

TECHNOLOGY AND NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS: INTERROGATING ISSUES OF CREDIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The Nigerian electoral process has evolved since the days of the restricted and municipal franchise. Since the Fourth Republic, successive administrations have demonstrated a commitment to democratic sustainability in Nigeria by deploying technology to support the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in conducting free, credible, and transparent elections. This paper observes that every election cycle attracts incremental appropriations and renewed commitments to using procured technology to midwife a digitalised, hitch-free, credible, and transparent electoral process, culminating in the sanctity of the electorates' will. The realities that underpin these vaulting promises bequeath despair and dashed expectations regarding the deployment of technology in the Nigerian electoral process. Against this background, this paper interrogates the twin issues of credibility and transparency in the 2019 and 2023 general elections. The study adopts a qualitative methodology that relies on both primary and secondary sources and the Institutional Theoretical framework of analysis. The paper concludes that the deployment of technology in the electoral process, without institutional overhaul and the necessary political will to implement extant electoral reforms, undermines the basic principles of democracy. A credible and transparent electoral process in the future will restore confidence and increase participation.

Keywords: *Credibility, Electoral Process, Nigeria, Technology, Transparency*

Introduction

Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights confers the participatory right of everyone in the government of their country, directly or indirectly, through periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage through secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedures. Elections are a crucial feature of every democracy. Therefore, the right to participate is inalienable, and the provision of credible and transparent elections is an irreducible benchmark. Irrespective of age, creed, ethnicity, gender, abilities, and/or disabilities, every citizen has a role in the electoral process because their needs and aspirations are expected to shape the electoral tide that leads to legitimate governance. Hence, participation in governance gives meaning to the ideal in a democratic society that sovereignty belongs to the people¹. Suffice it to state that age, to a large extent, is pegged for trustees of the people's mandates. In Nigeria, from the age of 18, a citizen without legal and medical impediments can vote and be voted for. Then, Military President, General Ibrahim Babangida, reiterated the essence of democratic rule over authoritarian rule in his autobiography, *A Journey in Service* (2025), "As leaders, we must accept and comply with the wishes of those we represent. No amount of force can forever stifle the right of the governed to decide at periodic free and fair elections the fate of any government. The free choice of leaders by the governed is the essence of representative government"². The eternal reality is that the oppressed always outlive their oppressors. This is because, no matter the orchestrated shenanigans by the gladiatorial political elite to skew the electoral process, the people's demand for periodic free, fair, and credible elections cannot be doused. Elections are the

¹ O.B. C. Nwankwo. "Elections: Theoretical and Empirical Issues: Changing the tide of Electoral Malpractice for Quality Elections in Nigeria." *Elections, Security Challenges and African Development*, edited by S. Ibrahim, H. Saliu, and A. Okolie. (Enugu: Timex, 2018), p.1.

² I. B. Babangida. *A Journey of Service: An Autobiography*. (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2025), p. 200.

institutional technology of democracy. They have the potential to make governments both more accountable and more legitimate. Elections should sound the death knell to political violence.³

Electoral democracies the world over rest on a quadruple pillar- credible, free, fair, and periodic elections. Granted that the making of democracies is not exclusive to periodic elections, the credibility of elections is measured by the freedom and fairness of the electoral process. Nigeria's dramatic return to civilian rule on Saturday, May 29, 1999, inaugurating the Fourth Republic, followed a constellation of pro-democracy activism after over three decades of military rule. Although Nigeria attained this democratic feat at the twilight of the 20th century, during the third tidal wave of democratisation in Africa, it has maintained an unbroken record of civilian rule since 1999. The prevailing constitutional revolution had at its core a multiparty democracy, which guaranteed ballot-based regime change in Africa⁴. Whether the Nigerian-styled democracy or civilian rule, midwived by every circle of electoral processes, reflects the democratic mandates of the people/electorate is another kettle of fish. Since 1999, there have been elections in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. Each election witnessed an incremental spate of violence and malfeasance in flagrant disregard for extant laws, serially amended. Political parties lie at the heart of competitive politics and democracy, but can also be a significant weakness in democratic governance⁵.

