

Automated Electoral Reform Systems, National Security, and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria: Reassessing the Electoral Integrity Nexus

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Abstract

Nigeria's democratic consolidation has been profoundly hindered by persistent crises of election legitimacy, leading to political instability, a lack of institutional confidence, and wider national security issues. This article explores the connection among election integrity, the implementation of an automated election Reform System (AERS), democratic sustainability, and national security within Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The research contends that trustworthy elections are a crucial element of national security as they confer the legitimacy necessary for efficient governance and public collaboration with governmental entities. Utilising Social Contract Theory and a qualitative research framework centred on documentary analysis, the article investigates Nigeria's electoral developments from 1999 to 2023, focusing on the technological innovations implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), such as biometric voter registration, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). The research indicates that electoral misconduct has traditionally undermined democratic legitimacy, exacerbated political discontent, and led to violence and instability associated with elections. It moreover discloses that AERS has bolstered specific aspects of election integrity by diminishing voter impersonation, augmenting transparency, and establishing systems for public verification of voting results. The results indicate that technology by itself cannot address Nigeria's voting issues. The 2023 general elections exposed ongoing weaknesses linked to technical malfunctions, cyber security risks, institutional capacity constraints, political opposition, and ambiguity around the legal interpretation of digital electoral evidence. The paper asserts that election automation needs to be perceived as a democratic security measure instead of simply a technological advancement. Although AERS has considerable potential to enhance democratic sustainability and national security, its efficacy is contingent upon supportive institutional reforms, legal precision, cyber security readiness, political responsibility, and ongoing public confidence. The research advocates for a comprehensive strategy that combines technical progress with enhanced democratic frameworks to strengthen Nigeria's social contract and election credibility.

Keywords: *Automated Electoral Reform System; Electoral Integrity; Democratic Sustainability; National Security; Electoral Technology; Nigeria; Social Contract Theory.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is primarily reliant on voters' capacity to establish political authority via credible, transparent, and competitive elections. In modern democratic frameworks, elections

function not merely as methods for choosing leaders but also as institutional procedures through which governments obtain legitimacy and individuals reaffirm their agreement to be ruled. As a result, the reliability of electoral procedures is widely acknowledged as a vital factor influencing democratic stability, institutional confidence, and national security (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2020).

Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa and a key strategic player, has seen a multifaceted democratic evolution since the reestablishment of civilian governance in 1999. Despite the Fourth Republic being Nigeria's most extended continuous democratic era, election governance continues to face difficulties due to accusations of manipulation, violence, inadequate institutional capacity, and disputed electoral results (Agbu, 2016; Joseph, 2014). These obstacles have led to persistent legitimacy crises, diminished public trust in democratic institutions, and exacerbated overall political instability.

Concurrently, Nigeria is confronted with a multifaceted national security dilemma marked by terrorism, insurgency, separatist movements, sectarian strife, abduction, banditry, and economic instability. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, disputes between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt, militancy in the Niger Delta, and escalating criminal violence in various locations illustrate the intricacy of Nigeria's security landscape (Campbell, 2021; Maier, 2023). Although these security concerns stem from several factors, deficiencies in political legitimacy and institutional trust have hindered the establishment of effective state solutions.

A primary contention of this study is that election credibility constitutes a significant yet insufficiently examined aspect of national security. Governments resulting from legitimate elections are more prone to garner popular confidence, political legitimacy, and institutional power. On the other hand, administrations regarded as the result of election tampering frequently encounter legitimacy shortfalls that hinder their ability to engage citizens, execute programs, and successfully tackle security challenges (Habermas, 1975; Buzan et al., 1998).

The correlation between election integrity and security holds particular importance in Nigeria due to the historical association of political competitiveness with fierce contests for state resources. The depiction of Nigerian politics as prebendal signifies the belief that attaining political authority facilitates economic gain and the allocation of patronage (Joseph, 2014; Adebani & Obadare, 2013). In these circumstances, elections transform into critical competitions where political figures could resort to unethical tactics, such as coercion, deceit, and institutional influence, to achieve success.

In reaction to these obstacles, Nigeria has systematically implemented technology innovations to enhance vote integrity. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has introduced various advancements, such as biometric voter registration, electronic voter verification, the Smart Card Reader, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). These measures signify an effort to rectify enduring deficiencies related to voter identification, result administration, and transparency.

Nonetheless, discussions persist over whether electoral technology can significantly alter democratic administration or if it simply generates new types of political rivalry. Proponents contend that automation diminishes the potential for electoral malfeasance and enhances transparency, whereas detractors emphasise issues surrounding cybersecurity, digital marginalisation, technological failures, political opposition, and institutional vulnerabilities (International IDEA, 2021; James & Garnett, 2021).

