

VOTERS' DISPOSITION AND THE OUTCOME OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper sought to discuss the disposition of the voters as it affected the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The objective was to interrogate the disposition of the voters and its impact on the presidential election. It adopted the qualitative secondary research approach as its research methodology and also relied on grounded theory strategy of inquiry. The paper utilized the rational choice theory (RCT) as its theoretical framework. It found out that the voters were highly mobilized to participate in the electoral process through effective voter education, promise to deploy technology which included INEC voter enrolment device (IVED); Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for both voter accreditation and e-transmission of results for collation; and the INEC results viewing (IReV) portal that will offer the public access to view polling units results real-time. Although, the voters' disposition significantly influenced the outcome of the presidential election, INEC failed to deliver on their promises and changed the rules in the middle of the exercise. It was recommended that the 2022 Amended Electoral Act be reviewed to ensure absolute use of technology to conduct and declare election results as well as embrace the use of e-voting technology utilizing e-ballot papers to allow voting from any location if duly registered, and permit diaspora voting in the democratic system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Collation, Election, E-Voting, E-Ballot, Technology, Transmission

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Introduction

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria was held on 25 February for the presidential and National Assembly elections and 18 March for the gubernatorial and state houses of assembly elections. These elections were coming after the previous six general elections conducted in Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Many reports have indicated that apart from the preparedness of the electoral management body (EMB); that is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the willingness of the ruling party in government to organize an election that can be deemed as credible; the disposition of the voters during each election cycle have largely determined the outcome of the general elections conducted in Nigeria. This is not too difficult to corroborate because right from the time the EMB begins the preparation for the next general elections with update of the voters' register until the conduct and announcements of the results, the enthusiasm and cooperation of the voters has been key to the success of each stage of their activities.

However, different electoral monitoring groups both local and international have made different assertions as to the credibility and quality of the outcomes of the previous elections. Some have stated that the outcome is transitioning from bad to good whereas others have stated that the

outcome was moving farther from acceptable democratic practices. The issue to examine is whether the attitude of the government and the EMB alone determine the quality and credibility of the outcomes of elections in Nigeria or does voters' behaviour and disposition have important influence in the situation? Definitely, the disposition and behaviour of the voters matter in any election outcome. Whether there is voter apathy or massive turnout during elections rest with the voters. Those who carry out thuggery, ballot box snatching and stuffing, and even kill, maim or destroy electoral materials are voters. Those who yield to the temptation of vote buying and bribery to collude and alter results are from amongst the voters. What this means is that if the voters resolve to shun these vices in order to have the deserved quality and credibility of election outcomes, the situation will be different. This however, does not excuse the actions of the political class who tries by all means to induce and corrupt the voters in order to have their ways in an election.

The scenario in 2023 general elections offered a much more inspired hopes than any other election conducted in the country. The ruling government embarked on some policies aimed at curbing electoral fraud during the 2023 elections. Such policies like the Naira redesign, currency cash swap, limits on allowable amounts on deposits and withdrawals and a more active role of the Economic Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) in monitoring the movement and deposits of cash during the elections. All these together with the assurances of the deployment of foolproof electronic devices by the EMB to checkmate any form of rigging may have influenced the disposition and behaviour of the voters in the 2023 general elections.

The objective of this paper is to interrogate the disposition of voters and its impact on the outcome of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The paper will be discussed in ten segments. The first sets out the background thoughts and introduction of the subject matter; the second segment makes an empirical review of extant literature on the use of e-voting system whilst the theoretical framework is discussed in section three. The adopted methodology of the study is given in segment four. The assessment of the quality and credibility of previous elections will be given in section five whilst the factors that may have influenced the voters' turnout in the 2023 elections will be engaged in section six. In section seven, the paper will examine the posturing of the traditional big parties on the entrance of a *'Third Force'* into the race with the electrifying effects on Gen-Z voting population. Thereafter, section eight will focus on the update of voters' register and the collection of PVCs. In section nine, the paper will discuss the actual conduct of the presidential and NASS elections and the critical roles played by the behaviour of the voters. Section ten will provide the INEC declared outcome and the conclusion of the paper.