³P. Collier. *Wars, Guns, and Votes Democracy in Dangerous Places*. (Pymble: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), p.7.

⁴ N. Steytler and C. M Fombad. "Introduction: Democracy, Elections, and Constitutionalism in Africa". In *Democracy, Elections, and Constitutionalism in Africa*, edited by Charles M. Fombad and Nico Steytler. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.1.

⁵ N. Steytler and C. M Fombad. "Introduction: Democracy, Elections, and Constitutionalism in Africa". In *Democracy, Elections, and Constitutionalism in Africa*, edited by Charles M. Fombad and Nico Steytler. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.10.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Institutional Theory espoused by James March and Johan Olsen (1984) and the Electoral Integrity Theory developed by Pippa Norris (2014). March and Olsen argue that institutions influence behaviours, norms, and outcomes. In this light, the electoral process involves the INEC, the legally empowered Electoral Management Body (EMB) in Nigeria; the political parties; the electorate; the judiciary; civil society groups; security agencies, among others, to midwife credible, free and fair elections towards resolving the leadership conundrum in Nigeria. Therefore, these institutions influence citizens' and other electoral observers' perceptions. On the other hand, the Electoral Integrity theory depends on the proper functioning of pre-election preparations, election-day administration, and post-election adjudication, and, by extension, on the people's reaction. Failures at any of these stages compromise legitimacy. Applying this perspective to Nigeria reveals that logistical inefficiencies, technological breakdowns, most notably with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), as well as controversial judicial interventions, collectively undermined the credibility of the 2019 and 2023 elections. These failures exposed profound institutional weaknesses and diminished citizens' trust in the electoral system⁶. Thus, the credibility and transparency of the 2019 and 2023 elections are consequential to institutional capacities.

Technology and Nigeria's Electoral Process: An Overview

⁶ S. O. Gbolahan, *et al.* "Electoral democracy and the breakdown of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria: Issues, challenges, and lessons learned" *International Journal of Political Science and Governance* 7(11): 2025, p. 125.

Advances in science and technology have had a tremendous impact on the world, especially with the advent of the internet⁷. Two principal factors determine the essence of innovation in human society: identifying a challenge and the desire to solve the identified challenge(s)⁸. INEC's deployment of technology in the electoral process began with the Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines, which were used to develop an Electronic Voters Register (EVR) in preparation for the 2007 elections. The EVR contains comprehensive voter information, such as name, age, gender, address, photograph, and fingerprint. There is no doubt that technology has reshaped Nigeria's electoral landscape. This has been expressed through continuous voter registration, verification, voting, and the transmission of election results. That is, technology improves voter registration, ID verification, vote counting, results transmission and tabulation, error reduction, real-time interactions, and information exchange. Elections have used optical scanners to count paper ballots, e-signing of initiative or referendum demands, e-voting and internet voting, geographic information systems for delineating boundaries and determining polling stations, locations, candidate or party endorsement lists, electronic registers, party agents and observer registration portals, biometry, blockchain, cloud computing, artificial e-citizenship, engagement, campaigning, and elections⁹.

The Electoral Act 2022 empowers INEC to deploy technology in the electoral process. For instance, Section 9(2a) of the Electoral Act 2022 provides for the digitisation and storage of the

⁷ P.O. Odey. "Social Media and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria". In *The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: Emerging Issues*, edited by J. T. Tsuwa and E. T. Ikpanor. (Abuja: Donafrique Publishers, 2017), p.285.

⁸ M. A. Oni and V. O. Ojo. "Smart Card Reader and Electoral Malpractice: A Comparative Analysis of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria." In *Elections, Security Challenges and African Development*, edited by S. Ibrahim, H. Saliu, and A. Okoli. (Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), 2018), p.43.

⁹ P. A. Toba, *et al.* "The Role of Technology in Nigeria 2019 and 2023 General Elections" *Global Scientific Journal*, Volume 11, Issue 12, December 2023, p.268.

