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Electoral Malpractice and Card Reader System in Nigeria: A Study of the 2019 Presidential Election

Abstract: The adoption of smart card technology in various parts of Africa has reduced electoral malpractices, resulting in election credibility and acceptability. However, its use in Nigeria's electoral process is believed to have downsides. The paper investigates how adopting smart card technology reduced electoral malpractices during the 2019 presidential election, making it more transparent, credible, and reliable than the traditional technique. It uncovers the flaws of the technology in Nigeria, including card reader malfunction, delays in accreditation and voting, the inability of the INEC staff to operate the technology efficiently during voting, and election postponement, among others. It is therefore recommended that the INEC improve public awareness of the use of the technology and train its staff.

Keywords: *election, electoral malpractice, card reader, Nigeria*

Introduction

An election that is free, fair, and credible empowers the citizens to hold their leaders accountable, and it is essential to the democratization process. The fact that irregularities routinely mar Nigeria's election has decreased the accountability of public authorities in the nation. In order to create democracy through well-run elections, Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, have been grappling with electoral processes and procedures. The anomalies experienced in the electoral process and procedure in Nigeria have impeded the consequences of the process of democratization.

Before the opening of the Fourth Republic, except for the annulment of the 1993 election, the five elections held in Nigeria were declared fair to a larger extent. The elections contributed in no small measure to the democratization process in the country. However, the fraudulent elections held in 1999, 2003, and 2007 made little impact on Nigeria's democracy.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adopted the biometric smart card reader to address electoral malpractices observed in recent general elections in Nigeria. Biometric systems guarantee the confidentiality and accessibility of an individual's data and information through identification and verification procedures. A one-to-one security method called verification verifies that a user is who he claims to be. Verifying that the voters who show up on election day are the legitimate eligible voters who registered before the voting day is helpful in the context of voting. On the other hand, identification is one of the security methods used to confirm a person's identity among several other people. The credibility of an electoral process and the outcome of the process depend largely on these two methods.

Despite INEC's confidence in using card readers for the 2015 general elections, several challenges and problems were experienced even though the polls were generally seen as a success. The country's post-1999 transition to multiparty democracy laid the foundation for a tension-laden presidential election till the 2015 general election. The election, which saw significant resources spent on it, including 120 billion naira from INEC, was the most politically heated in the history of Nigeria's democracy. About 750,000 Ad-hoc poll staff were engaged with about 360,000 security personnel to ensure trust and transparency.

Similarly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the nation's electoral body, reported that 84 million people applied for Permanent voter cards for the 2019 Nigeria general elections (PVC). Of these, 86.63% received their PVC, maybe intending to cast a ballot at one of the 119,973 polling places in the nation. This indicates that each polling location was expected to have an average of 607 people registered to vote between 8 am and 2 pm. As a result, not all registered voters will be served if the validation process is cumbersome or there are logistical problems.

In light of the above, this paper investigates electoral fraud and Nigeria's card reader system, using the 2019 general election as a case study. Compared to the conventional method of voter verification and the system's shortcomings thus far, it aims to demonstrate how the deployment of card readers in the election process has reduced electoral malpractice and increased transparency, credibility, and reliability.

Conceptual Clarification

Election. The political process is supposed to be centered on elections. Do we elect the politicians who rule over us, and under what conditions are these elections held? This is the most critical question in democracy. In reality, the election is viewed as the pinnacle

of democracy. Through it, the populace can exert power over their government and have a change in government.

Heywood (2004) claims that an election is a means by which a chosen group of individuals fills a position in government (electorate). There is little question to ask as to whether elections are an essential prerequisite for political representation, even though they may not be adequate. Indeed, some theorists have gone even further and claimed that the core of democracy is election. This is the position put forth by Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), which portrayed democracy as an “institutional structure” for electing public officials through a contest for the public’s vote. *Democracy* just implies that the people can approve or reject the men who will rule them, according to how he stated it. Schumpeter effectively associated democracy with elections, specifically competitive elections, by viewing democracy as nothing more than a political strategy.

While few contemporary democratic theorists are willing to reduce democracy to just competitive elections, the majority still adhere to Schumpeter’s definition of democratic government regarding the laws and procedures governing election administration. This draws awareness to the incredibly diverse shapes that elections might take. Heywood (2004) claims that the election process in all democracies clarified important or fundamental concerns like: 1) which positions or offices are subject to the electoral principle? 2) Who has the right to vote, and how broad is the franchise? 3) How are ballots cast? 4) Competitive or non-competitive elections? 5) How are elections held?

The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines election as “the process of choosing the authorities or representatives of an organization or group by the vote of its qualified members.” The definition provided by Bain, cited in Okolie, A.M. (2004), appears to be more thorough: “the formal system through which the electorate selects officials and determines the problems assigned to it.” As a result, it is a procedure wherein individuals who are legally eligible to vote choose officers or make binding policies. While casting a ballot involves making a decision. Voting is a choice-based process; when voting is over, it means a decision or decisions have been made.

As a result, the most formal definition of elections is “a system for choosing officers or making binding decisions affecting policy by the vote of those formally qualified to participate” (Encyclopedia Americana 10,1996). Akzin (1960), who distinguishes between the social and technical importance of elections, is cited by Okolie (2004). He defines an election as “the procedure by which an office is allocated to a person by an act of volition needing the simultaneous expression of opinion by numerous persons” in a technical sense. Also emphasized was the fact that elections are social processes that “link a person to an office with proper provision for the participation of the people meant to come under the officer’s authority” (Akzin, 1960, cited in Okolie) (2004).