Empirical Literature Review on Electronic Voting System

There has been some scholarly work done that discloses the arguments for and against the use of electronic voting (e-voting) in the conduct of elections in many countries. Some countries began the use of e-voting but later discontinued whilst some others have continued with its use. Still there are countries that uses both e-voting as well as paper ballot system in the conduct of elections. In their study, Carter and Campbell (2011) opine that relative advantage, confidence in the internet and the use of e-governance information, has significantly influenced the intention of the users to use the internet system of voting in the US. Warkentin et al. (2018) confirmed the study results of Carter and Campbell (2011) on how technological factor, social identity and trust influences the intention of the users to adopt the internet system of voting. Their findings explain that perceived usefulness and trust significantly influences the behavioural intention of the users to adopt an internet system of voting.

Choi and Kim (2012) noted that perceived ease of use, practicality, confidentiality and accuracy, directly and indirectly impacts the intention of using e-voting. Schaupp and Carter (2005) studied from apathy to adoption. In their work, they demonstrated that the perception of users in terms of confidence, usefulness and compatibility influences their intention of using e-voting system. Agbesi (2020) explored how effort expectancy, performance expectancy, expediting conditions, trust, and social impact, influence the e-voting adoption by young voters in Ghana. The findings show that accuracy, effort expectancy, and performance expectancy are the most critical factors that influences the intentions of voters to use the internet system of voting among the youths which are university students.

Achieng and Ruhode, (2013) posited that e-voting is a very significant feature of ICT enabled democratic governance. Aligning with this view, Adeshina and Ojo (2014) stated that the objective of e-voting is to increase citizens participation in the electoral process and to improve the electoral outcomes by tackling the issues associated with the traditional voting practices. Hence, e-voting technologies aids one or more of the main phases of the electoral process, from registration in the pre-voting stage to the balloting/voting and verification to vote counting (Ojo, Adeshina & Ayo, 2005; Sampigethaya & Poovendran, 2006). Adeshina and Ojo, (2020) posited that practically, the acceptance and adoption of e-voting technologies embodies mixed sentiments in several countries of the world. For example, several countries such as Netherlands, Ireland, and Germany after initially adopting the e-voting system moved back to traditional balloting (Achieng & Ruhode, 2013). Also, in the United States, the use of e-voting technologies has remained an issue of controversy. Generally, while e-voting has been seen as very risky, the benefits of e-voting does not outweigh the actual risks (Bannister, 2005).

Relatively, there are few studies that has investigated the challenges of adopting e-voting technologies in actual elections. Existing studies on e-voting acceptance have analysed the factors for the acceptance of internet voting by people (Bakon & Ward, 2015; Jacobs & Pieters, 2009; Schaupp & Carter, 2005); benefits and challenges in implementing e-voting in developing nations (Thakur, 2015; Ojo et al., 2005; Ahmad, Abdullah, & Arshad, 2015; Jegede, Aimufua, & Akosu, 2012); and acknowledging the effects of cultural diversity on the confidence in e-voting technologies Gefen, Rose, Warkentin, & Pavlou, 2005). Adeshina and Ojo (2020) with the use of a multi-level innovation adoption scheme that was described in Wisdom et al. (2013), draws from the direct participation of one of the authors as a key participant in the pre-adoption and adoption stage of e-voting, to support the registration of voters in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria. The study offered five recommendations for researchers, key stakeholders, and for policy makers working with electoral authority involved in the adoption of the e-voting technology:

First and fundamentally, any e-voting solution should be considered as a part of the ensemble of important elements for organising successful elections. Second, the Electoral Authority responsible for driving the use of the e-voting technology must have the capacity to efficiently support the use of e-voting solution not only at major election centers but also at remote and rural locations. Third, communication with stakeholders and among the various institutions (both government and non-governmental) involved in the adoption and use of the e-voting solution must be carefully planned and executed. Fourth, while it is clear that training will be required for all personnel involved in the adoption and use of the new e-voting solution, emphasis must be put on the efficacy of the training programmes. Fifth, given that most e-voting innovation involve relationship with technology vendors,

adequate time must be given for localisation and customisation to fit the reality of the adopting environment (Adeshina and Ojo, 2020: pg. 11).

