International Journal of Education, Culture, and Society

e-ISSN : 3024-8973
p-ISSN : 3024-8981
Index : Harvard, Boston, Sydney University, Dimensions, Lens, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/IJECS.v2i3.3831

The Impact of the 2022 Electoral Reform on the Credibility of the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Sep 1, 2024	Sep 11, 2024	Sep 14, 2024	Sep 17, 2024

Abstract

Over the years, Nigeria has faced serious election fraud, leading many Nigerians to lose confidence in the electoral process. In 2022, the new Electoral Act was introduced, creating more opportunities for the integration of technologies like BVAS and IREV to improve voter accreditation, result transmission, and real-time election viewership for all stakeholders. This development was welcomed by many Nigerians who hoped the Act would restore voter confidence in the country. However, the outcome of the elections, particularly the presidential elections, indicated that the Act failed to meet the expectations of Nigerians. This study therefore examined the Electoral Act 2022 and the election credibility of the 2023 elections. It explored why the Act failed to mitigate insecurity and ensure effective transmission and viewing of election results, which are key to free and fair elections. Using a mixed research approach to data collection and analysis, the study drew on direct responses from voters and stakeholders, scholarly literature, media reports, and findings from election observer groups. The results indicate that while the Act provides a legal framework for stronger elections in Nigeria, it has not sufficiently ensured a free and fair election in the

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presidential polls. The study concludes that the Act alone cannot guarantee transparent elections due to poor implementation by stakeholders and certain grey areas in the Act that were exploited for election manipulation. The researcher recommends revisiting or strengthening these grey areas to prevent manipulation by elites and ensuring effective implementation by all stakeholders. Specifically, the study suggests the integration of technological advancements, such as blockchain for secure voting, electronic voting systems to enhance accessibility, geospatial technology for better logistics management, and secure mobile applications for real-time results transmission, to further bolster election credibility and transparency in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, Electoral Reform, Credibility, Electoral Act, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a widely adopted form of government, with countries that were once under authoritarian regimes, such as Uganda, Egypt, Tunisia, and Nigeria, now aspiring to democratic governance (Yates, 2013). At its core, democracy centers on the people, requiring an informed and engaged public to express their interests and hold leaders accountable (National Democratic Institute, 2011). Elections play a critical role in democracy, serving as the mechanism for choosing leaders (Wojtasik, 2013; Nnoli, 2003). However, for elections to be meaningful, they must be credible, reflecting the rule of law and accountability (Mohammed, 2016).

In Nigeria, electoral fraud has historically undermined the public's trust. Even leaders like President Umaru Musa Yar'adua acknowledged the flaws in the 2007 elections that brought him to power. His administration initiated reforms to improve the electoral process. While the 2011 general elections were viewed as more transparent, they still faced challenges, leading to post-election violence in some northern states (Shuaibu & Iroegbu, 2011; HRW, 2011). Significant reforms, such as the introduction of Permanent Voter Cards (PVC) and card readers in the 2015 elections, improved credibility, but the 2019 elections saw a decline in trust and organisation.

In response, the 2022 Electoral Act was passed to further enhance Nigeria's electoral process. It incorporated technology like the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) platform, aimed at ensuring transparency and reducing manipulation. However, despite these advancements, reports of irregularities

during the 2023 general elections raised concerns about their effectiveness, with incidents of voter intimidation and disenfranchisement, especially in Lagos. Widespread dissatisfaction led to 327 election petitions, revealing continued challenges in Nigeria's electoral system (*Vanguard,* April 2, 2023). This study seeks to examine the reasons for the shortcomings in the 2023 general elections despite the reforms.

Statement of the Problem

Before Nigeria's 2023 general elections, there was optimism that the persistent issue of election fraud would be addressed through the 2022 electoral reform by former President Muhammadu Buhari. However, the election was marred by voter suppression, result manipulation, ballot theft, vote buying, factional conflicts, and occasional violence that forced voters to flee (Ezeador, 2023; Ifedi, Ngwu, & Nnamani, 2023). Additionally, the IREV system was often not used for result uploads, preventing real-time verification, and there were allegations of INEC colluding with political actors to manipulate BVAS.