Voters' Register in INEC's central database. Section 41(1) provides for electronic voting using electronic devices. Section 62(2) allows for the establishment of the National Electronic Register of Election Results as a post-election database for election results. The deployment of technology in Nigeria is bedevilled by a myriad of governance problems, often typified by the pre- and post-election crises associated with its democracy.¹⁰ It is appalling to note that the return to civilian rule over two decades ago has yet to bear democratic rule in Nigeria. Osita Agbu contends that,

However, the nagging question remains: for how long will the country continue to bastardise democracy and engage in electoral brinkmanship? The elections of 1999 and 2003 could be considered transitional because they marked watershed moments in the country's march toward civil rule, which had been severely truncated under military rule. We call them 'transitional elections' in the sense of movement away from military to civil rule, autocratic to supposedly popular rule, and from the embrace of democracy to its consolidation. While the 2007 elections appeared to have set back the gains made with the democratisation process, the 2011 exercise was a redemption exercise of sorts. The expectation, therefore, is that the 2015 general elections will significantly consolidate democracy after sixteen years of unbroken civil rule, which is a rare achievement in many developing countries, especially in Africa¹¹.

Unarguably, there is an ironic political undercurrent in Nigeria- the Nigerian gladiatorial political class clamour for democracy while they benefit from weak institutions. This is so, when

¹⁰ O. Agbu. "Introduction". In *Elections and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, edited by Osita Agbu. (Dakar: CODESRIA National Working Groups, 2016), p.1.

¹¹ O. Agbu. "Introduction". In *Elections and...* p.1

politicians surreptitiously orchestrate mines in the electoral process through weaponised poverty to make the electorate vulnerable to vote buying, stifle the independence of the INEC (which has practically made it the National Electoral Commission (NEC), abuse judicial processes by securing all sorts of injunctions and controversial judgements, sponsoring electoral violence, and misuse of the security agencies. These are evident because institutional failure breeds no consequences for electoral malfeasance. The hue and cries for electoral reforms to guide periodic electoral processes for credible, free, and fair elections have witnessed significant recourse to technology. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC),

The Nigerian electoral system has been replete with experiments since 1922 on how best to make votes count, from the traditional Direct Open Ballot System (DOBS), to the Modified Open Ballot System (MOBS), and the present Open Secret Ballot System (OSBS). Currently, the country uses a single-member constituency system with competitive multi-party competition and the first-past-the-post winner system¹².

The above explains the progression in the conduct of elections to address issues of population growth and geographic variation, security, and technological innovation. The conduct of elections through democratisation is a continuous, iterative process. Within this cycle, the electoral process comprises several phases, in each of which technology can play a key role. These include the design and drafting of legislation, the recruitment and training of electoral staff, electoral planning,

¹²Independent National Electoral Commission, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2008.

voter registration, polling, counting, tabulation of results, declaration of results, resolution of electoral disputes, and reporting, auditing, and archiving.¹³

Paul Collier's team with Action Aid identified three illegitimate winning options in Nigeria's elections- bribery, intimidation, and vote miscounting¹⁴ and launched into action in the 2007 election. It turned out that, at least in the Nigerian election, violence was predominantly a strategy of the politically weak, perhaps somewhat analogous to terrorism¹⁵. The palpable demons of godfatherism that circumvent the electoral process with a humongous financial base, flagrantly set aside internal party democracy, monetise the electoral process with powerful foreign currencies, sponsor electoral violence, and secure power through other means rather than through legitimate ballots. It is Nigerians who must build democracy and the rule of law in their own country. Their foreign friends can help only on the margin. It is axiomatic that credible elections and adherence to the rule of law would improve the relationship between Nigerians and their government and be the best guarantee against state failure¹⁶.

As a deliberate means of containing this electoral malfeasance, political analysts, civil society groups, and the people have agitated for extant laws to legitimise the deployment of technology in the electoral process. Hence, Section 64(6b) of the Electoral Act 2022 recognises the deployment of technology during elections for accreditation and the resolution of discrepancies

¹³ T. A. Abioro and O. M. Abiodun. "Electoral Management Bodies, Information and Communications Technology and Democratization Process in Nigeria" *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science* Volume 21 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2021, p.28.