The social aspect of elections pertains to the idea of ruling a community with the consent of the ruled. By separating elections from appointments, democracy is achieved. Elections are frequently held in private organizations, including corporations, religious institutions,

and labor unions, to select CEOs or make decisions regarding specific policy matters. Elections can also occur within specific governmental organizations or bodies, like in Nigeria, where lawmakers choose the House officers, and citizens elect their representatives to the state and National Assemblies.

Here, our primary concerns are public elections for governing body executives or for choosing public policy issues. The primary purpose of elections for public office is to allow the electorate to decide who should rule them and what their policies and programs should be. When it comes to governmental institutions, this is especially true. According to Mayo (1960), cited in Okolie, “the main objective of the entire election process is to establish a government with legitimacy” (2004).

According to conventional opinion, the election is a means of holding politicians accountable and pressuring them to implement policies that reflect public will. This emphasizes the bottom-up functions of elections, such as political recruitment, representation, government establishment, influencing policy, etc. On the other hand, a radical reading on election put up by theorists like Ginsberg and discussed in Andrew Heywood (2004) sees it as a tool used by the state and political elites to impose control over the people, making it more subservient, pliable and ultimately governable. This viewpoint emphasizes top-down operations, including creating credibility, swaying public opinion, and supporting elites (Heywood, 2004). Elections have a variety of purposes; they are not just ways to ensure political control or public accountability. Like all other political communication channels, the election is a “two-way street” that allows the government and the populace, the elite and the masses, to influence one another.

Electoral Malpractices. The term “electoral malpractice” often refers to a situation in which the accepted norms and values that give election credibility are violated, and in place, duplicity, deception, manipulation, and election-swaying cheating are used. Election-related malpractice, according to Ezeani (2005), includes “illegalities perpetrated by the government, election officials, political parties, groups, or people with the nefarious aim to influence an election in favor of a candidate(s)” (Ezeani, 2005).

Birch (2011) categorizes electoral fraud, which she refers to as “electoral corruption,” into three groups. They include violations of the legal system, violations of the way preferences are formed, and violations of the way elections are run. Because it harms a nation’s democracy, electoral fraud of any kind is abhorrent to democracy. As a result, electoral fraud is not tolerated anywhere globally but is instead condemned. The rejection of electoral fraud is essential.

If unethical practices—such as rigging elections, spending much money, using violence against political rivals, and so forth—are allowed to go unchecked, politicians are more likely to adopt a negative culture of “political thievery.” As a result, elections lose some effectiveness as a mechanism for legitimizing political power and transferring it peacefully.

Lopez-Pintor (2010) asserts that election fraud has more serious political ramifications since it allows a party or candidate to occupy public offices against the general population’s

will. This erodes democracy and frequently leads to uncertain elections, unstable politics, and insecurity. The administrations of Cote d'Ivoire, Peru, and Serbia fell in 2000 due to widespread protests against stolen elections. Similarly, the 2004 "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine saw significant fraud, leading to a complete rerun of the presidential elections. Election fraud undermines public confidence in the democratic process and hinders the development of electoral democracy. Lack of confidence in the electoral process's fairness, accuracy, transparency, and fundamental integrity threatens democracy (Alvarez & Hall, 2008).

Smart Card Reader. A biometric smart card (BSC) is essentially a smart card with a biometric sensor and the capability to self-authenticate, which is currently primarily a fingerprint sensor. The BSC is used for all the steps necessary for biometric security, including collecting the necessary biometric trait, pre-processing it, extracting features from it, developing templates, and template matching.

The card reader uses cryptographic technology, which is incredibly safe and is frequently used in hardware that needs secure transactions, like payment terminals. It features a single core frequency of 1.2GHz, uses extremely little power, and runs the Android 4.2.2 operating system.

The card reader machine is beneficial at this point in the country's electoral history because it can carry out the tasks mentioned above as well as keep track of the total number of voters accredited at the polling place and send the information to a central database server via a Global System for Mobile (GSM) network (Engineering Network Team, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Functionalist theory is the foundation of this study. Functionalism, also referred to as functionalist theory, maintains that each element contributes to the stability of society as a whole rather than society being the sum of its parts. Durkheim compared society to an organism in which each part is essential yet unable to function independently. When one component malfunctions, the others must change to fill the void.

According to functionalist theory, the various facets of society are primarily made up of social institutions, each of which is created to address a certain need. A grasp of the family, government, economy, media, education, and religion is necessary to comprehend this theory and the fundamental institutions that shape society, politics, and governance.

In order to ensure that the benefits of democracy are realized, Nigerian society depends on the Independent National Electoral Commission as an institution to guide the electoral process in a way that produces great leaders. The breakdown or dysfunction of the system causes social unrest. So, from the functionalist perspective, if everything goes well, the components of society create order, stability, and production. Different facets of society must change if things do not go as planned in order to provide new kinds of order, stability, and production.

The Electoral Umpire, INEC, which also stands as an institution of government that partakes in the regularization and stability of the political system, deployed advanced technological devices to regulate the 2015 electoral process. The new electoral dimension used by INEC contributed to the stability of the society as a whole. The body understood that any attempt to conduct a fraudulent election would cause cracks and breakdown of the political system as a whole, hence its concerted effort at imbibing the principles and norms of fairness, equity, and transparency.

