweets and Facebook messages to whip up interest and have people go out to register and vote, and they will then use the same tools to report on their activities so we can create online buzz that inspires more offline action (Harwood 2010, OPAC, 2012). The RSVP campaign involved mobilizing voters by organizing rallies in Abuja and Lagos via online channels and working with celebrities in conducting voter education through online campaigns. Enough is Enough (EiE) built a mobile phone application for election mapping known as Revoda, this made it possible for users to register their phone numbers in a particular polling unit, so that reports made at the polling unit could be authenticated and followed up by INEC (Asuni and Farris 2011).

Another example of efforts by the civil society to report 2011 is the project. The goal of project was to collect and report election results from polling units in Lagos state within the period of elections. The project tried to contact voters in all the wards throughout Lagos state who can post election results to a platform. Participants in the project were mobilized and sensitized through SMS, radio and email messages. Social media tracking centre considers the project to improve social media coverage of polling units in Lagos with 80% coverage achieved in gubernatorial elections (Asuni and Farris 2011). It is pertinent to state that NGOs play a major role to ensure that 2015 election is not just a success but partners with the electorate, donors and other partners to build the nation's democracy to be all-inclusive and ensure a better future for the nation.

Security Agencies The sheer logistics of elections in Nigeria requires adequate security in place, from moving electoral materials to deploying staff, manning of the polling booths to cast ballots to collation centres. For instance protecting voters at the polling units, safety of candidates, party agents and even the media that cover the election, each of the process requires adequate security.



According to (Jega, 2015), adequate security enhance free movement of staff, voters, candidates, observers and other stakeholders thus ensuring the credibility of the process. In order to ensure a credible electoral process devoid of violence and brigandage, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) set up Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (Attoh, 2015). The committee comprises police, military, DSS and other stakeholders to ensure security of the electoral process. Despite this laudable initiative, the 2015 and even 2011 general elections experienced pockets of insecurity especially in South-South and South-East geo-political zones of the country. The effort put in place by the security agencies, there was no observable use of ICTs despite the numerous benefits it offers in combating electoral crime and violence. The Information and Communications Technology will definitely enhance command and control. Thus, ICT play a major role in tackling some of these contemporary-security-related electoral challenges.

The Role of ICT in Managing Election in Nigeria

The smart card reader which was used for the first time in Nigeria's electoral process was the most contentious issue and a critical component of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria but remains one of the greatest innovative technologies in the history of Nigerian elections. Past elections in Nigeria witnessed the desperate bid for political power by many stakeholders with vested interests in the Nigerian electoral process. Some of these stakeholders engaged in all forms of electoral malpractices including multiple voting, impersonation, manipulation and falsification of results which had led to legal actions, electoral conflicts and violence. Electoral malpractices make the citizens lose trust in electoral processes; and lack of confidence by the citizens in the democratic process obstructs the deepening of electoral democracy because if the citizens do not believe in the fairness, accuracy, openness, and basic integrity of the election process, the very basis of any democratic society might be threatened (Alvarez and Hall, 2008).

In view of the negative impacts of electoral malpractices, global is on how to mitigate this undemocratic behaviour and improve the electoral process. One of such strategies to combat electoral malpractices is the introduction of information and communication technology in the



system. Although the use of technology in elections is not an end in itself, it assists in the various aspects of electoral administration (ACE Project, 2008). It is against this backdrop that an electronic technologically based device, smart card reader was introduced in Nigeria electoral process in 2015 to improve and deepen electoral democracy. The smart card reader is a technological device setup to authenticate and verify Permanent Voter Card (PVC) issued by INEC. The device uses cryptographic technology that has ultra-low power consumption, with a single core frequency of 1.2GHz and Android 4.2.2. Operating System (INEC, 2015). In other words, the card reader is designed to read information contained in the embedded chip of the permanent voter's card issued by INEC to verify authenticity of the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) and carry out a verification of the intending voter by matching the biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with the ones stored on PVC (Engineering Network Team, 2015). The ability of the card reader to perform the above described functions as well as keeping a tally of the total numbers of voters accredited at the polling unit and forwarding the information to a central database server over a Global System Mobile (GSM) network makes the card reader most welcome at this point in time in the nation's electoral history (Engineering Network Team, 2015). The basis for deploying technology device in 2015 general elections by INEC was to prevent fraud; for votes to count; reduce election litigations; authenticate and verify voters; protect credibility of the election; audit results from polling units across the federation; ensure transparency and accountability; build public confidence and trust in the election; reduce electoral conflicts; ensure a free and fair election and deepen Nigeria's electoral process.

In spite of the laudable goals and objectives of the smart card reader, it generated debates among the 2015 general elections stakeholders before, during and after the polls. According to Peters (2015), the card reader procedure has the capacity to prevent or minimize rigging in the sense that there would not be multiple voting while the opponents believed that in the peculiar circumstances of the Nigerian situation, the card reader is designed to assist a certain political party to win the general election. Their argument is that the card reader must have been programmed to assist a pre-determined winner of the election by ensuring that so many persons



would discriminately be disenfranchised to deny other parties of favourable votes thereby ensuring the winning of INEC preferred or pre-determined party.