Theoretical Framework

The rational choice theory (RCT) provides an understanding of individual behaviour, economic, and also social actions. Elster (1989) opined that the RCT explains that individuals in the face of various courses of action, tend to choose what they feel would likely produce the overall best result. Friedman (1953) however, noted that the RCT defined “rationality” means that people act in ways that balance costs against benefits so as to arrive at the action that maximizes personal benefit. Rational choice emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the behavioural revolution in American Political science that aimed to investigate the behaviour of humans with the use of empirical methods. Downs (1957) was the first to apply the RCT to competition in political parties and electoral behaviour. Hinich and Munger (1997) reviewed his work and further revolutionized electoral studies. The underlying assumption of the rational choice theorists is that of individualism. They postulate that individuals are ultimately responsible for making decisions as actors in the society. Also, they act as rational beings, self-interested, self-maximizing and self-calculating, and these individual social actions ultimately produce greater social outcomes (Ogu, 2013).

Some strengths of the RCT are recommended as a model for a deductive method in political analysis. Rational choice model has been described by Besker (1976) as unified framework used to understand all of human behaviour. Rogowski (1997) asserted that the model is very rigorous and is a theory that is generally applicable to social action in this century. Hirshleifer (1985) also described it as a universal language of social science. Other strengths of the RCT as examined by Ogu (2013) are: generality, predictability and parsimony. Several scholars and critique have noted the specific pitfalls of the RCT, some of which include: human interaction and social actions are intricate, and other theories may provide better explanations on how human interaction occurs; challenges of insufficient information and ambiguity; habits and norms may determine actions, and once these becomes deeply rooted, people may use them to carry out significant social actions; and by including every calculated course of action in rational choice, it is evident how the standards determining what is rational and what is not are constructed (Ogu, 2013).

Methodology

The qualitative secondary research approach is adopted in this study. It focuses on re-using available data initially collected and used for other purposes to respond to the research question being studied (Johnston, 2017; Hox & Boeijs, 2005). The qualitative secondary research is identified in literature as a convenient and financially viable method to conduct a qualitative study (Long-Sutehall, Sque, Addington-Hall, 2011). Although, it relies on available data, the secondary research approach also contributes to knowledge by identifying gap in literature through extensive review and analysis process and procedure to fill in the gap (Yende, 2021; Hox & Boeijs, 2005). This approach like in primary research method, is not haphazardly done but it is systematic to respond effectively to the current research question. Therefore, Johnston (2017), identified three series of stages to be followed in executing the qualitative secondary research approach which include: developing a research question; identifying a data set; and evaluating the rigour or appropriateness of the data.

The study also used strategies of inquiry such as grounded theory with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (Creswell, 2003). Grounded theory places emphasis on becoming deeply involved in the data; that is being grounded so that embedded meanings and relationships

can be identified (Patton, 2002). The immersion process is derived from a French word which means “I root myself” as such we intend to become implanted in the data so that the resulting analysis would grow out of that groundedness (Patton, 2002). As researchers, our practice according to Creswell (2003), was have ourselves positioned, and bring personal values into the study, ensure the accuracy of findings through validation, and interpret the data (Creswell 2003:19).

Assessment of the Quality and Credibility of Previous Elections

The quality and credibility of the overall outcome of the elections most often does not reflect the expectations of the electorates. For instance, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) which was an alliance of civil society groups, described the 1999 presidential electoral results as a charade where the pattern of granting high votes was predominant (TMG, 1999). Kew (1999) noted that the results from some Niger Delta states were rigged to an extent that several local governments recorded 100% voter turnout which is almost impossible, while the results from the South-east states were greatly fictitious. The first civilian to civilian transition elections after the military rule in 2003 was also described as ‘filled with potholes which were either filled aimlessly or left unfilled prior to the conduct of the elections’ (Omotola, 2004, p. 30). The order of the elections was changed by the then incumbent president to allow the presidential elections to be conducted first and so guaranteed bandwagon effect in the consequent elections. Kurfi (2005) opine that the 2003 elections fell below minimum expectations in the aspect of credibility, because it was characterized by various kinds of electoral fraud, specifically, ballot stuffing while voting.