Overview of election/electoral malpractice in Nigeria. Liberal democracy depends heavily on elections. Election integrity and credibility are significant indicators of a country's level of democracy, as was before. The conduct of elections is governed by strict rules in any nation where democracy is strong. Nevertheless, since people choose who holds particular elected public offices through elections, politicians and parties can turn to heinous, dishonest tactics to win elections. Therefore, any political institution has to establish guidelines that all participants in the electoral process must follow. These regulations also specify the sanctions that must be met to any afflicted person or entity that commits electoral misconduct.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) and the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended) provide the legal foundation in Nigeria on how elections are held, what constitutes an electoral offense, and how violators are punished. The 1999 Constitution primarily addresses the framework required for holding elections for the various political offices in Nigeria, as well as the creation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Election Tribunals. The Electoral Act 2010 specifies in great detail what constitutes electoral malpractice and the associated penalties. Sections 76, 77, and 78 of the 1999 Constitution, for instance, outline the procedures for choosing members of the National Assembly and the requirements for Nigerians to be eligible to vote in National Assembly elections. Similar information about how and when elections for State Houses of Assembly are to be held may be found in Sections 116, 117, and 118 of the Constitution.

Sections 131, 132, 133, and 134 of the 1999 Constitution also detail the qualifications of any Nigerian who chooses to run for president and how that candidate will be chosen as the winner of a national election as it relates to the position of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Sections 177, 178, and 179 also contain requirements for candidates running for office as State Governor. Section 285 of the 1999 Constitution provides for forming Election Tribunals at the state and federal levels to hear disputes arising from elections for the offices as mentioned above.

Sections 14 and 15 of the Constitution's Third Schedule, Part I, define INEC's creation, the characteristics of its chairman, and its roles and authority. The Electoral Act of 2010 explicitly outlines the offenses and penalties for purchasing or selling voter identification cards and crimes committed during voter registration. The Act, for instance, specifies in section 23(c) that anybody who "buys or offers to purchase voters' card on his behalf or behalf of any other person, commits an offense and should be liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding N500,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both Section 24(2b)

of the Nigerian Constitution states that anybody who “in any way prevents another person from registering as a voter commits an offense and is punishable on conviction to a fine not exceeding N500,000.00 or imprisonment not exceeding five years.” This provision relates to voter registration.

The Electoral Act of 2010 also defines additional electoral offenses, such as impersonation and voting while ineligible (section 122), bribery and conspiracy (section 124), non-secrecy in voting (section 125), voting by unregistered persons (section 127), disorderly conduct at elections (section 128), offenses on election day (section 129), undue influence (section 130), threatening other voters (section 131), and so forth. All these legal requirements aim to prevent instances of electoral fraud to increase the legitimacy and integrity of elections in Nigeria.

Nigeria has held five national elections since the Fourth Republic, when democracy returned to the country (in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015). A few factors separate these elections, but they have many things in common. For instance, all of the elections were held on schedule as anticipated, both domestic and foreign observers closely watched them, they sparked a variety of debates among Nigerian voters and politicians, and they were all tainted by irregularities of various severity. Except for the elections in 2011 and 2015, the credibility and acceptance of the polls decreased with each new election. The conduct and results of these elections suggest that Nigeria has not yet shown the characteristics of a developing democracy (Yagboyaju, 2011, p. 93).

Elections that ushered in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic were staged gradually after more than three decades of military rule. On January 9, 1999, the state Houses of Assembly and governor elections took place. On February 20, National Assembly elections were held, and on February 27, 1999, a presidential election was held. This signaled the conclusion of the military regime’s transition plan under General Abdusalami Abubakar. Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won the 1999 elections, and he was subsequently sworn in as Nigeria’s first president of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999. ‘Transition elections’ are typically peaceful when a nation changes from an authoritarian to a civic regime, as highlighted by Okolie (2005, p. 439). The 1999 elections “went place without systematic rigging” in this sense (Omotosho, 2008, p. 3).

The 1999 elections allowed Nigerians to realize their desire for democracy because they were generally tired of the military government and ready to accept it. This does not suggest that there was no electoral corruption or malpractice during the 1999 general elections. These fraudulent electoral activities included late poll openings, delayed delivery of voting materials, names of eligible voters missing from the voter list, early voting station closings, and voting outside of the prescribed hours of the law. According to election observers, voter bribery and vote buying stood out the most. For instance, in Oshimili North LGA in Delta State, a party donated the funds that made it possible for the parties to share ballot papers; as a result, that party received 75% of the ballots to thumbprint, while the other two parties split the remaining ballots.

In Kano, there were irregularities on all sides in another case of vote buying. At the same time, some voters in Gaya Local Government Area (LGA) were willing to sell their votes for as little as N10.00, and INEC officials and party agents colluded in bribery and election cheating in other regions, such as Madobi. Consequences of election fraud at Zamfara State's Sabon Gari ward, Magami polling place Underage voting attempts were also common in this state; for instance, ten underage males tried to vote at the Dambawa 5B polling stations in the Tsafe Ward but were caught. Sha 2008, p. 127, referenced the subtlety of the form, scope, and complexity of the electoral fraud in the 1999 elections, which set them apart from other elections. For example, the significant number of casualties caused by lethal malpractice, such as physical violence during and after an election, went unnoticed.

Following the 1999 election, Nigeria held subsequent elections for the National Assembly, the Presidency, and the State Assemblies for governorships on April 12, 2003, and May 3, 2003, respectively. The Nigerian democracy was put to the test in the elections of 2003. While the military had run the elections in 1999, a civilian administration hosted them for the first time in 2003. Following the 2003 elections, Nigeria had its first successful inter-civilian power transfer since a failed attempt during a military coup in 1983.