The general elections of 2023 present a significant opportunity to analyse this discourse. The election saw the inaugural state wide implementation of BVAS and IReV, serving as a crucial evaluation of Nigeria's dedication to technology-facilitated electoral reform. Although the system enhanced specific elements of electoral management, issues regarding result transmission, technical difficulties, and legal conflicts revealed that technology by itself cannot ensure voting legitimacy.

Against this background, this study examines the nexus between Automated Electoral Reform Systems, democratic sustainability, and national security in Nigeria. It poses the following research questions;

- 1) How have electoral integrity challenges contributed to democratic and security vulnerability in Nigeria?
- 2) To what extent has the automation of elections enhanced the legitimacy of Nigeria's electoral system?
- 3) What are the implications of AERS for the endurance of democracy and the security of the nation?
- 4) What challenges limit the efficiency of electoral technology reforms?
- 5) What institutional measures are essential to enhance the democratic benefits of electoral automation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.1 The Integrity of Elections and the Sustainability of Democracy

Electoral integrity has emerged as a pivotal notion in modern democratic research, as elections function as the principal means by which individuals legitimise political authority and assess governmental efficacy. Electoral integrity encompasses more than just the execution of elections; it pertains to how well electoral procedures adhere to recognised democratic tenets such as fairness, openness, inclusivity, precision, and accountability across the whole electoral period (Norris, 2014).

Norris (2014) posits that electoral integrity includes the whole election process, starting from the establishment of electoral legislation and voter enrolment to campaign operations, voting methods, tallying, announcement of results, and conflict resolution. This expansive viewpoint contests the limited perception of elections as singular occurrences that transpire alone on Election Day. Elections are perceived as institutional mechanisms whose legitimacy relies on the interplay of legislative structures, administrative efficiency, political conduct, and public trust.

Birch (2020) contends that election misconduct erodes democracy by diminishing the connection between the populace and political entities. When constituents believe that elections fail to represent their preferences, civic engagement wanes, political legitimacy diminishes, and individuals may grow more detached from official political activities. In dire circumstances, scepticism towards elections may lead to political turmoil and violent uprisings.

In nascent democracies like Nigeria, the integrity of elections poses a considerable problem due to the prevailing conditions of institutional fragility, elite rivalry, patronage systems, and insufficient accountability frameworks. Such circumstances foster avenues for exploitation and diminish public trust in electoral results (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

The longevity of democracy is thus heavily reliant on the capacity of political institutions to uphold trustworthy election frameworks. Linz and Stepan (1996) define democratic consolidation as a progression in which democracy is recognised as the rightful structure for political rivalry. In established democracies, political participants and the populace acknowledge elections as the suitable method for obtaining and relinquishing authority.

Nonetheless, the endurance of democracy transcends mere electoral cycles. It necessitates robust institutions, adherence to the rule of law, accountability, safeguarding of rights, and acknowledgement of electoral results by rival political entities (Diamond, 2015). In contexts where electoral procedures are frequently contested, democratic institutions may be precarious as citizens doubt the authenticity of political competition in representing popular sovereignty.

In Nigeria, the integrity of elections has thus emerged as a pivotal factor for the preservation of democracy. Ongoing conflicts regarding electoral results have led to diminished trust in democratic entities and a heightened dependence on judicial measures to resolve political matters (Ibeanu, 2016). This scenario prompts questions about whether democratic legitimacy originates chiefly from the electorate's votes or from institutional assessments post-elections.

2.2 National Security: Beyond the Traditional Military Perspective

Conventional methods of national security have traditionally focused on safeguarding territory, enhancing military might, and defending against outside dangers. Nonetheless, modern security studies have broadened this comprehension by acknowledging that insecurity may also arise from political turmoil, institutional collapse, economic fragility, and dangers to human well-being (Buzan et al., 1998).

The human security framework established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994 greatly expanded the scope of security analysis by focusing on safeguarding individuals and communities from various dangers, such as political violence, poverty, disease, environmental instability, and institutional shortcomings.

This expansive understanding is especially pertinent to Nigeria, where instability transcends traditional military confrontations. Despite terrorism and violent extremism being significant issues, Nigeria's security landscape also encompasses election-related violence, communal strife, abductions, separatist activities, and governance difficulties. These threats are linked to issues of governmental legitimacy and institutional efficacy.

Egwu (2016) asserts that Nigeria's security issues cannot be comprehensively addressed through military means alone, as numerous dangers stem from failures in politics, economics, and governance. A government devoid of institutional legitimacy may find it challenging to obtain public compliance, implement regulations, and uphold societal unity.