¹⁴P. Collier. *Wars, Guns, and Votes Democracy in Dangerous Places*. (Pymble: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), p.34.

¹⁵P. Collier. *Wars, Guns, ...* p.35.

¹⁶ J. Campbell. *Nigeria Dancing on the Brink*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), p.xxii.

in the collation of results. Also, Section 152 of the Electoral Act 2022 prescribes the use of technology in the electoral process- pre-election, election, and post-election activities. Thus, technology was deployed in the electoral process to streamline electoral activities and serve as a mechanism for conflict resolution.

The introduction and deployment of technology in the Fourth Republic were midwived by the INEC, led by Professor Attahiru Jega, during the 2015 general elections. For instance, the Card Reader is a device that authenticates the identity of the voter present at the polling booth. The voter's biometrics are verified with the encoded chip in the permanent voter card (PVC), including the timing. The information is later transmitted to the INEC server by short message service (SMS). According to Jega, "The ward collation officer can use this information to audit polling unit result sheets and to determine whether accreditation figures have been altered, a common feature of electoral fraud in our jurisdiction¹⁷. This novelty would enable INEC to audit results from polling units and produce statistical analyses of voting demographics¹⁸. At the introduction, two critical technological components are involved- the permanent voters' card (PVC) and the Card Reader. The challenges of the Smart Card Readers led to the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which verifies voters' biometrics and facial features. By these, the prospective voter must have been validly registered, collected his/her PVC, and physically present in the correct polling unit for accreditation and subsequent voting. The insistence on the use of the Card readers (and later BVAS) and PVCs rather than the analogue system of manual accreditation reduced cases of overvoting, multiple voting, the use of incidence

¹⁷O. Adeniyi. *Against the Run of Play: How an Incumbent President was defeated in Nigeria*. (Yaba: Kachifo Limited, 2017), p.181.

¹⁸ O. Adeniyi. *Against the Run...* p.181.

forms, and the like. Voters only needed to be accredited to vote in their validly registered polling units with valid cards. An improvement in the use of technology is the development of the internet server (I-rev), which will transmit election results in real time from polling units to a central server accessible to all. The creation of the I-rev was heralded with renewed enthusiasm and faith in the Nigerian elections under the Mahmud Yakubu-led INEC. The Ekiti and Osun gubernatorial elections in June and July 2022, respectively, are testaments to renewed hope for a technologically driven election in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Technology and the Issues of Credibility and Transparency in the 2019 and 2023 Elections

One of the many existential contradictions of Nigeria's Fourth Republic is the digitalisation of the electoral process. Since 2011, Nigeria's electoral process has seen digitalisation in voter registration, mobilisation, verification, and the transmission of election results. Has this innovation improved electoral integrity and restored hope in the electorate regarding the general elections? The incremental violence, electoral manipulations, and judicialization of the process leave hurtful memories, consequential voter apathy, and a one-party State. At the same time, democratic gains are expected to be incremental, local and international expectations on the 2019 general elections that birthed the Muhammadu Buhari second term and the 2023 polls that midwived an APC-to-APC change of baton (Buhari to Tinubu). The 2023 general election was widely regarded as one of the most meticulously planned since 1999¹⁹. This is evident in the provision of funds a year before the elections (as provided by the 2022 Electoral Act) and in the use of technology (BVAS and IReV) for accreditation and the mandatory real-time transmission of scanned results from the

¹⁹ Yiaga Africa. *Electoral Trust Restored? Nigeria's Electoral Process One Year after the 2023 General Election*. (Abuja: Yiaga Africa, 2024), p.1.

polling units to the central INEC server. To achieve the eternal mandate of INEC, the Commission spent ₦355 billion²⁰ on the 2023 elections, compared with ₦254 billion²¹ in the 2019 elections.

Larry Diamond captures the global existential threat to democracy, thus,

After three decades in which democracy was spreading and another in which it stagnated and slowly eroded, we are now witnessing a global retreat from freedom. In every region of the world, autocrats are seizing the initiative, democrats are on the defensive, and the space for competitive politics and free expression is shrinking. Established democracies are facing relentless scandals, sweeping citizen disaffection, and existential threats to their survival.²².