However, the 2003 election suffered from comparable electoral problems to those previously occurring in Nigeria, just like its predecessors. Vote buying, stuffing ballot boxes, ballot box snatching, manipulating election results to favor or disfavor specific candidates, and falsely declaring that those who had actually lost had won were among the apparent irregularities during the 2003 elections (Ojo, 2008, p. 116). Though the ballot box was complete by lunchtime, just 85 of the 743 individuals on the list of registered voters had their boxes checked, according to European Union (EU) inspectors. At a third polling place, the first 50 names on the voter list were checked [on the register] in alphabetical order, and 50 cast votes were suspiciously folded in the same manner, as mentioned on page 144 of Calingaert (2006).

The level of electoral corruption seen in the 2003 elections gave the impression that the PDP, which was in power then, was deliberately trying to hold onto power at all costs and by any means. Elaigwu (2006) asserts that both domestic and foreign observers and monitors agreed that the 2003 elections were seriously rigged. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some petitions are still being processed by electoral tribunals and Appeal Courts three years later. ... At the state level, all political parties in control oversaw the overuse of their rigging apparatus. The [elections] were a complete failure; they provided concrete proof of a democratic deficiency that might jeopardize the democratic process. p. 10 in Elaigwu (2006). Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in for a second term as president on May 29, 2003, despite opposition parties' calls for the elections to be called off. Nigerians went to the polls on April 14 and April 21 to choose new leaders.

The 2007 general elections, however, ended up being the most denigrated and ridiculed of the bunch. Due to the widespread use of electoral fraud, they were labelled the worst elections ever held in the history of both Nigeria and the world (Jega, 2009, p. 20). The 2007

elections were described as a “fitful path” to democracy (Ibrahim, 2007), “muddled elections” (Suberu, 2007), “failed elections” (International Crisis Group, 2007), and a “troubled transition” from a civilian to a civilian rule as a result of this debasement (Africa Confidential 11 May 2007).

The primary cause of these unfavorable depictions is that every type of misconduct possibly marred the elections. Political experts said that the polls were set up to fail in the run-up to the 2007 elections. The electoral disaster of 2007 was the culmination of a string of politically motivated killings, party and inter-party strife, interpersonal disputes among politicians, shoddy INEC preparations, and undemocratic primaries held by nearly all 50 political parties that participated in the election. Political tension was sparked by former president Obasanjo’s comments that the elections were a make-or-break contest for the PDP, which was in power. The April 2007 elections were immediately interpreted by opposition political parties and outside observers of Nigeria’s political transition at the time as being doomed to be opaque. This was since the then-president and his ruling PDP controlled all state institutions for coercion and manipulation, including the military forces, police, security services, Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and INEC (Suberu, 2007, p. 97).

When the elections were held in a highly fraudulent way, this concern was proven accurate. The massive sums of money raised by some political parties before the 2007 elections created the scene for a monetized electoral process. For instance, the money raised by the ruling PDP, which outraised all other parties combined, was enormous and came from unreliable sources. This money served as a voting-related component. For instance, a seasoned politician in Abuja claims that some of the fraud [committed in the 2007 elections] is explained by political finance. He clarified that the PDP is actually 37 separate parties—one for each state and one central party—and that each party raises funds in various ways, most frequently through shady deals struck between contractors and state governments. African Secrets 11 May 2007, p. 2 Even after its so-called success in the 2007 elections, the PDP still managed to raise enormous sums of money unmatched by any other party in Nigeria. Business tycoons, including Femi Otedola and Aliko Dangote, reportedly contributed N1 billion and N3 billion, respectively, at an event to raise money for a new PDP secretariat project in Abuja on November 15, 2008, and Strabag (a Nigerian construction company) donated N100 million. An unidentified donor provided N100,000,000 (Okocha & Taiwo, 2008).

Because donors could be confident that they would receive their money back through the award of contracts if the party they supported won the election, this aggressive fundraising strategy used by political parties served as the foundation of electoral malpractice in the 2007 elections (Aluaigba, 2009). Furthermore, since 1999, “money has been utilized to influence everyone engaged in the electoral process, from INEC officials to party agents, security agents, and the electorate” in Nigerian electioneering (Bryan & Baer, 2005). These methods were popular during the general elections in 2007.

According to a study on how the 2007 general elections were conducted (Aluaigba, 2009), the most frequent electoral malpractices were, in order of frequency, the following: the purposeful alteration of election results, stuffing of ballot boxes, use of violence, misconduct by security agents, collaboration by polling officials and party agents to rig elections, voter intimidation, and vote buying. In his opinion, other irregularities that occurred in the 2007 election included a lack of voting confidentiality, a fraudulent declaration of the results, the theft of ballot boxes, and underage voting. Both domestic and foreign observers who followed the polls attested to the existence of these corrupt tactics.

Another survey on the prevalence of vote buying during the 2007 elections confirmed the heinous practice when it stated that: In Nigeria, voters are typically offered money in vote-buying transactions (68 percent of all reported attempts in 2007), commodities (such as food or clothing, 26 percent), or jobs (6 percent). The modal (i.e., most typical) enticement in Nigeria's most recent and previous elections was 500 naira, or roughly \$4. However, between 2003 and 2007, the average cost of a vote payment grew from 1,750 naira to 2,250 naira, partly due to an increase in the proportion of high payments (10,000 naira or more per vote). 2008, Bratton, p. 4. The use of violence during the elections was also extremely high; as a result, there were an estimated 200 deaths related to the conduct or results of the voting across the federation, including 39 police officers (especially in the states of Anambra, Delta, Jigawa, Katsina, Nasarawa, Ondo, and Osun).