The widespread disillusionment, as evidenced by numerous cases before the electoral tribunal, highlights the failure of INEC to ensure necessary infrastructure and logistics for free and fair elections. Delays and violence in regions like Lagos, Kogi, and Rivers reduced voter turnout (Ezeador, 2023). Moreover, difficulties in uploading results and the potential for manipulation further undermined trust in the system. Trust is crucial to the electoral process; its absence leads to voter apathy, lower participation, and election-related violence. The failures of the 2023 elections threaten Nigeria's democratic future, underscoring the need for immediate reforms. This study aims to evaluate why the 2022 Electoral Act did not result in credible elections in 2023, filling a gap in early research on these elections.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Why was the implementation of the 2022 electoral reform not able to reduce threat and violence during the 2023 general elections?
2. How effective was the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in ensuring accurate voter accreditation during the 2023 general elections?
3. How did technical glitches in the INEC result viewing portal (IReV) compromise the credibility of the 2023 general elections?

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications: Election, Election Reform, and Election Credibility

Election:

In political science, defining concepts like elections can vary, though scholars agree on key characteristics. Bello-imam (2015) describes elections as a formal process through which citizens choose their representatives according to constitutional rules. It involves selecting officials or representatives of a group by voting. Elections offer citizens the opportunity to choose among competing policies and leaders, replacing older selection methods like co-option or inheritance. This system is now integral to modern democratic societies.

Elections are the primary means by which the governed express their choices and assess their representatives (Rose, 1978, as cited in Obakhedo, 2011). Babalola (2019) argues that elections fundamentally revolve around the selection of leaders. As highlighted by Zhizhi and Ibrahim (2020), elections are vital to the functioning of liberal democracy, validating legitimacy and allowing for peaceful transitions of leadership. Nnoli (2005) emphasizes that elections are so integral to representative democracy that they are often considered the most critical indicator of its existence.

Historically, elections in Nigeria date back to the pre-independence period and continue to evolve within its democratic framework. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has held several elections, beginning with the First Republic (1960–1966). This period, however, saw issues like electoral malpractice and regional conflicts, leading to military intervention (Suberu, 2018). Although subsequent republics aimed to improve the electoral process, each was similarly plagued by electoral fraud and violence, leading to military rule or political instability (Ojo, 2007; Omotola, 2010). The 2023 general elections, which took place in February and March, were Nigeria's seventh since the return to civilian rule in 1999. However, despite multiple reforms, elections in Nigeria continue to be marred by fraud, violence, and voter intimidation (Onapajo, 2014). Nwanegbo (2015) even likens elections in Nigeria to warfare due to the flawed processes that undermine democracy. These persistent issues raise concerns about the integrity of Nigeria's electoral system.

Electoral Reform:

Electoral reform encompasses adjustments to electoral rules, procedures, and institutions to improve democratic governance. Norris el al (2014) explains that reform extend to areas

such as campaign finance, voting technology, and the independence of electoral bodies. Reforms are often implemented in response to systemic flaws, such as voter suppression or election insecurity, with the aim of enhancing fairness, transparency, and accountability (Thompson, 2020). Ogwu (2016) defines electoral reform as a deliberate effort to address deficiencies in the election process. It involves collaboration between various actors, including voters, political parties, and civil society. Welp (2019) notes that election reforms are shaped by historical and societal changes, adapting to address emerging needs. Though not without flaws, electoral reform plays a critical role in boosting election credibility.

Nigeria's electoral reform journey has undergone significant changes since the colonial era. The 1922 Clifford Constitution introduced elective representation, though limited to Lagos and Calabar. Post-independence reforms, particularly in the 1979 Constitution, sought to enhance transparency, but electoral malpractice persisted (Isma'ila & Othman, 2015). More recent reforms, particularly the 2022 Electoral Act, introduced key measures such as electronic transmission of results and stricter penalties for electoral offenses. The Act also aims to strengthen INEC's independence, reducing electoral fraud and restoring public confidence in the electoral process (Ajayi & Olaniyi, 2022). However, as Omotola (2010) notes, the success of reforms depends heavily on the political culture and those responsible for implementation.