This research thus embraces an expansive interpretation of national security that encompasses:

- a. Safeguarding state sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- b. Ensuring political stability;
- c. Upholding democratic institutions;
- d. Defending people's rights and welfare;
- e. Enhancing the capability of governmental institutions to address internal and external threats.

In this context, the credibility of elections transforms into a matter of security, as they influence citizens' perceptions of political legitimacy and the social basis required for effective governance.

2.3 Automated Electoral Reform System (AERS): Concept and Components

An Automated election Reform System (AERS) denotes the incorporation of digital technologies into election procedures to enhance efficiency, transparency, precision, and trustworthiness. It embodies a comprehensive strategy for electoral modernisation that utilises technology throughout all phases of the electoral process, including as voter registration, voter verification, result administration, and electoral oversight (International IDEA, 2021).

The global proliferation of electoral automation has emerged as electoral management entities pursue remedies for issues related to erroneous voter registries, electoral malfeasance, ineffective administration, and waning public confidence. Research indicates that technology is not intrinsically democratic; instead, its effects are contingent upon the political and institutional context in which it functions (James & Garnett, 2021).

In Nigeria, AERS is fundamentally composed of three technology elements:

2.3.1 Biometric Voter Registration (BVR)

Biometric Voter Registration entails the acquisition and preservation of voters' distinctive biological traits, including fingerprints and face pictures, to establish a more precise voting roll. The main aim is to eradicate redundant registrations, enhance voter identification, and bolster trust in election records.

The precision of voter rolls is essential for election integrity, as deficiencies during the registration process might influence all following electoral operations. An imperfect voter registry facilitates impersonation, duplicate voting, and controversies over voter eligibility (IFES, 2018).

Nigeria's implementation of biometric voter registration signified a significant institutional reaction to longstanding issues related to exaggerated voter counts and erroneous election documentation. Nonetheless, biometric registration necessitates robust data protection protocols, accessibility initiatives, and ongoing updates to ensure efficacy.

2.3.2 Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System signifies Nigeria's latest progress in technical enhancements on Election Day. In contrast to earlier voter verification systems, BVAS employs both fingerprint and facial recognition technologies for confirming voter identity.

The implementation of BVAS aimed to rectify deficiencies linked to manual accreditation and prior electronic verification methods. By mandating biometric verification prior to casting votes, BVAS diminishes chances of impersonation and duplicate voting, hence enhancing trust in polling-unit operations.

In addition to voter verification, BVAS serves a crucial role in transparency by photographing polling-unit result sheets and enabling their submission to the IReV platform. This dual function renders BVAS an essential element of Nigeria's election reform framework.

The efficacy of BVAS is contingent upon technical dependability, sufficient training of electoral staff, the availability of infrastructure, and the public's comprehension of the system. Technological malfunctions or poor execution can lead to exasperation and diminish trust.

2.3.3 Electronic Result Transmission and the IReV Platform

The electronic transmission of results signifies a crucial effort to enhance transparency in Nigeria's electoral system. Historically, the aggregation of results has been regarded as a susceptible phase where tampering may transpire between voting stations and final announcement venues.

The INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) was established to enhance transparency by enabling citizens, observers, and political participants to access uploaded polling-unit result sheets. The aim was to diminish chances for modification and enhance public trust in outcome administration.

From the standpoint of democratic governance, the communication of results electronically embodies the notion that transparency bolsters accountability. When electoral data is openly available, citizens can more effectively assess the legitimacy of results (Norris, 2014).

Nonetheless, internet communication presents additional obstacles, such as cybersecurity threats, network constraints, misinformation, and controversies around the legal validity of digital evidence.

2.4 Electoral Technology and Democratic Governance: Theoretical Debate

The discourse on election technology is polarised between technological optimism and institutional realism.

Proponents of technological optimism contend that digital solutions can markedly enhance the credibility of elections by minimising human intervention, augmenting transparency, and bolstering accountability. From this viewpoint, automation offers tools to curtail manipulation and restore public confidence (International IDEA, 2021).

Institutional realists, meanwhile, warn that technology cannot resolve political issues stemming from frail institutions, elite conduct, and inadequate governance. Cheese man and Klaas (2018) contend that political figures frequently adjust to institutional changes by formulating new tactics to preserve their power.

This discussion holds significant relevance for Nigeria. Although BVAS and IReV have mitigated certain conventional types of malpractice, political conflicts have transitioned to issues about technological governance, legal analysis, and institutional trustworthiness. Consequently, technology alters the essence of electoral strife instead of eradicating it completely.