The homes of local PDP politicians, as well as the INEC headquarters and police stations, were set on fire (Suberu, 2007). In order to guarantee the victory of the ruling party at all costs, deliberate efforts were made to reduce the supply of voting materials in opposition areas artificially and to use incumbent status in PDP-controlled states to lower the overall number of votes for opposition political parties (Africa Research Bulletin 2007, 2007). As a logical consequence, after INEC announced that the PDP had won the election, there were protests from rival political parties calling for a fresh round of voting. Analysts and observers who evaluated the conduct of the 2007 elections concluded, as a result of these occurrences, that democracy had been violated and the wishes of Nigerian voters had been ignored. Despite Professor Maurice Iwu, the chairman of INEC, repeatedly assuring Nigerians that the voting process would be free and fair to all, this was accomplished by the flagrant destruction of the trust that Nigerians had placed in the security agents and the electoral umpire, INEC.

Three alternative dates in April of that year—9, 16, and 26—were used for the 2011 general elections to choose the president, the National Assembly's members, and the governors or members of the State Assembly. Elections that were initially planned to start on April 2 have been moved to April 9. Professor Attahiru M. Jega, the chairman of INEC, cited logistical issues as the cause of the delay and said it was necessary to prevent a shortfall of electoral supplies on election day (Akaeze, 2011, p. 18). Because of the history of electoral fraud in previous elections, predictions about the credibility of the 2011 elections were standard among Nigerians prior to the election. However, the Jega-led INEC allayed Nigerians'

anxieties, and by the time of the 2011 elections, both local and foreign observers generally agreed that the polls had been comparatively free and fair and that the results were more reliable than those of the 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections.

The new INEC leadership, which was determined to reform the electoral organization to ensure better election administration in Nigeria, may be credited with the increase in the credibility profile of the 2011 elections. Despite the initial disappointment brought on by the postponement, INEC was applauded for the improvements in logistics and the generally seamless voting procedure during the elections. The election results broke the PDP's absolute dominance, which it had maintained since 1999. In contrast to the 2007 elections, when it had won 27 states, the party lost its two-thirds majority control of the Senate and only 23 of the 36 governorship races. In contrast to the previous elections, where National Assembly members had largely maintained their seats, many MPs lost their seats in the 2011 elections. For instance, 260 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives and 72 of the 109 senators lost their seats, respectively. These patterns showed Nigeria's incremental but comprehensive development on the road to democratic consolidation.

Despite the accomplishments made by INEC in the 2011 elections, a closer examination revealed that the elections were far from being free, fair, and transparent by international standards due to the prevalence of electoral malpractice. Malpractices that surfaced during the 2011 election in Nigeria included incidences of ballot box stealing and stuffing and the late arrival of voting materials in numerous polling places. Others included vote-buying, intimidation, the detention and arrest of election observers, underage voting in various areas of the nation, and arrests of voters (Ibrahim, 2011; Jimoh & Olaniyi, 2011; Yusuf, 2011).

The incapacity of INEC to oversee the collation process was another critical flaw during the elections. Most of the voting was rigged at this point; therefore, this could not happen despite INEC's creative initiative to encourage communities to watch the results' compilation, this could not happen. In certain places, a declaration of fake results resulted from this failure. For instance, "there were some locations where voting did not take place but where results appear to have been generated, including substantial portions of Idoma land in Benue South as well as Isoko land and Warri in Delta State" (Sahara Reporters, 2011). The unfortunate deaths of nine National Youth Service Corps members who were working as the INEC's ad hoc personnel in Bauchi State were caused by inadequate protection at several polling places. Voters were terrified by the large number of soldiers there and refrained from visiting the polling places as a result of the tight security offered in some other violently volatile locations.

The post-election violence in Northern Nigeria, which killed over 1000 lives, was similar to this problem of insecurity and more harmful to Nigeria's democratization process. As a result, the elections were officially the bloodiest in Nigerian electoral history. After President Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent PDP candidate, won the presidential election on April 18, 2011, there were reports of violence in numerous Northern Nigerian cities, including Kano, Katsina, and Yola. Fourteen states in the area were affected by the unrest,

but Adamawa, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa, and certain regions of Niger experienced the worst violence.

In retaliatory attacks, the demonstrators targeted PDP leaders' homes as well as establishments like shops, churches, and occasionally mosques. According to Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), election violence can be caused by voters' displeasure over perceived unfair defeat due to a corrupt election process or unfair judicial adjudication of electoral disputes. These elements fueled the unrest in Northern Nigeria following the 2011 elections.

The 2015 Nigerian general elections, held on March 28 and April 11, have been hailed as the most successful in the country's electoral history (Gabriel, 2015). Due to the thorough planning and the largely orderly and proper administration of the elections by INEC, this election received excellent marks from both domestic and foreign observers. INEC's innovations and use of technology in the electoral process led to the 2015 elections being characterized as credible. For instance, biometric voter registration was used before the actual election. The INEC introduced the Smart Card Reader during the actual voting. Highly secure features and codes were added to necessary electoral materials like ballots and result sheets.

Evidence suggests that the 2015 elections were not entirely error-free despite these significant advancements in the electoral process. "Late arrival of election materials, congestion, failure of the card reader, result manipulation, and voting by underage in several units in the Northern portion of the country" are a few faults attributable to operational shortcomings on the side of INEC (Udu, 2015). Other electoral irregularities visible during the 2015 elections included the theft of voting equipment and ballot boxes by thugs and the inflating of election results. For instance, roughly 430,000 voters in Akwa Ibom State were authorized to cast ballots for the state's governor and state house of assembly. However, the elected governor received around 900,000 votes in 2015 (Sobowale). The fact that the Election Tribunal and Appeal Court ordered new governor elections to be held in states like Akwa Ibom and Rivers in December 2015, respectively, implies that these electoral irregularities occurred during the March and April elections. Nevertheless, Nigeria's Supreme Court ultimately upheld the governorship elections in Rivers and Akwa Ibom.