Election credibility:

Election credibility can be understood in various ways. However, the core idea revolves around the perceived validity, impartiality, and integrity of the democratic process. Attributes such as transparency, honesty, accountability, and inclusivity shape the overall confidence in an election (Nwori & Ndaba, 2016). As Omodia and Erhabor (2019) note, a credible election should provide a level playing field for all contestants. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (2018) highlights key components of election credibility, such as accountability mechanisms like independent electoral commissions, transparent complaints and appeals systems, and the rectification of errors. Schaffer and Ouedraogo (2017) stress that credible elections include inclusive voter registration processes, access to polling stations, and efforts to eliminate barriers that may prevent certain groups from fully participating.

The National Democratic Institute (2015) posits that credible elections require an open pre-election environment where citizens can participate without fear or obstruction,

political parties, candidates, and media operate freely, the judiciary remains independent, and electoral authorities act impartially. Similarly, the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2015) defines credible elections as ensuring the right and opportunity for every citizen to vote and be elected without discrimination, through regular, genuine, and competitive elections that uphold fundamental human rights, including universal suffrage, personal security, and the right to a timely and effective remedy.

According to Ayogu, Egbara, and Aleje (2019), key indicators of election credibility include adequate security, an independent judiciary, an independent electoral administration, clear electoral rules, a trustworthy voter register, and transparent voting and counting processes. Diamond (2008) encapsulates a credible election as one administered by a neutral authority, with electoral administration that is competent enough to take precautions against fraud. He notes that law enforcement, the military, and courts must treat all candidates and parties impartially. The secret ballot must be protected, almost all adults should be able to vote, and there should be transparent, impartial procedures for resolving electoral complaints and disputes.

Previous Empirical Evidence

Election Security and Voter Participation

Studies have shown a strong link between election security and voter participation. Shenga and Pereira (2019) argue that concerns about election integrity, such as fears of fraud or manipulation, can significantly reduce voter turnout. Security breaches or doubts about the election process can erode public trust, discouraging eligible voters from participating in the democratic process. Smith (2019) also highlights how concerns over electronic voting systems and the potential for hacking may deter voter engagement, especially among marginalized communities that already face challenges in electoral participation. Norris et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of strengthening election security measures to build trust and encourage greater participation, particularly among vulnerable groups.

The conduct of elections presents numerous security challenges, from providing protection for voters at rallies to ensuring the safety of result forms. Olurode (2013) asserts that the success of an election is heavily influenced by the security measures in place throughout the entire process. In Nigeria, for instance, election security plays a pivotal role in both the integrity of the process and voter participation. Ibeanu (2018) notes that election security is a critical factor affecting voter engagement in Nigeria's political processes. There is

significant evidence that insecurity reduces voter turnout in Nigerian elections. For example, Shenga and Pereira (2017) found that regions experiencing high levels of violence and insecurity had much lower voter participation rates. Similarly, Tonwe, Aihie, and Igiebor (2021) discuss how not just physical violence but also the perception of insecurity, driven by political instability and the threat of electoral violence, negatively influences voter behaviour. This perception weakens confidence in the electoral system, leading to reduced turnout.

In addition, Igiebor (2019) highlights that insecurity not only impacts voter turnout but also influences perceptions of the legitimacy of the electoral process. Electoral violence, such as attacks on polling stations, creates an atmosphere of fear and distrust, which diminishes voter confidence and reduces participation. Omotola (2019) found that weak security measures during Nigerian general elections often result in voter apathy, particularly in regions with heightened concerns about safety and alleged electoral malpractices. Research by Olaniyan and Oyewole (2019) further demonstrates that election violence, such as political thuggery and intimidation, severely hampers voter turnout in states like Rivers and Kogi. Ojo (2018) also underscores the negative impact of ethno-religious tensions on voter participation in states like Kaduna and Plateau, where communal clashes are common.