The suggestion is that election automation ought to be regarded as an complementary reform measure instead of an standalone solution. Sustainable enhancement of elections necessitates the integration of technology, institutional autonomy, legal precision, and a democratic political culture.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Social Contract Theory

This study is grounded in Social Contract Theory, which elucidates the connection between individuals and the government through the tenets of consent, duty, legitimacy, and administration. The concept, chiefly linked to the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, posits that political power arises from an unspoken pact between citizens and the government. Individuals relinquish specific liberties and acknowledge political power in return for safeguarding, stability, organization, and the maintenance of their rights (Hobbes, 1651; Locke, 1689; Rousseau, 1762).

Hobbes (1651) underscored the imperative for a robust political power to avert chaos and instability, contending that individuals create government to evade states of unpredictability and strife. Locke (1689), meanwhile, prioritised restricted governance and the consent of the governed, asserting that political power is valid solely when it safeguards citizens' rights and embodies their endorsement. In democratic nations, elections serve as the principal institutional method by which individuals articulate their approval and bestow legitimacy upon political leaders.

The primary premise of Social Contract Theory pertinent to this research is that the validity and durability of the state rely on the ongoing consent of the populace towards political power. When governments do not embody the consent of the populace or contravene the foundational norms of political power, legitimacy wanes, which may lead to political instability and diminished state efficacy (Habermas, 1975).

3.2 Application of Social Contract Theory to the Study

The significance of Social Contract Theory in this research is to its capacity to elucidate the relationship among election legitimacy, democratic endurance, and national security in Nigeria. In a democratic framework, trustworthy elections signify the mechanism by which citizens reaffirm their approval and establish the legitimacy of political power. Consequently, electoral procedures regarded as deceitful, manipulative, or inequitable erode the social contract between the government and its populace.

In Nigeria, persistent electoral conflicts, accusations of misconduct, and disputed results have led to a waning confidence in democratic institutions. When individuals believe that political authority is obtained through deceit rather than authentic electoral selection, the legitimacy of the government diminishes, consequently undermining citizens' trust and collaboration with governmental entities. Legitimacy shortfalls can lead to political unrest, electoral aggression, and wider national security issues.

The theory thus establishes a foundation for analysing the Automated Electoral Reform System (AERS) as a tool for enhancing the social contract. Enhancing election transparency, minimising manipulation opportunities, and bolstering confidence in electoral results, technologies like biometric voter registration, BVAS, and electronic result transmission can potentially reinstate citizens' faith in democratic institutions. An authoritative automated electoral system might so enhance political legitimacy, foster democratic endurance, and bolster national security.

Nevertheless, the thesis posits that technology by itself cannot provide legitimacy. The efficacy of AERS is contingent upon the overarching institutional context, which encompasses the autonomy of electoral bodies, compliance with legal principles, the integrity of the judiciary, and the dedication of political figures to democratic ideals.

Consequently, Social Contract Theory serves as the theoretical basis for this research by elucidating the impact of electoral credibility on the citizen-state relationship, and how enhanced electoral legitimacy can bolster democratic stability and national security in Nigeria.

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Research Design

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in the analysis of documents. The selection of a qualitative methodology is guided by the research's aim to explore the intricate interplay between electoral automation, democratic sustainability, and national security in Nigeria's political landscape. Instead of employing statistical measurements of variables, the research emphasises the analysis of historical progressions, institutional transformations, policy structures, and academic discussions related to electoral integrity and security governance.

Qualitative research is especially adept at analysing political phenomena related to institutional conduct, legitimacy, public confidence, and governance mechanisms, as it facilitates a profound comprehension of the meanings, perceptions, and ramifications tied to social and political changes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

4.2 Sources and Method of Data Collection

The research is solely based on secondary sources derived from reputable academic, institutional, and policy documents. Data were gathered from peer-reviewed journals, academic texts, and official documents from electoral bodies, reports from international entities, civil society organisations, and credible media evaluations.

The primary references utilised encompass documents from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), International IDEA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), reports from election observation missions, and pertinent research on Nigerian elections and national security.

The research centres on Nigeria's Fourth Republic, spanning from 1999 until 2023. This timeframe was chosen as it signifies Nigeria's most extended uninterrupted democratic tenure and offers ample data for analysing the progression of election reforms, technical advancements, and their effects on democratic stability.

4.3 Method of Data Analysis

The gathered data underwent examination through theme analysis. This methodology entails recognising persistent themes, patterns, and connections among the current literature and documentary sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The examination was structured on four principal themes:

- 1) Electoral integrity and legitimacy challenges in Nigeria:
- 2) This topic explores the impact of electoral misconduct, contested results, and election-associated violence on democratic legitimacy and national security.
- 3) Evolution of electoral automation in Nigeria:
- 4) This emphasises the initiation and advancement of biometric voter registration, electronic accreditation mechanisms, BVAS, and digital result dissemination.
- 5) The relationship between electoral technology and democratic sustainability:
- 6) This investigates if automated electoral innovations have improved transparency, accountability, public confidence, and harmonious political rivalry.