Concerning the general election of 2007, some have claimed that ‘if the general elections of 2003 were barely credible, the 2007 voting was flagrantly fraudulent (Suberu, 2007, p. 95). The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) noted that the manner in which the elections were conducted were not in compliance with the Nigerian law as well as international standards (EUEOM, 2007). The report that was submitted by the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) to the government stated described the elections of 2007 as the worst ever since the first elections conducted in 1922 ((FGN, 2008). On their own part, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) claimed that the 2007 polls were the worst the organization had ever observed anywhere all over the world.

Amao (2020) claims that there were some indicators of progress in the 2011 elections as a consequence of the electoral body's perceived improved management and the Goodluck Jonathan administration's apparent non-interference with the EMB's operations. Akhaine (2011) argues that a few critics have questioned whether the non-interference was an expression of Jonathan's belief in the EMB or an effort to foster that belief. Due to innovations like the Permanent Voters Card (PVC), card reader technology, thorough audit of the voters registers to filter out numerous and false registrations, and modification of ballot papers and boxes at every polling unit to prevent ballot grabbing and stuffing, the results of the 2015 elections marked a significant improvement over the electoral fraud and violence that characterized previous elections in Nigeria (Onapajo, 2015). Despite the new innovations, there were a number of problems that affected the quality of the 2019 election, including voter apathy, violence on election day, and inadequate logistical planning on the part of the election officials at INEC. Some observers, according to Amao (2020), argued that the 2019 general elections marked a significant reversal of the improvements in democracy achieved in 2015.

The question that begs for answer is why was the improvements made in the 2011 and 2015 elections not sustained during the 2019 elections? It may then be stating the obvious that the

character and nature of the ruling government most significantly determines the quality and credibility of the general elections conducted in Nigeria. The insinuation of critics if the non-interference in the 2015 elections was a demonstration of Jonathan's belief in the EMB or a desire to inspire that belief (Akhaine, 2011) clearly demonstrates both the 'belief' and 'desire' of Jonathan which was lacking in the past administration. This explains why the elections conducted so far including the 2023 general elections have represented a considerable degrade in terms of democratic progress (Amao, 2020).

Factors that Influenced Voters' Turnout in 2023 Elections

There were several activities of INEC that stimulated the interest of voters to participate in the 2023 general elections. Principal amongst those was the media operations to sensitize the public on the election planning to deploy technology in such a manner that was never used before. They emphasized that election technology would involve the deployment of three critical components namely: Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for both accreditation of voters and e-transmission of results for collation; INEC voter enrolment device (IVED); and the INEC results viewing (IREV) portal that offers access to the public to view real-time results from polling units. The bane of election malpractice in Nigeria has been the manipulation of results during transmission and collation. Therefore, it was most reassuring and interest boosting when INEC came up with such novel plan to curb the malpractices that occur with election results.

This was further strengthened with the electoral legal framework (Amended Electoral Act 2022) passed by the National Assembly and the signed into law by the President on 25th February 2022. With the new electoral Act, INEC began an effective voter education on the conduct of the 2023 general elections which galvanized the interest of the public to register for the elections. The exercise conducted for the registration of voters and upgrade of permanent voters card (PVC) witnessed massive turnout of voters. The voters' education was vigorously pursued and coordinated by both the INEC Chairman and the Commissioner in charge of voters' education. During the announcement of the presidential election results at the national collation centre, one of the party agents for the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Senator Dino Melaye told the audience in the hearing of the INEC Chairman that he has Googled the number of times the Chairman and the Commissioner said that results will be transmitted electronically with the BVAS from the polling units direct to IREV portal and found it to be over eighty and one hundred and eighty times respectively by both officials of INEC. So, with an effective voter education on the use of technology, INEC aroused the confidence of the public to participate in the elections.