The Nigerian frantic quest to overcome this existential threat to democracy, especially in the Fourth Republic has witnessed some innovations like the deployment of technology in the education and mobilization of the citizens/electorates, and use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), PVCs, and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) for the transmission, and retrieval of election results. The promised ease of operations and the budgetary appropriations for procurement and logistics to ensure credible, free, fair, and transparent elections in the 2019 and 2023 general elections. There is no Nigerian exceptionalism in the picture Diamond paints. Still, the Nigerian picture exemplifies why democracy is a journey full of potholes, hills, valleys, and undulating lands rather than a destination with a clear roadmap.

²⁰ J. Opanuga. "Nigeria spent N355billion on 2023 elections – INEC". *Guardian*, 23 February 2024. <https://guardian.ng/features/unbundling-n254bn>. Accessed 11/11/2024

²¹ T. T. Olaiya. "Unbundling N254bn budget for 2019 elections" *Guardian*, 23 July 2018. <https://guardian.ng/features/unbundling-n254bn>. Accessed 11/11/2024

²²L. Diamond. *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), p.11.

The deployment of technology in Nigeria's 2019 and 2023 general elections has, among other things, reduced the incidence of multiple voting and overvoting. Areas where outrageous election results in several million votes have suddenly been reduced to hundreds of thousands of votes. The reduction in election votes does not necessarily imply voter apathy, but rather reflects the efficiency of technology, especially the BVAS. Despite technological gains in the 2019 and 2023 elections, issues such as the legal framework, institutional fragility/capture, technical/mechanical and logistical challenges, compromised electoral personnel, insecurity, etc., collectively called into question the credibility and transparency of the elections. For instance, post-mortem analysis of every election informs electoral improvements in succeeding elections. It was in this light that the 2019 election was expected to improve on the 2015 elections. However, several reports indicated that numerous pitfalls, including severe operational shortcomings, a lack of transparency, and breaches of electoral security, tarnished the credibility of the 2019 polls.²³

- Legal Framework

Deployment of technology in the electoral process must derive legitimacy from an underlying legal framework that recognises and supports its operations. This is because elections are rooted in the constitution and law; therefore, any technology used should not violate the enabling laws and legislation²⁴. The PDP presidential candidate in the 2019 election, Atiku Abubakar, claimed that the authentic results on the INEC server showed that he won. Still, the

²³cited in N. Orji. "The Promise and Problems of Electoral Reforms" In *Democracy and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Governance, Political Economy and Party Politics 1999–2023*, edited by W. Adebaniwi. (Suffolk: James Currey, 2023), p.276.

²⁴ R. T. Sibe and C. Kaunert. "Technology, Cyber Security and the 2023 Elections In Nigeria Prospects, Challenges and Opportunities" *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p.71. DOI: 10.20940/JAE/2023/v22i2a4

election tribunal ruled otherwise because, under the law, there was no provision for technology²⁵. The INEC had boasted of the use of technology in the 2019 election, and the training manual for ad hoc electoral officers contained the use of technology and personnel to provide technical support during voting and collation. The ad hoc staff who provided technical support were called Registration Area Technical Support (RATECH).

Section 60 of the Electoral Act 2022 allows for the use of technology with a discretionary proviso for INEC. INEC was empowered to determine the suitability of technology for the collation and real-time transmission of election results. It was this leeway that opened the floodgates of manipulation and litigation. Thus, the legal landmine against the seamless utilisation of technology to guarantee credible and transparent elections was apparent. The technology was designed to work even in areas with no network. The results are transmitted offline and will be delivered as soon as the device gains network access. This is akin to SMS and social media chats, which are delivered whenever the network is available. More to this, the Commission, network providers, and the nation's communications ministry have separately assured Nigerians, on different platforms in Nigeria and abroad, of the technology's efficiency and preparedness to tackle challenges like cyberattacks by hacktivists on the IREV. In a press release, the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy reported the spike in cyberattacks and reassured Nigerians that,

A total of 12,988,978 attacks were recorded, originating from both within and outside Nigeria. It is worth noting that the Centres successfully blocked these