- 7) Challenges and security implications of electoral automation:
- 8) These analyses the rising issues related to cyber security, technological malfunctions, institutional capability, political opposition, and digital governance.

This thematic methodology allows the research to amalgamate historical data and modern advancements to assess the degree to which AERS aids in the fortification of democracy and national security.

5. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ELECTORAL CHALLENGES, DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY, AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA (1999–2023)

5.1 Electoral Governance and Democratic Fragility in the Fourth Republic

Nigeria's Fourth Republic, begun in 1999, signifies the nation's most prolonged continuous democratic tenure. Nonetheless, the resilience of democratic governance has coexisted with ongoing issues about electoral integrity, institutional fragility, and political turbulence. Elections in Nigeria have traditionally been marked by accusations of fraud, vote purchasing, violence, and conflicts regarding electoral results, prompting apprehensions about the authenticity of democratic institutions (Agbu, 2016; Joseph, 2014).

The importance of election legitimacy in Nigeria transcends mere political rivalry, as access to governmental authority is intricately linked to the management of economic assets and patronage systems. Joseph (2014) posits that prebendal politics illustrates the fierce rivalries among elites in Nigeria vying for state resources. In these circumstances, elections transform into fiercely contested battles where political figures may view triumph as crucial for preserving economic and political power.

This atmosphere has fostered the view of elections as zero-sum competitions, in which the loss of political authority can have considerable personal and institutional drawbacks. As a result, electoral procedures are often linked to manipulation, violence, and post-election conflicts, which in turn impact democratic stability and national security.

5.2 The 1999 - 2011 Period: Electoral Irregularities and Security Consequences

The electoral transition of 1999 signified Nigeria's reversion to civilian administration following an extended period of military governance. Despite the election effectively transferring authority to a democratically elected administration, apprehensions persisted about the transparency of the electoral process and the autonomy of institutions. The initial years of the Fourth Republic were marked by democratic consistency and constrained electoral trust.

The general elections of 2003 and 2007 heightened apprehensions regarding electoral integrity. Domestic and international observers reported anomalies, such as ballot tampering, coercion, violence, and deficiencies in electoral management. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2007) described the 2007 elections as inadequate in fulfilling fundamental international democratic principles, highlighting considerable deficiencies in transparency and legitimacy.

The ramifications of these electoral deficiencies transcended mere political discontent. The alteration of electoral systems has led to a decrease in public confidence in democratic entities and has strengthened the belief that political authority may be obtained through undemocratic methods. Such viewpoints undermined the credibility of elected administrations and fostered an environment ripe for political discontent and instability.

The 2011 presidential election marked a notable advance in electoral management compared to earlier elections; yet, controversies regarding the results led to extensive post-election violence, especially in northern Nigeria. Human Rights Watch (2011) documented considerable fatalities and migration resulting from the turmoil. The aggression illustrated how election discontent may escalate into security emergencies when the populace doubted the integrity of electoral bodies.

The events of this era forged a significant connection between electoral legitimacy and national security: when individuals view electoral results as unjust, political conflicts may intensify from institutional rivalry into bloodshed.

5.3 The 2015 General Election: Electoral Reform and Democratic Breakthrough

The 2015 general election was a significant milestone in Nigeria's democratic evolution. Held amidst considerable security threats, notably the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, the election bore substantial consequences for national stability.

Before the election, there were extensive apprehensions that electoral conflicts may exacerbate current security issues. Political strife was exacerbated by fierce rivalry between the governing People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposing All Progressives Congress (APC). Nonetheless, the election changes implemented by INEC played a crucial role in enhancing public trust in the procedure.

A significant advancement was the implementation of the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) and Smart Card Reader technology for verifying voters. Despite encountering operational difficulties, the technology marked a significant advancement in mitigating impersonation and multiple voting, while enhancing election openness.

The election resulted in a momentous event: the inaugural peaceful transition of presidential authority from a ruling party to an opposition party in Nigeria's past. The incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan's acknowledgement of the outcome, along with Muhammadu Buhari's ascension to the presidency, bolstered Nigeria's democratic reputation both nationally and globally.

The importance of the 2015 election transcends mere political change. It illustrated that trustworthy elections could enhance national security by bolstering governmental legitimacy. A government regarded as electorally legitimate has an enhanced ability to engage citizens, foster institutional collaboration, and tackle security challenges.