The use of the card reader for the 2015 general elections was also criticized on the premise that its timing was too close for over a sixty eight million Nigerian voters. Considering the fact that the device was relatively a new technology that has not been tested or tried in Nigeria, it was therefore argued that INEC should step aside the card reader in the 2015 general elections. For the issue of card reader not being tested, INEC hurriedly conducted a test-run of the device on March 7, 2015 (21 days to the commencement of the polls) in twelve states (consisting of 225 polling units and 358 voting points) of the federation. Some of the card readers could not function effectively during the test-run. However, INEC promised to deal with the issue. This test-run exercise was carried out after the general elections were rescheduled. In order words, INEC could have conducted the general elections without test-running the device. This could have created a disaster for INEC that could only be imagined. The legality of the use of the card reader in the 2015 general elections was one crucial aspect of the debates that critics of the card readers contested. A careful study of the Nigeria's electoral jurisprudence is needed to determine whether the use of the smart card reader by INEC falls within the confines of the law. It is clear that INEC is a creation of the law as it is established under Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution as a federal executive body. Under paragraph 15 of Part 1 of the Third Schedule to the 1999 Constitution (as amended), INEC organize, undertake and supervise all elections in Nigeria, conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the registration of voters for the purpose of any election (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2015). The deployment of the card reader by INEC is not illegal Falana (2015). He also stated that INEC has the constitutional power to set the standards and guidelines for elections. In view of this, he argued that the card reader is part of accreditation and not voting. He maintained that what the law proscribed is electronic voting and not the card readers. The use of card reader in the 2015 general elections is legal and legitimate (Oderemi, 2015). Banire (2015) contended that the electronic voting machine and the card reader are two different devices that are not



necessarily deployed together for all purposes. Card reader is not an electronic voting machine but a machine used for accrediting voters before the actual voting. Electronic voting requires no ballot papers whereas the 2015 general election was ballot paper-based. Section 52(2) prohibits the use of electronic voting machine not use of card reader for accreditation of voters. In spite of the agitations the card reader was eventually used for 2015 general elections. However, the device had some challenges in its operations during the elections.

Benefits of ICT to Electoral Management

Time Saving: The use of information and communication technology saves time through the electoral process. From the registration of electorate through the counting and declaration of winner, ICT networks can contribute meaningfully by saving time since it takes the use of computer software and hardware. The manual process can take several weeks for the registration of electorate, while voting, counting and result announcement can take days all together. However, ICT can simplify the process through the use of one time applications that enhances performance, transparency and relative perfections in the electoral process.

Reduced Cost Implication in the Long Run: Although, the use of ICT in electoral process is expensive at the initial stage, however, the cost implication of the use of ICT in elections in the long run is relatively low compared to the manual electoral process. The use of ICT may reduce the number of personnel; reduce the number of materials to be used during elections. The fact that ICT requires huge amount of money for its acquisition and maintenance, however, these costs in the long run are manageable and reasonable when compared to the manual electoral process.

Massive Citizens Participation: With the prevailing trend in ICT growth and development, it is pertinent to point out that; e-governance has widened the framework of service delivery through ICT and by logical extension encouraged the use of ICT by citizens. The use of ICT encourages the citizens to participate in governance. Since the process is expected to capture the data of the citizens and in turn enable them to vote, citizens will be willing to participate as against relative apathy being experienced currently in the country.



Transparency: The use of ICT promotes transparency which enhances the legitimacy of the government. Since citizens are aware of the process involved and they know the resultant effect of their activities, it is not an overstatement that they will be willing to participate and trust the process reduced electoral litigations: The application of ICT in the electoral process reduces the incidences of electoral litigations that often characterize the Nigerian electoral process.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the introduction of biometric voters capturing machine is not a sufficient guard against multiple registration and other manipulations, there is need to introduce ICT into other electoral processes in Nigeria and this should be complemented by forensic investigation at each process because of its unique identifier. It is only the incorporation of ICT into the entire electoral process serve as guarantees against multiple registrations, voting and counting of votes. This is because the biometrics registration of voters as witnessed in the country has been subjected to various manipulations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper recommends:

1. There is need for INEC to consult widely and carryout necessary and effective campaigns on the card reader and any other technology to be used in future elections.
2. Adequate training of election of temporary and permanent INEC officials should be conducted ahead of time in future elections including practical demonstrations using the device effectively.
3. Card readers should be sufficient and made available during the training session. Each of the trainees should undergo a mock test during training.
4. INEC must frequently update and re-examine the importance of the card reader to future elections in Nigeria because technology is changing and the level of technology change is rapid such that a device used five years ago may not be too relevant or as relevant to the present day.
5. The use of electronic card reader must be perfected to avoid technical hitches as experienced during the last elections.



6. Ballot scanning machine should be introduced to scan used ballot papers and record votes in real time.
7. There must be Presidential debate to enhance quality of choice. Political campaigns in the last elections were bereft of ideas and more of character assassination and mundane issues.

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