Electronic Voter Accreditation and Election Credibility

Research indicates that the use of smart card readers significantly enhances the credibility of elections. Ekumem (2015) highlights that card readers prevent election fraud by eliminating duplicate registrations and multiple voting. Similarly, Alebiosu (2016) regards the introduction of smart card readers as one of the most critical technological advances in Nigeria's electoral history. The smart card reader was designed to ensure free and fair elections by verifying voters on Election Day, a step crucial to deepening democracy.

Studies, such as the one conducted by Ifegwu et al. (2019), also suggest that the use of smart card readers has reduced voter impersonation, over-voting, and election result manipulation. The findings indicate that these technologies have improved voter confidence and reduced the number of post-election petitions. However, Ugwuozor (2021) notes that technological malfunctions in some polling units during the 2015 and 2019 elections caused delays and inconveniences. These challenges suggest that while electronic

voter accreditation is desirable, it is prone to technical failures that can undermine its benefits.

Despite the successes, electronic voter accreditation systems face significant challenges, obstacles such as false biometric rejections and equipment malfunctions occurred. These issues, can erode voter confidence and participation. For example, a study by Ibeogu et al. (2021) in Ebonyi State found that while smart card readers reduced election rigging, their malfunctions sometimes caused delays, which frustrated voters. Nonetheless, Ayeni and Esan (2018) conclude that the integration of technology into the accreditation process has improved the quality of Nigerian elections. Their findings show that the use of smart card readers, electronic voter registers, and fingerprint systems has reduced electoral fraud and increased the credibility of elections. In 2022, Nigeria introduced the BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) to replace the older card readers. Apalowo et al. (2023) found that voters were optimistic about BVAS, believing that it would further boost the credibility of elections. Similarly, Ogieva and Ajisebiyawo (2023) emphasize that BVAS has had a positive impact on Nigerian elections and must be refined to ensure its continued success.

Voter Confidence in Nigerian Elections and the Impact of BVAS and IReV

Before the 2023 general elections, a study by Apalowo, Osigwe, and Adejumo (2023) explored public opinions and voting behaviours related to the introduction of BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) and IReV (Election Result Viewing Portal). The researchers surveyed 400 respondents in Abuja, using questionnaires to collect data. The results showed that public awareness of these technologies was high, and there was significant appreciation for the innovations they brought to Nigeria's elections. Furthermore, the study found a positive correlation between public awareness of BVAS and IReV and the increase in the collection of permanent voters' cards (PVCs), suggesting that Nigerians gained confidence in the electoral process before the election took place. Jaiyeola (2023) noted that both technologies failed to function as expected, leading to doubts about their reliability. Multiple candidates challenged the election results in court, with claims that BVAS and IReV had not performed as intended, complicating the integrity of the voting process.

The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) reported widespread issues with uploading polling unit results to IReV, which contradicts Section 50 of the Electoral Act 2022. This

section was specifically designed to prevent human interference in the transmission of election results. TMG argued that the credibility of the 2023 elections was undermined not because technology failed to introduce transparency, but because it was not utilised effectively (Olufemiajasa, 2023). A study by Tsaro (2023) examined voters' attitudes during the 2023 presidential elections and found that voters were highly motivated and confident in the transparency promised by BVAS and IReV. However, there was widespread frustration when the technology failed to deliver on its promises, particularly in the e-transmission of results. This mismatch between expectations and reality led to a significant decline in public confidence.

Challenges Facing Electoral Reforms in Nigeria

Despite efforts to improve the electoral process in Nigeria, significant challenges persisted during the 2023 general elections. According to Ogunmade (2023), a key issue was the lack of a comprehensive legal framework to support electoral reforms. Existing laws often lacked enforcement mechanisms, making it difficult to implement reforms effectively. Additionally, voter suppression and intimidation tactics were widespread, with the BBC News (2023) reporting instances of violence, coercion, and manipulation, which prevented many eligible voters from participating freely. Electoral officials were often forced to contravene the Electoral Act under these circumstances.