This experience bolsters the assertion that election legitimacy acts as a stabilising force in democratic society.

5.4 The 2019 General Election: Declining Confidence and Institutional Challenges

Notwithstanding the advancements made in 2015, the 2019 general election exposed persistent deficiencies in Nigeria's electoral framework. The election took place in the context of ongoing instability, characterised by the Boko Haram insurgency, conflicts between farmers and herders, militancy, and escalating criminal violence.

Civil society organisations have highlighted issues with voter intimidation, vote purchasing, electoral violence, and diminishing public trust in the electoral process (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2019). While the election did not result in violence comparable to that in 2011, controversies related to the process rekindled apprehensions about electoral integrity.

The 2019 election revealed that earlier changes had not fully resolved the structural issues impacting Nigeria's democracy. Although advancements in technology have started to impact electoral management, uncertainties persisted concerning institutional autonomy, political responsibility, and public confidence.

The event underscored the necessity for more profound reforms that integrated technical advancement with institutional fortification.

5.5 The 2023 General Election: Automation, Transparency, and Emerging Controversies

The 2023 general election served as the paramount evaluation of Nigeria's automated voting reform initiative. For the inaugural occasion, INEC implemented BVAS and the IReV platform across the country, fostering anticipations that technology would significantly enhance election integrity.

The implementation of BVAS improved voter verification by integrating fingerprint and facial recognition systems. This diminished the chances for specific types of election misconduct, especially voter impersonation and duplicate voting. The system facilitated the digital acquisition and submission of polling-unit result sheets via the IReV platform.

The transparency capabilities of IReV marked a significant advancement in Nigeria's electoral history. The technology established a novel degree of public access to electoral data by permitting people, observers, and political participants to electronically view polling-unit outcomes.

Nonetheless, the 2023 election revealed significant shortcomings with electoral automation. Technical obstacles, postponed result submissions, connectivity issues, and disputes over the interpretation of digital data engendered considerable contention. Numerous public and political figures enquired if the technology had been completely executed as planned.

The debate over result transmission revealed that societal anticipations of technology were intricately linked to views on voting legitimacy. When technical systems do not function as expected, trust in the whole voting process may diminish.

Moreover, the legal conflicts subsequent to the election underscored the nascent difficulty of incorporating digital evidence into Nigeria's electoral dispute resolution system. The judiciary's understanding of electronic evidence and the legal stipulations for result transmission emerged as crucial factors in assessing the process's credibility.

Consequently, the 2023 election offers a measured evaluation of AERS: advancements in technology enhanced transparency and mitigated certain types of manipulation, although institutional, legal, and practical obstacles constrained its transformational capacity.

5.6 Electoral Integrity and the National Security Implications

The historical progression of Nigeria's elections from 1999 to 2023 illustrates a persistent correlation between electoral integrity and national security.

Three primary trends arise:

Initially, election crises undermine the legitimacy of the state.

When individuals view elections as rigged, trust in governmental institutions diminishes. This undermines the social contract and diminishes citizens' readiness to collaborate with governmental entities.

Secondly, electoral conflicts may produce security issues.

Nigeria's situation, especially following the 2011 election, illustrates that unaddressed electoral disputes can lead to bloodshed, relocation, and societal unrest.

Firstly, trustworthy elections enhance governmental efficacy.

The 2015 transition illustrated that valid electoral results can bolster political stability and furnish governments with more robust bases for tackling security issues.

Consequently, electoral reform ought to be perceived as an element of the national security framework. Enhancing electoral integrity not only bolsters democracy but also fortifies the credibility and durability of the Nigerian state.

6. FINDINGS

1) Electoral Legitimacy Influences National Security:

The research indicated that contentious and untrustworthy elections diminish public confidence in governance, heighten political discord, and foster circumstances that may jeopardise national stability.

2) Aers Enhances The Transparency And Accountability Of Elections:

The implementation of biometric technology, BVAS, and IReV has improved voter authentication, diminished specific types of electoral malfeasance, and expanded access to election data.

3) Technology Alone Cannot Guarantee Credible Elections:

The 2023 general election revealed that technological obstacles, cyber security threats, institutional vulnerabilities, and political scepticism can hinder the efficacy of automated voting systems.

4) Electoral Reform Requires Institutional Strengthening:

The viability of AERS relies on an autonomous electoral commission, robust legal structures, judicial competence, and accountable political conduct.