²⁵ *Daily Trust*. "On Presidential Election Tribunal's Verdict", 15 September, 2019, [On Presidential Election Tribunal's Verdict - Daily Trust](#). Accessed 25/11/2024,

attacks and/or escalated them to the relevant institutions for appropriate action. The parastatals, under the supervision of the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, have played a crucial role in providing the enabling environment for the successful conduct of a credible, free, fair, and transparent election.²⁶

The twist in the transmission of results was that both the Presidential and National Assembly elections were held on the same day (25th February, 2023), and the results were expected to be transmitted as such. However, the presidential results were not transmitted, while the National Assembly results were successfully transmitted.

- Institutional fragility/capture

The hue and cry over INEC's independence remains unabated. The appointment of the Chairman and Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) of INEC, and their dispositions towards electoral credibility and transparency, classically demonstrate the cliché: he that pays the piper dictates the tune. The 2023 elections were conducted under the Electoral Act 2022, which promised significant improvements, particularly through the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). These innovations were expected to enhance both credibility and transparency. However, the elections fell short of expectations. While BVAS improved voter accreditation by reducing incidents of multiple voting, the failure to consistently upload results to the IREV portal in real time undermined trust. Key actors, including opposition parties and civil society groups, questioned the integrity of the

²⁶ U. Sulaiman. "Press Statement: Monitoring Nigeria's Cyberspace Before, During and After the 2023 Presidential Elections" 14th March, 2023. ncc@ncc.gov.ng. Accessed 21/03/2025.

process, arguing that technological inconsistencies created a gap between promised reforms and actual performance.

The humongous expenditure to manipulate electoral outcomes before, during, and after elections is a deliberate conspiracy between the government and its cronies outside government to frustrate institutional and infrastructural efficiencies. An unanswered question, like many others, is why the post-mortem evaluation of the financial appropriation to INEC for the conduct of credible and transparent 2023 elections, with the deployment of technology, has been delayed? INEC had declared its readiness to deploy technology for the 2023 elections. Ventilating the preparedness of INEC to deploy technology in the 2023 polls to minimise human errors, a National Commissioner and Chairman of INEC's Information and Voter Education Committee, Festus Okoye, discloses that,

We have reached the critical stage in the electoral process. At this critical stage, it's important to let Nigerians know about some of the creative innovations identified for the 2023 elections. The INEC chairman has made it clear to Nigerians that only Nigerians' votes will determine this election. He has also made it clear that this particular election will be technology-driven²⁷.

The failure of INEC to adhere to its own rules, with the well-publicised assurances in print and non-print media of the Commission's commitment to real-time electronic transmission of results in a high-stakes presidential election, calls into question the integrity of the Commission's

²⁷ Z. Adaramola. "How ICT will shape Nigeria's 2023 elections, startups, others" *Daily Trust*, Wednesday, 4 Jan 2023. dailytrust.com. Accessed, 12/02/2025.

leadership. Recall that only the presidential election results suffered the notorious ‘technical glitch’ in achieving real-time transmission of results. The avalanche of post-election litigation was troubling. It was as though the over three hundred billion naira budget for the 2023 elections successfully procured 1,209 litigations filed across several election tribunals, encompassing five presidential election petitions, 83 governorship election petitions, 143 Senatorial, 417 House of Representatives, and 557 State House of Assembly²⁸. The expected renewed hope following the Ekiti and Osun States litmus tests was flagrantly dashed by external influence that undermined INEC's independence.

The dashed hopes of INEC and the Court sparked agitation for the use of technology in court proceedings, a call that was not known under the Electoral Act. What a paradox! Justice Tsammani justified the opposition to live coverage (or the deployment of technology in electoral litigations), thus, “...the request (for a live broadcast of the court proceedings) has no utilitarian value... We cannot permit a procedure that dramatises the court’s proceedings”²⁹. However, the Court conceded to the public with live broadcast of the judgments at both the tribunal and the Supreme Court levels. Thus, the failure of the Commission and other institutions to name and prosecute those responsible for the notorious ‘technical glitch’ and judicial outcomes of litigations further reinforced institutional fragility in the electoral process and ingratiate squandered hope.