Corruption, including bribery, vote-buying, and other malpractices, was rampant during the elections, as highlighted by the *Vanguard Newspaper* (2023). This corruption undermined the integrity of the electoral process and rendered reforms ineffective. Similarly, Eze (2023) pointed to inadequate electoral infrastructure and logistical challenges that led to malfunctioning biometric systems, poor network connectivity, and insufficient training of electoral personnel. These inefficiencies were consistent with earlier findings by Ogunbode et al. (2019), who noted that technical and logistical constraints are significant obstacles to the successful implementation of BVAS and other election technologies.

Ethnic and regional divisions also played a role in undermining the electoral process. Ogundiya (2023) observed that during the 2023 elections, the need for substantial electoral reforms was overshadowed by contentious politics rooted in ethnic and regional associations. This supports Mohammed's (2016) earlier claim that politicians often manipulate ethnic and religious divisions to gain support, leading to violence and polarisation, which weakens election credibility. A study by Ochuko and Ogbanga (2023)

highlighted the failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to collect and transmit votes in real-time through the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). This failure undermined public confidence in the 2023 presidential election, leading to legal challenges. The study attributed these failures to inadequate training of INEC ad-hoc personnel and pervasive elite corruption, which delayed the transmission of election results. The Voice of Nigeria (VON) reported that attacks on INEC infrastructure, such as offices and warehouses, significantly hampered the preparation for elections. These attacks also posed a threat to the security of electoral materials, including BVAS and IReV technology. Such disruptions compromised the integrity of the electoral process.

Vote buying and selling also emerged as a persistent problem. As noted by Alemika and Jegede (2019), corruption, including vote buying, rigging, and electoral fraud, distorts election results. Sobowale and Adetula (2018) further argued that poverty and illiteracy contribute to this problem, with politicians exploiting voters' socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The lack of independence and impartiality within electoral authorities such as INEC has also been a significant challenge. Adejumobi (2018) and Omotola (2019) argued that political interference compromises the ability of these institutions to conduct free and fair elections. In Nigeria, the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission has been a focal point of concern, with allegations of the body being partial towards the government in power (ERC, 2008).

Theoretical underpinning: Democratic Elitism

Democratic elitism is a political ideology that combines democratic principles with the influence of a select group of elites who hold decision-making power over the majority (Maloy, 2023). These elites are individuals with significant authority who monopolize political power, allocate scarce resources, and enjoy the benefits of their control (Wigmore-Shepherd, 2019). The theory was first proposed by Joseph Schumpeter in his 1942 work, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Schumpeter argued that direct citizen engagement in policymaking is impractical in modern societies, given the lack of time, expertise, and inclination among ordinary people. Instead, elites, who possess superior knowledge and resources, dominate the political landscape (Egidi, 2017).

Damele and Campos (2022) claim that no society is governed by the majority; even democracies are ruled by a minority. Similarly, Hirschman (1991) posits that every society, regardless of its political system, is divided between elites and non-elites. He further argues

that democratic structures are often manipulated by the ruling class to legitimize their power. Peffley and Rohrschneider (2007) explain that political elites tend to be more knowledgeable and active, thus having a greater influence on public policy, while the masses remain less politically engaged.

Critiques of democratic elitism highlight its lack of empirical evidence and its failure to account for the diverse interests within the elite (Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2009). Walker (1966) argues that the theory has transformed the normative value of democracy into a more conservative doctrine. The theory's opposition to pluralism and participatory democracy also limits its applicability to modern democratic societies (Chandel & Pradesh, 2021). Nonetheless, it can still be used to explain the failed implementation of Nigeria's 2023 electoral law.