7. DISCUSSION: ELECTORAL AUTOMATION, DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY, AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY NEXUS

7.1 Electoral Legitimacy as a Foundation of National Security

The results of this research indicate that election legitimacy is a vital aspect of national security in Nigeria. While security discussions have historically emphasised military dangers, terrorism, and safeguarding territory, modern governance studies are progressively acknowledging that political legitimacy and institutional trust are vital components of state stability (Buzan et al., 1998; UNDP, 1994).

The Nigerian experience post-1999 demonstrates that electoral procedures provide ramifications that extend beyond the mere appointment of political leaders. Elections influence citizens' perceptions of governmental legitimacy and their readiness to engage with state institutions. In contexts where electoral results are broadly endorsed, administrations enjoy enhanced political capital and an increased ability to galvanise collective action. In contrast,

when elections are viewed as rigged, governments may suffer from legitimacy deficiencies that impair their capacity to tackle security issues effectively.

This discovery corresponds with the tenets of Social Contract Theory. The validity of a democratic government hinges on the populace's acknowledgement that political power embodies their shared desires. Elections function as the formal apparatus by which this approval is articulated. Consequently, election manipulation signifies not only a failure in administration but also a violation of the bond between the populace and the government.

Nigeria's historical context of contested elections illustrates this connection. The electoral turmoil linked to prior election periods fostered popular scepticism, political aggression, and institutional fragility. These results indicate that diminished election legitimacy may pose a security threat as it undermines trust in governmental institutions and fosters conditions for political strife.

7.2 Automated Electoral Reform System as a Mechanism for Strengthening the Social Contract

The research indicates that AERS serves as a crucial instrument for restoring the social contract between the populace and the Nigerian government. Through the enhancement of transparency, the refinement of voter verification processes, and the establishment of credible electoral documentation, automated technologies mitigate certain historical deficiencies that have eroded public trust in electoral processes.

The theoretical conclusion suggests that technology enhances democratic legitimacy by reinforcing the link between citizens' decisions and political results. When constituents trust that their votes are properly documented and tallied, they are more inclined to accept electoral results and acknowledge governmental legitimacy.

The implementation of BVAS and IReV signifies this capability. BVAS enhances the credibility of voter verification by minimising chances for impersonation and duplicate voting, whereas IReV fosters transparency by enabling people and stakeholders to independently monitor facets of result administration.

These technical measures so enhance three crucial aspects of democratic legitimacy:

Transparency

Transparent electoral procedures diminish ambiguity and enable voters to assess the fairness of institutional actions. The existence of digitised electoral records facilitates independent validation and supervision.

Accountability

Automation establishes organisational frameworks that enable the evaluation of electoral authorities and political participants. Digital documentation might furnish proof for examining discrepancies and enhancing electoral management.

Trust

Public trust in elections is heavily influenced by the perception of the credibility of electoral processes. Enhancing precision and transparency, AERS can aid in restoring confidence in democratic institutions. The research underscores that technology enhances the social contract solely when the populace trusts that institutions will employ technological systems justly and responsibly.

7.3 The Dual Character of Electoral Technology: Reform Opportunity and Conflict Arena

A notable discovery of this research is that electoral technology possesses a dual nature. Although it addresses conventional election issues, it simultaneously presents novel political and security dilemmas.

On the advantageous side, AERS diminishes chances for specific types of electoral fraud. Automated voter authentication complicates impersonation, and computerised recording of polling-unit outcomes enhances transparency.

Nonetheless, technology also engenders novel domains of dispute. The 2023 general election revealed that technological difficulties, postponed electronic procedures, and disputes over digital proof might lead to political strife.

This discovery undermines the presumption that technology inherently leads to enhancements in democracy. Technology operates within the confines of prevailing political contexts. In contexts where institutions are deemed credible, technical advancements can bolster democracy; conversely, in environments where institutions are not believed, technology may face opposition.

Consequently, election automation ought to be perceived as a revolution in governance rather than simply a technological advancement. The achievement of its objectives relies on the interplay among technology, institutions, and political conduct.

7.4 From Electoral Violence to Institutionalized Contestation

The research additionally reveals that AERS has played a role in altering the dynamics of electoral strife in Nigeria. Historically, electoral conflicts often led to violent confrontations, property damage, and fatalities. Enhanced transparency frameworks offer different avenues for political entities to contest results.

The notable lack of extensive post-election violence following the 2023 elections indicates that institutional frameworks, such as technology documentation and legal procedures, might play a role in conflict resolution.

Nonetheless, this change should not be construed as the total eradication of electoral discord. Conflict has progressively transitioned from tangible environments to institutional and digital domains.

Modern electoral controversies now encompass:

- 1) Legal disputes regarding electoral processes;
- 2) Disputes regarding the reliability of digital evidence;
- 3) Issues related to cyber security;
- 4) Digital disinformation;
- 5) Institutional conflicts over technical procedures.