Another major factor that may have influenced the turnout of voters in the 2023 general elections was the apparent sincerity expressed by the President to leave behind the legacy to conduct a free, credible and fair elections. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 21st September 2022, President Buhari said "As president, the goal I have set as one of my lasting legacies I would like to leave is to establish a process of free, transparent, fair and credible elections through which leaders will be elected based on the choice of Nigerians" (Buhari, 2022). In demonstrating the determination of the government, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) came up with the currency redesign and cash swap policy to prevent the use of money by politicians to buy votes and induce malpractice in the electoral process. This again upped the confidence of the public that the electoral process would be conducted in a free, credible and fair manner and therefore influenced the turnout of voters in the 2023 general elections.

Also, credit is deserving to the local media organizations and civil society organizations (CSO) especially, Channels Television, Arise Television and YIAGA Africa for their intense and

committed media enlightenment campaigns which most certainly influenced voters' turnout in the 2023 general elections. The daily and weekly briefings and explanations of the responsibilities of the voters and the expectations from INEC carried out by these media organizations helped a great deal in assuring the voters that the 2023 elections will be different and credible than the previous elections.

Lastly, another serious factor that may have influenced that turnout of voters in the 2023 general elections was the lecture given by the INEC Chairman at The Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), London, on Tuesday 17th January 2023. In the address to the audience and global viewers, he said, "To be certain, in the final analysis, inclusive and credible elections are dependent on sufficient preparations, and my major preoccupation today is to share with you how preparations are being made for the general elections for high inclusiveness and integrity in Nigeria in 2023" (Yakubu, 2023). The Chairman went on the detail the lessons learnt from the 2019 general elections and the stages involved in the preparation for the 2023 general elections. Some of the stages include election planning, electoral legal framework, voter registration and PVC, election technology, expansion of voter access to polling units, inclusive election and election staff recruitment and training amongst others. The Chairman concluded by reassuring all that "Nigerians and the friends of Nigeria have been promised that the general elections for 2023 will be free, credible, fair and inclusive, and we have ensured that no stone be left unturned in the preparations for it, notwithstanding the various challenges" (Yakubu, 2023). All these media pronouncements from INEC coupled with the stance of the government about introduction of the new redesigned currency and cash swap policy strengthened the believe and interest of the public to trust the process and turnout massively to register, queued long hours and even days to collect their PVC and enthusiastically came out to vote in the presidential and national assembly elections held on 25th February 2023.

Traditional Big Parties and Third Force Effects

When INEC released the timetable of electoral activities for the 2023 general elections, many saw it as a two-horse race between the traditional big parties: Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC). There were many other political parties available for contestants to vie on their platforms but attention was so focused on who would emerge on the PDP and APC platforms. The stakes were very high that the cost of the expression of interest and nomination forms were outrageously too much. For instance, the PDP sold the presidential ticket nomination form for N40m (Forty Million Naira) covering N5m for expression of interest and N35m for the nomination form. Despite the amount being deemed to be very high in a depressed economy, there were 13 aspirants that purchased the forms. The APC raised the bar to all time high selling the expression of interest form for N30m whilst the nomination form was sold for N70m making a total amount of N100m (One Hundred Million Naira) for APC presidential nomination form. Notwithstanding this huge amount, about 28 aspirants bought the APC presidential nomination forms.

The clamour for who would emerge on either political party platforms as their standard flag bearers in the presidential election was so widespread that aspirants on the other political party platforms did not emerge until the primaries of these parties were concluded. Few days to the PDP presidential primaries, Peter Obi withdrew from the race and renounced his membership of the party when it became clear to him that he did not stand any chance of clinching the presidential ticket of the PDP. Similarly, Doyin Okupe withdrew too and renounced his membership of the

party and together with Peter Obi, they both sought the platform of the Labour Party (LP) to realize their ambition although, Okupe stepped down to support Obi's presidential bid. Thus, was berthed what many referred to as the *Third Force*.