This final judgment supports the overall conclusion that the 2015 Nigerian elections were among the most credible in the nation's electoral history. The study of Nigerian elections since 1999 makes it clear that none of them can be exonerated of the venality, deceit, and duplicity brought on by the blatant usurpation of electoral laws and abuse of the will of the Nigerian electorate. These voting irregularities, which are covered in more detail in the following section, have severe ramifications for the style of government that Nigerians have had since 1999. The quality of democracy being shaped in the nation after the military stepped down from power years ago is impacted by these negative repercussions. Election fraud has dashed the dreams of Nigerian citizens in addition to demeaning democratic principles based on openness, accountability, and good governance. Optimism among Nigerians during

democracy's rebirth in 1999 rested on gaining access to democracy's benefits, which would manifest in improving the country's citizens' quality of life.

Introduction of Card Reader System into Nigeria's Electoral Process. Given the harmful consequences of election fraud, global emphasis is now focused on minimizing such undemocratic behavior and improving the voting process. Incorporating information and communication technologies into the voting process is one strategy to counteract electoral malpractices. Based on this assumption, card readers were incorporated into the Nigerian electoral system in the 2015 general election, becoming the most innovative technology in the Nigerian electoral system.

In other words, the INEC card reader is intended to read the information contained in the embedded chip of the permanent voter's card issued by INEC in order to verify the authenticity of the PVC and to verify the intending voter by matching biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with those stored on the PVC (Engineering Network Team, 2015). The card reader machine's ability to perform the functions mentioned above, as well as keeping a tally of the total number of voters accredited at the polling unit and forwarding the information to a central database server via a Global System for Mobile (GSM) network, makes the card reader especially useful at this point in the nation's electoral history (Engineering Network Team, 2015).

The fundamental basis for INEC's deployment of the technologically-based device in the 2015 general elections was to mitigate electoral malpractice, to allow electoral votes to count, to authenticate and verify voters; to reduce election-related litigation; to ensure the reliability, integrity, and credibility of the election; to audit results from polling units across the country; and to ensure accountability, which are the foundations of democracy.

Regardless of the card reader's admirable intents and objectives, it sparked stakeholder disagreement before, during, and after the elections. On the one hand, supporters of the card reader have hailed the invention as a purposeful effort to ensure the conduct of a free and fair election. At the same time, critics have claimed that INEC lacks the legal power and capacity to employ the card reader (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2015).

According to Peters (2015), proponents of the device believed that the card reader procedure could prevent or minimize rigging by preventing multiple voting. In contrast, opponents believed that in the unique circumstances of the Nigerian situation, the card reader was designed to help a specific political party win the general election.

According to Peters (2015), the card reader must have been designed to aid a pre-determined election winner by guaranteeing that so many people are disenfranchised to deny other parties favorable votes, hence securing the victory of an INEC preferred or pre-determined party. There is also concern about using a faith-based bank to transfer funds to print permanent voters' cards and set card readers.

The harsh reality is that the arguments against card reader usage were not proven. As the administration in power lost to the opposing party, the presumption that the card reader was designed to favor a political party proved to be false, unsubstantiated, and malevolent.

Smart card readers and the 2019 general elections. The national-level elections (presidential and federal parliamentary) and state-level elections were held on February 27 and March 9, 2019, respectively, following the first postponement of the former, scheduled for February 23. The postponement was ascribed to a delay in the supply of electoral materials by INEC. Nonetheless, the government's late disbursement of electoral money, refusal to reform the Electoral Act, and intra-party battles and primaries that delayed the swift fabrication of ballot boxes all indicate that INEC was not well-prepared for the elections (National Democratic Institute [NDI], 2019).

It should be noted that the stakes for the 2019 general elections were especially high in the presidential election, which was fiercely contested by two powerful political actors: incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the primary opposition challenger, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The protracted security situation, which was laced with sporadic Boko Haram attacks and widespread insecurity in various parts of the country, particularly in the North East, North Central, and South-South, which were deemed to be the main electoral bases of the two candidates, heightened tensions and concerns about the election's outcome (Olaniyan, 2019).

Furthermore, the intense political and party campaigns, followed by Nigerians' verdicts on which candidate could address the country's ongoing socioeconomic crisis and perennial insecurity, heightened the stakes for the 2019 general elections. Given the concerns mentioned earlier, INEC, led by Mahmood Yakubu, attempted to restore trust in the electoral organization and guarantee Nigerians of legitimate elections. Under his leadership, INEC maintained the reform process that began in 2011 with Prof Attahiru Jega, the former INEC chairman and lasted until 2015. To address some of the issues that arose during the 2015 general elections, INEC, led by Yakubu, implemented several reforms, including instantaneous voting and accreditation, presentation of results at voting centers, improvement in voter-verification devices through the use of smart card reader machines, and training of INEC staff (Olokodana, 2019).

INEC implemented continuous voter registration as part of the changes, allowing the new register to be included in the current ones rather than generating a new one. This innovation reduced double registration and voter registration manipulation (NDI, 2019).