Although these methods of dissent are typically more desirable than violent confrontations, they nonetheless necessitate robust democratic frameworks that can equitably address conflicts.

7.5 Cyber Security and the Emerging Security Dimension of Digital Elections

The incorporation of electoral technologies has broadened the definition of electoral security. Historically, the emphasis on election security was predominantly on safeguarding polling locations, electoral personnel, and the electorate. Nonetheless, digital elections raise further issues pertaining to information security and technological robustness.

The safeguarding of AERS relies on the protection of:

Electoral Database

Biometric Information

Electronic Transmission systems

Digital communication channels

And Public confidence in electoral information

Cyber security threats have considerable importance as successful assaults may not directly modify election outcomes; rather, they might erode public trust by instilling doubt regarding the integrity of voting procedures. Consequently, safeguarding electoral technology has emerged as a crucial aspect of national security strategy. Electoral cyber security ought to be regarded as an integral component of Nigeria's comprehensive democratic resilience framework.

7.6 Institutional Capacity as the Determining Factor in Electoral Automation

The results of the study suggest that the efficacy of AERS is influenced more by institutional robustness than by mere technological advancement. Technology functions within societal and governmental frameworks. Ineffective institutions may hinder the advantages of sophisticated technological systems, but robust institutions can enhance the efficacy of basic technology.

For Nigeria, effective electoral automation necessitates:

- 1) A credible and independent electoral commission: INEC must uphold its operational independence, professional competence, and public trust.
- 2) Clear legal frameworks: Electoral legislation should ensure clarity concerning the application, interpretation, and evidentiary significance of digital electoral systems.
- 3) A technologically informed judiciary: Judicial bodies need to enhance their ability to assess digital evidence and adjudicate technology-related electoral controversies.
- 4) Responsible political behaviour: Political entities must embrace democratic rivalry and refrain from endeavours to exploit technological frameworks.
- 5) Public awareness and civic education: Individuals need to comprehend election technologies to actively engage and ensure institutional accountability.

7.7 Implications for Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

The overarching significance of this research is that electoral reform ought to be perceived as a strategy for long-term democratic sustainability. Sustainable democracy necessitates more than periodic elections; it demands elections that the populace perceives as significant, equitable, and able to yield legitimate administrations.

AERS enhances the durability of democracy by possibly fortifying:

Electoral credibility

Political accountability

Citizen participation

Peaceful transfer of power and Institutional trust.

Nonetheless, the endurance of democracy cannot be realised solely by technological means. Nigeria's democratic obstacles stem from profound political dilemmas, encompassing patronage systems, institutional frailty, corruption, and inadequate accountability mechanisms. Thus, the incorporation of electoral automation ought to be part of a broader democratic reform strategy that tackles both the technological and political aspects of government.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between Nigeria's Automated Electoral Reform System (AERS), the endurance of democracy, and national security issues in the framework of the Fourth Republic. It was determined that electoral legitimacy is an essential element of national security, as credible elections enhance public confidence, institutional legitimacy, and citizen endorsement of governance.

The research determines that Nigeria's shift from traditional election methods to technology-based systems, especially via biometric voter registration, BVAS, and electronic result administration, signifies a crucial advancement in enhancing electoral integrity. Nonetheless, although AERS have the capacity to diminish election misconduct, improve transparency, and bolster democratic legitimacy, technology by itself cannot address Nigeria's electoral issues.

The efficacy of automated election reform relies on robust institutions, political dedication, legal transparency, cyber security safeguards, and public trust. Consequently, electoral automation need to be regarded as an integral component of a comprehensive democratic consolidation approach that can fortify the social compact between the populace and the government while enhancing national security.

Recommendations

- 1) Strengthen the legal framework for electoral technology: Electoral legislation must delineate explicit regulations for electronic result transmission, the implementation of BVAS, and the legal standing of digital electoral documentation.
- 2) Enhance INEC's institutional and technical capacity: INEC must have sufficient financial resources, ongoing technology advancements, and enhanced training for electoral staff to guarantee the successful execution of AERS.
- 3) Develop a comprehensive electoral cyber security framework: Nigeria ought to implement more robust protocols to safeguard election databases, digital frameworks, and electoral data against cyber-attacks and tampering.
- 4) Improve judicial capacity for resolving technology based electoral disputes: Election tribunals and courts must to enhance their proficiency in evaluating digital evidence and adjudicating technology-related electoral disputes.

- 5) Promote civic education and political accountability: Stakeholders must to enhance public consciousness regarding election technologies while urging political entities to adhere to democratic principles and engage in peaceful rivalry.

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