The entrance of Peter Obi into the presidential race was so electrifying that the social media was agog with excitement and approval of his candidature. The mostly young people also called the Gen-Z were awoken that many who have never voted before and did not plan to vote began to scramble to obtain their PVC. The extended period for the registration of voters was not sufficient for INEC to capture all the new intended voters. Suddenly, many election gallop polls began to reflect Peter Obi as having the highest approval ratings amongst all the candidates that have declared presidential ambition and were the flag bearers of their parties. The reaction and responses from the spokespersons of the traditional big parties were that Peter Obi was only popular on the social media space and that elections are not won in the social media but on the ground. They described Obi and his LP as having no structure on the ground to win a presidential election in Nigeria. By that they meant that his party did not have a serving governor in any state, no member in the national and state assemblies and no local government chairman anywhere in the country. Thus, Obi was considered not a serious contender for the race besides the fact that he was also perceived as not having a deep pocket that can financially outdo his fellow contestants.

However, he continued to speak to the public and his message began to resonate more with the youths who yearned for a new Nigeria with more credible individuals that they can trust. The general feeling of retiring the old and recycled politicians propel the momentum of Obi's message into a movement termed *Obidients*. The *Obidient Movement* was gaining wider acceptance and approval until the unveiling of Datti Yusuf Baba-Ahmed as the vice-presidential candidate to Peter Obi on the LP platform. If the entrance of Obi was electrifying and brought excitement, the revelation of Datti as VP candidate did not only bring frenzied and frenetic reactions but also ecstatic jubilation among Nigerians both at home and in the diaspora. Soon, the *Obi-Datti Movement* was birthed and many still never gave them any chance of making any impact in the elections. They were thoroughly underrated and ignored but their doggedness in explaining their mission for a new Nigerian was bold and infectious. Many bought into their message especially those who have never been interested in voting before but were now determined to cast their votes to them and they did.

Update of Voters' Register and Collection of PVC

In the timetable released by INEC for activities leading to the 2023 general elections, continuous voters' registration (CVR) exercise was scheduled to commence in June 2021 and terminate in June 2022. Therefore, INEC launched the online voters' registration portal in June 2021. Based on the voter education by INEC and CSOs, there was commendable response from the general public to the exercise. However, as the deadline for the online registration was drawing nearer, the *Third Force* entrance into the presidential race brought about an upsurge in the number of new registrants that INEC was unable to cope with. They maintained that the online registration portal had been open for almost a year and by their schedule it must end in June 2022 as stated.

The *Third Force* effect came as a result of Peter Obi dumping the PDP in May 2022 and a week after joined the LP and at the national convention and presidential primary of the party held in Asaba, Delta State, he emerged as the 2023 presidential candidate of LP after other aspirants stepped down for him (Adenekan, 2023). Since INEC was bent on shutting down the online registration portal in June 2022 and there were now many young voters seeking registration, the

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and other 185 individuals approached the court to demand extension for voters' registration and the court granted their prayer and ordered INEC to extend the voter registration till 31 July 2022 (Erezi, 2023).

INEC complied with the court order and extended the CVR exercise till July 31st. According to the published data by INEC, that extended registration added about 9.5m voters to the voters' register making a total of 93.5m registered voters for the 2023 general elections. The breakdown of the registered voters indicated that there were 52.5% of male and 47.5% of female registered to vote. Demographically, it was given that the youths (18 – 34 years) make up 39.65% of the registered voting population, middle age (35 – 49) make up 35.75%, the elderly (50 – 69) make up 18.94% and the senior citizens (70 – above) make up 5.66% of the registered voters (Oguntola, 2023). From the demography of the registered voters given by INEC, it was clear that the youths and the young people making up over 75% of the voting population would determine whoever was to emerge as winner in the 2023 presidential election.

The distribution and collection of PVCs started on 12 December 2022 and ended on 22 January 2023. INEC reported that about 87.2m PVCs making 93,3% of the cards produced were collected whilst over 6.2m PVCs remained uncollected. Many of the registered voters expressed difficulties in collecting their PVCs. The INEC personnel and logistics were so overstretched that they were unable to cope with the number of persons seeking to collect their PVCs. Besides, INEC allocated people to voting centres that were very far away from their residence and even when they were told to collect their PVCs from those centres, there were several hours and even days of queuing up to collect the PVC. Many were frustrated and left without collecting the PVC and those were many of the new registrants who really wanted to vote for the first time.