- Technical/mechanical Challenges

²⁸ Cited in Yiaga Africa. *Electoral Trust Restored? Nigeria’s Electoral Process One Year after the 2023 General Election*. (Abuja: Yiaga Africa, 2024), p.19.

²⁹ Yiaga Africa. *Electoral Trust Restored?...* p.19.

Credibility and transparency in the 2019 and 2023 elections were constrained by limited technological integration. The 2019 electoral process remained largely manual, particularly in vote collation and transmission. During post-election litigation, INEC denied the deployment of the technological transfer of results to the server, which the electoral commission had budgeted for and had facilities installed.³⁰ These created opportunities for manipulation, especially at collation centres where results could be altered without immediate verification. The lack of real-time public access to results further deepened stakeholders' suspicions. As stated earlier, all critical stakeholders in the communication and digital ecosystem have agreed on the workability of a technologically-driven election in Nigeria, especially in 2023. Telecommunication network providers were aware of network conditions in some parts of Nigeria, where service was poor or absent due to terrorist activities. The BVAS technology enabled it to scan and transmit election results from polling units, regardless of whether a telecommunications network was available.

For instance, there was no explanation why the BVAS worked efficiently during voting on the Presidential and National Assembly elections, but failed to transmit the presidential election results alone. Also, INEC's decision to reconfigure the BVAS for the Governorship and Houses of Assembly elections raised suspicion of a compromised process. As reported, an ad hoc staff of the presidential election argues that,

Before our participation on election day, we were told that the BVAS is an advanced tool for combating corruption. Still, along the way, we could only upload the Senate and the House of Representatives, but couldn't upload the presidential.

³⁰ W. Odunsi. "Nigeria election: INEC chairman, Mahmood asked to resign over EU report", *DAILY POST* June 16, 2019, <https://dailypost.ng/2019/06/16/nigeria-election-inec-chairman-mahmood-asked-resign-eu-report>. Accessed 25/11/2024.

It's a rhetorical question, but the whole thing is that I don't know the intention of INEC in this reconfiguration.³¹

The trust deficit heightened by the experiences of the presidential elections left most Nigerians suspicious; the technical/mechanical glitches experienced with technology were imaginary and premeditated.

Conclusion

Nigeria's democratic experience since the Fourth Republic has demonstrated incremental progress in improving electoral outcomes through electoral reforms and budgetary measures. The twin elections in focus, the 2019 and 2023, are a testament to the above assertions. However, while the 2023 reforms introduced technological reforms absent in 2019, the gap between policy design and implementation became more evident. In 2019, credibility was undermined by manual inefficiencies; in 2023, it was challenged by the failure of technological promises. Thus, rather than a linear progression, Nigeria's electoral credibility reflects a cyclical pattern of reform and relapse. The crises of credibility and transparency in the 2019 and 2023 elections highlight the need for deeper institutional reforms beyond technological adoption.

To address these issues of credibility and transparency in future elections in Nigeria, an institutional overhaul is inescapable. INEC must be free from the overbearing influence of the government and the highly politically exposed individuals. The appointment of the INEC Chairman and RECs must not be the responsibility of the president of Nigeria, but rather an

³¹ F. Onyemachi. "What does it really mean to reconfigure BVAS?" *BusinessDay* March 11, 2023. businessday.ng/technology/article. Accessed 28/03/2025.

independent body comprising retired justices and Civil Society. Also, extant electoral laws must be free from ambiguities, and the relevant stakeholders shall demonstrate strict compliance.

The operational electoral legal frameworks in Nigeria should be free from ambiguities, and electoral litigations should not be consigned to the realm of technicalities. There should be consequences for every action in Nigeria. Post-mortem reports of elections should be interrogated, and electoral offenders and beneficiaries should be appropriately sanctioned. Finally, since the electoral reforms and legal frameworks are in place, the political will to midwife credible and transparent, technologically driven elections is profound. This is because bequeathing a credible and transparent electoral process is critical for democratic sustainability, a panacea to the leadership quagmire, and a recipe for national rebirth.