Application of Democratic Elitism in Nigeria:

Democratic elitism posits that decision-making in democracies is concentrated among a small group of elites, which is evident in Nigeria's political landscape. Despite electoral reforms designed to foster a fairer system, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria demonstrated the persistent power of political elites, who control resources, party structures, and patronage networks. These elites dominate candidate selection, campaign financing, and even influence electoral management bodies.

Reforms like the adoption of BVAS and IReV were met with resistance from political elites, hindering their full implementation. This aligns with the view of Stein, Owens, and Leighley (2003), who argue that the effectiveness of electoral reforms is largely dependent on the strategic behavior of elites. The failure to properly implement the Electoral Reform Act of 2022 during the 2023 elections can be attributed to the influence and behavior of Nigeria's political elites, who have historically resisted changes that might undermine their control.

METHODS

This study utilized a mixed research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges in implementing electoral reforms and ensuring election credibility during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including

INEC officials, journalists, and civil society representatives, to gather detailed insights into their experiences and perspectives. The quantitative aspect employed a cross-sectional survey to collect data from a larger population, enabling broader generalizations and enhancing the validity of the findings.

The target population for the study included registered voters, INEC officials, journalists, and civil society group officials. These groups were selected due to their significant roles in the electoral process, providing diverse and relevant data on the elections' successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. The study aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives to ensure the data's depth and reliability, contributing to a thorough understanding of the electoral process and its implications.

Sampling for the study involved purposive sampling for the qualitative segment, with fifteen participants chosen based on their expertise and involvement in the elections. For the quantitative survey, a sample of 385 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling to represent different regions of the country. Data collection employed a combination of online questionnaires and an interview guide, with quantitative data analyzed through descriptive statistics and qualitative data through thematic content analysis, ensuring a detailed and nuanced exploration of the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Respondents' opinion on why the implementation of the 2022 electoral reform failed to adequately mitigate threat and violence during the 2023 general elections (RQ 1)

Variable	Responses	*n*	*(%)*
On whether respondents ever voted before the 2023 general elections	Yes	267	69.4
	No	118	30.6
Level of safe during the 2023 general elections.	Very safe	0	0
	Safe	163	42.3
	Neutral	198	51.4
	Unsafe	20	5.2
	Very unsafe	44	11.4
On whether concerns about security influence decision to participate in the 2023 general elections.	Yes	377	97.9
	No	8	2.1
	I can't say	0	0
On where there any instances of violence or intimidation	Yes	301	78.2

during the election period.

	No	84	21.8
	I can't say	0	0
Level of satisfaction with security at polling stations	Very Satisfactory	111	28.8
	Satisfactory	87	22.6
	Fairly Satisfactory	187	48.6
	Unsatisfactory	0	0
On whether violence during the 2023 elections affect willingness to go out and vote	Yes	311	80.8
	No	74	19.2
	I can't say	0	0
On whether there were observed efforts to disrupt the electoral process	Yes	299	77.6
	No	50	12.9
	I can't say	36	9.4
		36	9.4
On whether there any security checkpoints or restrictions that made it difficult to access polling station	Yes	117	30.4
	No	27	7
	I can't say	241	62.6
On whether the security measures put in place prevented threat and violence	Yes	30	7.8
	No	288	74.8
	I can't say	57	14.8

Source: Survey, 2024

The data on the first research question explored the reasons behind the inadequate mitigation of security threats and violence during Nigeria's 2023 general elections despite the 2022 electoral reform. Analysis revealed that 69.4% of respondents had voted in previous elections, indicating a strong level of electoral engagement. However, during the 2023 elections, 51.4% of respondents felt "neutral" about their safety, reflecting uncertainty or ambivalence regarding security at polling stations. A significant 97.9% of respondents reported that security concerns influenced their participation, with many experiencing violence or intimidation.