Many potential voters benefited from INEC's decision to collect Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) after registration, as dissatisfaction and disappointment had previously led to many electors failing to obtain their PVCs. INEC registered 84,000,484 voters throughout the registration process. However, 72,775,585 PVCs were collected, or 86.3% of the total (NDI, 2019). Recognizing that this figure was insufficient, INEC was forced to work with Civil Society Organizations (CSO) to increase information dissemination about PVC collection via "traditional and social media platforms including electronic, SMS, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and social groups, among others" (Olokodana, 2019). Following the initial deadline, INEC extended PVC collection from February 8 to 11, just a few days before the polls. Despite INEC's efforts to ensure PVC collection, around 11,224,899 PVCs

remained uncollected. Some critics have claimed that uncollected PVCs contributed to disenfranchisement and low voter turnout in the elections (NDI, 2019).

While this is an unscientific argument, the 84,271,832 million voter registrations are encouraging, considering the significant increase in first-time voter registration. More voter registration reflects increased political participation and awareness, as measured by voter trust in the electoral process. Despite reservations, INEC used the SCR in the 2019 general elections. INEC placed 180,000 SCRs in polling stations nationwide and programmed them to operate only during the election period (Sahara Reporter, 2019). To provide an alternative to non-functional equipment, the body established arrangements for backup machines in order to avoid the problems related to malfunctioning devices that occurred during the 2015 general elections.

The polls were primarily deemed orderly on election day, with elections beginning on time. The majority of polling stations followed INEC criteria for accreditation and voting procedures. Poll workers used the smart card readers to verify permanent voter cards (NDI, 2019, p. 6). At the end of the elections, Muhammad Buhari of the APC received 15,191,847 votes (55.6%) to defeat the PDP's Atiku Abubakar, who received 11,262,978 votes (41.2%). (INEC, 2019). Unlike the opposition candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, in 2015, who accepted the election result and thanked the winner, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku challenged the result and went to court.

Electoral malpractice and Card Reader System in the 2019 presidential election.

Elections are not one-time events. An election result is credibility heavily depends on the procedure that produced it. The outcome of elections has an impact on the electoral process. If the electoral process is free and fair, the outcome will likely be credible and acceptable to both candidates and voters. However, if the electoral process is corrupt, the outcome will be untrustworthy, perhaps leading to an election crisis.

Despite advances in smart card readers' operating efficiency in the 2019 general election, there were documented incidences that appeared to throw doubt on the quality of the elections. Problems highlighted included defective card readers, which delayed the holding of elections, electoral violence, voter intimidation, vote buying, excessive influence of security forces on elections, and other related situations. These instances highlight some controversy surrounding the results of the 2019 general elections.

The opposition candidates' rejection of the election, particularly Atiku Abubakar (the PDP presidential candidate), may be linked to several electoral irregularities and a high level of post-election litigation stemming from petitions against the elections. For example, around 766 election petitions were recorded during the general elections, which were broken down as follows: presidential election 4, Senate 207, House of Representatives 101, Governorship 54, and House of Assembly 402 (Premium Times, 2019).

This is a divergence from the 2015 elections, which resulted in a total of 297 petitions. Malfunctioning card reader machines, delays in the accreditation and voting processes, late voting in some polling places, and incompetence on the part of INEC employees caused the

problems in the 2019 elections. In their reports, some domestic and international election observers highlight these shortcomings. For example, the (NDI, 2019, p. 6) stated that several of the card reader equipment malfunctioned on Election Day, causing delays in the accreditation and voting processes.

There was an issue with insufficient training for INEC personnel, as some of them struggled to operate the equipment during the polls. This happened largely in Imo, Ogun, Lagos, Abia, Nassarawa, Kebbi, and Kaduna, where SCRs had some problems, delaying the start of voting (Situation Room, 2019). Although SCRs reduced electoral malpractice, their failure to distinguish biological traits resulted in the disenfranchisement of some voters and the prohibition of voting at numerous polling places around the country.

Complaints regarding electoral violence and election insecurity appear to have contributed significantly to the main critiques that followed the elections. The tense security climate created by the protracted Boko Haram wars in the North East, criminal banditry, and intraparty conflicts and contestation that enveloped party primaries before the elections all contributed to voter and electoral process insecurity. Although the peace accord signed by political parties and their candidates restored some confidence, concerns about the neutrality of security agents and heavy militarization of the electoral process frequently resulted in voting interruption, voter intimidation, and low voter turnout in many states.

According to the (NDI, 2019), “the military disrupted the polls in several regions, notably Rivers State, where soldiers were strongly positioned near INEC’s headquarters, resulting in the suspension of vote collation.” This resulted in inconclusive results and the necessity for extra polls in numerous states, including Kano, Benue, Gombe, Bauchi, Plateau Sokoto, and Rivers. Such manifestations are also responsible for the rise in electoral petitions and lawsuits in the months following the 2019 general elections.

While INEC and military institutions claimed that the army was involved in the electoral process, election observers’ findings and submissions from certain strong democratic countries suggested otherwise. According to sources, the United States of America was dissatisfied with the quality of the 2019 general elections. “We (the United States) were dismayed by the low voter turnout as well as credible claims of voter intimidation, vote buying, and meddling by security personnel and violence in some locations,” according to the US Embassy in Lagos.

Although some actual issues were encountered during the polls, the operational efficiency of the elections and the cumulative gains of the SCR since 2019 indicate an increase in the overall quality of elections in Nigeria. Indeed, the elections saw enhanced voter verification, transparent results transmission, and a calm voting process. The 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections provided a chance to consolidate democracy in Nigeria, according to the African Union Election Observation Mission [AUEOM] (2019).

The political space has widened, as indicated by the many political parties and candidates who ran in the elections. Furthermore, the delegation is pleased by Nigerians’ patience and tenacity during the polls. The procedure was peaceful, organized, and followed Nigeria’s

legal framework. The difficulties observed during the 2019 general elections were not always related to the operational performance of the SCRs. Instead, they reveal fundamental structural and systemic issues in Nigerian states' election management. These issues are both the cause and the result of Nigeria's electoral crisis and violence.