Interview participants highlighted critical security gaps during the elections. Ms. Adekunle noted that inadequate security measures fostered an environment where intimidation and violence thrived, undermining the credibility of the electoral process. Dr. Okafor pointed out that most polling stations were vulnerable to disruptions due to insufficient security, which endangered voters and election officials while creating opportunities for manipulation. Mr. Johnson emphasized that inadequate security led to fear and uncertainty,

reducing voter turnout and compromising the legitimacy of the elections. These observations align with Njoku and Nwangeneh's (2010) assertion that the integrity of elections is closely tied to security. The findings corroborate previous research by Akeem and Idayat (2020) and Alao (2021), which identified insecurity and manipulation as major issues despite electoral reforms. Studies have also highlighted how inadequate security impacts voter confidence and democratic engagement (Olurode, 2013; Fernandez & Kuenzi, 2010).

Table 2: Respondents' opinion on Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and accuracy of voter accreditation (RQ2)

Variable	**Responses**	***n***	**%**
Whether respondents were adequately informed about the use of BVAS during the 2023 general elections	Yes	*185*	48.1
	No	174	45.1
	I can't say	26	6.8
Whether there are difficulties with the BVAS	Yes	107	27.8
	No	278	72.2
	I can't say	0	0
Confident on BVAS ability to verify voters' identities?	Very confident	14	3.6
	Confident	185	48
	Neutral	197	52.1
	Not very confident	11	2.8
Whether there are technical issues with the BVAS that impact trust in the electoral process	Yes	267	69.4
Yes	No	118	30.6
No	0	0	0
I can't say			
Whether there are instances where BVAS failed to authenticate voters properly	Yes	195	50.6
Yes	No	118	30.6
No	I can't say	72	18.7
Whether respondents witnessed any instances of voter fraud or manipulation despite the use of BVAS	Yes	190	49.4
Yes	No	195	50.6
No	I can't say	0	0
Whether respondents believed BVAS can prevent multiple voting or other forms of electoral fraud?	Yes	111	28.8
Yes	No	177	45.9
No	I can't say	97	25.2

The data regarding voter perceptions of the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) during Nigeria's 2023 general elections indicates mixed outcomes. Of the 385 respondents, approximately 48.1% reported being well-informed about BVAS, while only 27.8% experienced difficulties with the system during accreditation. This suggests that while BVAS was generally effective, a substantial portion of voters encountered challenges. Interview participants supported these findings, noting BVAS's high accuracy and its role in reducing electoral fraud. Dr. Ahmed highlighted BVAS's notable improvement in voter accreditation accuracy compared to previous methods, while Mr. Okonkwo emphasized its deterrent effect against fraud despite some technical issues.

However, significant concerns were raised regarding BVAS's reliability. About 69.4% of respondents felt that technical problems with BVAS undermined their trust in the electoral process. Moreover, 50.6% reported instances where BVAS failed to authenticate voters, causing disruptions. Interviewees corroborated these issues, pointing to technical and operational challenges such as connectivity problems, equipment malfunctions, and inadequate training of polling staff. Mr. Johnson and Dr. Nwosu both stressed the need for better infrastructure and continuous investment to enhance BVAS's effectiveness.

Despite its benefits, BVAS faced limitations that impacted its overall credibility. Nearly 49.4% of respondents witnessed voter fraud or manipulation, and only 28.8% believed BVAS effectively prevented electoral fraud. These findings align with prior research by Onyekwelu (2023) and Ayeni & Aweh (2023), which highlighted BVAS's potential to improve electoral integrity while also noting instances of failure. Reports from The Punch (2023) and legal mandates under the Electoral Act, 2022, emphasize the need for BVAS to meet its technological promises to ensure transparent and credible elections. Overall, while BVAS represents a significant advancement, its implementation revealed critical areas needing improvement.

Table 3: Respondents opinion INEC result viewing portal (IReV) and the credibility of the 2023 general elections (RQ 3)

Variables	Responses	n	%
Awareness of technical glitches related to IREV during the 2023 general elections	Yes	175	45.5
	No	154	40
	I can't say	56	14.5
Nature of the technical glitches (check all that apply)	System crashes	175	45.5
	Transmission errors	111	28.8
	Data inaccuracies	154	40
	Slow loading	121	31.4
	Network connectivity issues	170	44.2
	Incompatibility with devices	14	3.6
On whether technical glitches impact on voter's confidence in the accuracy of the election results	Yes	276	71.7
	No	79	19.7
	I can't say		
Overall, rating of the credibility of the 2023 general elections considering the technical glitches in the IREV system	Highly credible	113	29.4
	Moderately Credible	201	52.2
	Not credible	71	18.4

Source: Survey, 2024

The data provided offers a comprehensive overview of the technical challenges faced by the INEC Results Viewing (IREV) system during the 2023 general elections. Out of 385 respondents, approximately 45.5% reported experiencing technical glitches with IREV. Key issues identified include system crashes (45.5%), transmission errors (28.8%), data inaccuracies (40%), slow loading (31.4%), network connectivity problems (44.2%), and device incompatibility (3.6%). This indicates several areas where IREV's performance was compromised, affecting its reliability and the timely transmission of election results. Interview participants echoed these concerns, highlighting issues such as system freezes, calibration errors, and slow response times. Mr. Johnson noted that connectivity issues were particularly problematic, impacting voters' ability to view results in real-time. Ms. Halima added that inadequate technical support worsened the situation, leaving election officials ill-prepared to address the glitches effectively.

The impact of these technical glitches on voter confidence was significant. About 71.7% of respondents felt that these issues diminished their trust in the accuracy of the election results. This sentiment was corroborated by interview participants, who unanimously agreed that IREV malfunctions negatively affected public perception of the electoral process. Mr. Ojo and Mr. Adewale both highlighted how these technical problems contributed to skepticism and doubts about the fairness and transparency of the elections.

Regarding the overall credibility of the election, only 29.4% of respondents rated it as "highly credible," while 52.2% considered it "moderately credible." This indicates that while there was recognition of the technical issues with IREV, many respondents still viewed the elections as somewhat credible. Conversely, 18.4% rated the elections as "not credible," reflecting significant concerns about the impact of IREV's problems. Participants in the interviews attributed IREV's shortcomings to several factors: the lack of contingency plans (Mr. Okonkwo), reactive rather than proactive responses to malfunctions (Dr. Onyeka), unclear protocols for handling glitches (Mr. Okonkwo), inadequate system testing (Dr. Okafor), rushed implementation (Dr. Nwosu), and insufficient training (Ms. Halima).

The findings align with prior research and reports. Berebon (2023) noted that IREV did not meet expectations for real-time result updates. Yiaga Africa reported delays in result uploads from polling units, and INEC's post-election analysis confirmed significant technical challenges with uploading result sheets (Premium Times, February 23, 2024). These issues underscore the need for improved infrastructure, better training, and more robust contingency planning to enhance the reliability of electoral technology in future elections.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the mixed outcomes of the 2022 electoral reform on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Despite initial optimism, the elections revealed ongoing challenges in addressing threats and violence, exacerbated by insufficient security personnel, politicised security agencies, and partisan interests among INEC officials. The effectiveness of the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in accrediting voters and reducing multiple voting incidents was tempered by operational difficulties, such as technical malfunctions and lapses in real-time result transmission. Similarly, the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) failed to provide real-time election results due to frequent

system crashes, transmission errors, and delays, undermining public trust in the electoral process. These findings underscore the entrenched nature of Nigeria's political culture, which continues to hinder progress toward credible elections.

The implications of these findings are profound for Nigeria's electoral process. Addressing systemic challenges in electoral administration, security management, and technological infrastructure is crucial for enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of future elections. There is a pressing need for comprehensive electoral reforms to bridge the gap between legislative mandates and their implementation, strengthen institutional capacities, and rebuild public confidence in democratic processes. Emphasising transparency, accountability, and impartiality within electoral institutions will be essential for sustaining democratic governance. Implementing advanced technologies, such as blockchain for secure voting and geospatial tools for election logistics, along with improving real-time result transmission and developing a centralised data management system, are vital steps towards achieving free and fair elections in Nigeria.

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