The independence of INEC is still severely questioned due to questionable appointments, dismissals of necessary officers, and funding of the body being at the government's discretion (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). For example, INEC had to deal with delayed allocation and distribution of electoral funding in the run-up to the 2019 federal elections. Despite the National Assembly approving INEC's 189 billion naira (about \$521 million) for the elections, the funds were not given until the issue between the administration and the National Assembly over how the funding should be sourced was resolved (AUEOM, 2019).

This finally resulted in a significant delay in acquiring materials, logistics provisioning, and operational preparations for the polls. The lack of a legislative framework to guide the process and outcome of the elections also impacted the electoral process, contributing to several systemic failures in the 2019 general elections. Concerning the 2010 Electoral Act, the National Assembly highlighted critical areas for revision and adopted four versions of a Bill for executive assent. Unfortunately, the president refused to provide his consent, citing a lack of time for the Electoral Act's implementation. Some parties suggested that the president's unwillingness to sign the law resulted from the executive-legislative standoff over the budget, which the National Assembly had first refused to accept.

As a result, the standoff between the president and the National Assembly over appropriation and budget had a part in undermining the 2019 elections. Such confrontation results from the elite's lack of consensus and the government and opposition parties' politics of intolerance. The structural and systemic issues exposed the high value placed on political power by Nigeria's political elites. These elites have failed to distance themselves from anti-democratic tendencies such as opposition intolerance, personalization of political power, and disregard for democratic rule (Tenuche, 2009).

Because of the low degree of democratic values, democratic spaces have been militarized. A political culture like this frequently undermines electoral competition and puts the polity under stress and strain. A typical example is the internal political struggle over control of an oil-rich state between incumbent Governor Nyesome Wike of the PDP and Rotimi Amaechi of the APC (a former governor and federal Minister of Transportation of Rivers states) (International Crisis Group, 2018). It should be noted that Rivers State is a significant oil producer, bringing in more federal government money. As the largest recipient of federal government fiscal transfers, it is also the second largest revenue generator after Lagos State (International Crisis Group, 2018).

The state's economic dominance has encouraged patronage and zero-sum politics between the ruling PDP and the opposition APC. Such thirst for political power and the associated zero-sum politics were at the root of intimidation, violence, electoral violations, and a volatile political atmosphere during the 2019 general elections.

However, it is impossible to deny that SCRs and other technology tools in the electoral process have reduced the prevalence of electoral fraud and manipulation. AFIS has eliminated double registration in terms of processes and outcomes, while smart card readers and permanent voter IDs have brought some consistency and integrity back to the electoral process. Without a doubt, Richard Klein, a senior elections adviser at the National Democratic Institute, argued that SCRs and PVCs were a critical innovation in Nigeria's political process. According to him, "improvements in election security have prompted politicians to rethink their campaign techniques to directly approach and convince voters" (Kazeem, 2019).

As a result, using SCRs in the 2019 elections averted significant rigging, which may have occurred if manual voting had been used. The improvement in election conduct and management through the use of technological innovations in the 2015 and 2019 general elections is a sign of potential democratic deepening, and it has propelled the country's electoral process forward against the backdrop of Nigeria's chequered electoral history.

Impact of the Smart Card Reader and Permanent Voter's Card on the 2019 General Election in Nigeria. Using smart card readers and permanent voter's cards for the 2015 election was not without hiccups and challenges. However, the considerable impact of technology and innovation was felt in a number of ways. Public trust and confidence in the electoral process were infused in the minds of many electorates who had often been discouraged from participating in the country's election. Before the 2015 election, many citizens lost confidence and interest in the country's electoral process, and the election turnout was always low. With the introduction of the smart card reader and permanent voter's card, more public trust was increased, and turnout for the 2015 election was also increased compared to previous elections held in the country. The majority of the citizens were confident that, to a more considerable extent, their vote would count, and as such, the legitimacy of the democratization process in the country was reassured.

Technological devices during the 2015 general election reduced the country's electoral fraud level. The rate of inflating the number of electorates per polling unit was reduced, the fraudulent creation of fake polling units by electoral officials in favor of politicians was put in the check, and multiple voting by electorates was not allowed where the card readers were effectively used.

Nigeria's 2015 general election was conducted in a new dimension. Its patterns, processes, and procedures were quite different from those of the previous elections in the country. The introduction of anti-fraud electoral procedures, that is, the use of smart card readers and permanent voter's cards, made people have a higher level of trust in the electoral body, INEC. The level of acceptability of all electoral processes did not go unnoticed both within the country and beyond its shores. The level of violence recorded during the presidential election was minimal, which shows that the political behavior of the Nigerian electorates is in consonance with the sustainability of the democratization process in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The significance of the Card Reader system as one of the new technology measures adopted in the Nigerian electoral process has been explored in this paper. Since 2015, digitization of the electoral process has increased the legitimacy of elections in Nigeria as a possible solution to the problem of electoral malpractices and manipulation. In this context, the use of Card Reader systems, SCRs, and PVCs in the 2019 general elections not only improved the electoral process but also deepened democratic values in the country, despite several procedural and technical hiccups such as card reader malfunctions, delays in accreditation and voting, INEC staff inability to operate the technology efficiently during voting, election postponement, and election security.

There is a need to improve public sensitization and awareness, as well as INEC employee training on the proper use of the technology. The public and the INEC staff should be informed of the consequences of the effective use of SCR and PVC on election quality and general credibility.

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