Although, INEC tried to inform the registered voters about the centres to go for the collection of their PVCs through bulk SMS, many persons did not receive the message. Even many of those that had collected their PVCs were re-allocated to new polling units less than 48 hours to the presidential election. Some received the SMS of the re-allocation to new polling units but many others did not. Most of the re-allocated polling units were unknown to the voters and others were very far away from their residences. Therefore, many registered voters though they have the PVC were unable to vote in the presidential election because of the confusion from re-allocation of voters to newly created polling units.

Conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly Elections

Omotayo (2023) examined how the 2023 elections were conducted and stated that there was a rise in political interest as a result of the enormous number of youths in Nigeria who registered to vote. According to him, the electoral commission spent N305 billion on the 2023 polls, a 62% increase over what was spent on the general elections in 2019, making it the most expensive election in the history of Nigeria's elections. The introduction of technology aimed at ensuring perfect voter authentication and results uploading in close to real-time was explained as the cause for the increase. The presidential and National assembly elections were deemed a disaster in all respects, despite the enormous budget, extensive logistical preparation, and high expectations from the voters (Omotayo, 2023).

According to Agomuo (2023), INEC claimed to achieve 62% PVC distribution in Lagos before the general elections commenced. However, there were reports of discriminatory distribution of PVC which denied non-indigenes their PVCs in Lagos but Agomuo (2023) debunked the allegations. He stressed that "There have been several accusations and deception regarding the PVC distribution in Lagos. Some persons have made claims that the commission

was cooperating with a party to ensure that non-indigenes are not permitted to collect their cards so that they would not be able to vote for a certain candidate during the elections. But what truth does such accusations hold?" he queried. Although, Agomuo (2023) denied the discriminatory PVC distribution, it was manifest on the day of voting in the presidential and national assembly elections that many non-indigenes in Lagos that had registered had no PVC to vote.

Zeijl (2023), a correspondent of Al Jazeera, noted that "established political parties have used violent groups referred to as 'political thugs' for years to influence the electoral process". He stated that a 31-year-old first-time voter named Tobi Olayinka came out to cast her ballot on Saturday morning in Lagos State, carrying a bag full of food and beverages as well as an umbrella to protect herself from the sun. She had felt she could make a difference with her vote. She was determined to remain at her polling place after casting her ballot until the ballots were tabulated and the results were announced. As LP presidential candidate Peter Obi emerged as a third contender in what had previously been a two-horse race between the ruling APC and the opposition PDP, the two major parties, Zeijl stated that Olayinka was one of many young Nigerians who became motivated to vote. She told Al Jazeera, "I had so much hope that this time around, our future could be better." But whilst they were waiting for counting of votes to begin, a group of men rushed towards her direction and she heard gunshots and ran for cover. It is well-known that 'violence is a tried-and-true strategy in Nigeria – Africa's largest democracy - to sabotage the electoral process, particularly in neighbourhoods that generally support the opposition...The candidate will gather these goons to raid the polling places if it appears that the election will not go their way. Not only does it discourage people from voting altogether, but it also invalidates the votes of those who do turn out to vote (Zeijl, 2023).

The Punch Editorial (2023) noted that the harassment, threats, and intimidation, of non-indigenes after the presidential/national assembly elections conducted on the 25th of February in Lagos State speak to the archaic nature of politics in Nigeria. Despite all the alleged discriminatory distribution of PVCs and denials by those concerned, the violence, gunshots and snatching/destruction of ballot papers deemed for the opposition candidates in the full glare of security personnel deployed at the polling units, Peter Obi, the LP candidate from Anambra State in the South-East, defeated the APC's Lagos-born presidential contender to win the state. According to the report, tensions rose immediately following the election but subsided on Monday when Obi was certified the winner in Lagos by the INEC. After their candidate was defeated, some APC supporters were enraged and started harassing residents that are not Yoruba and destroying their property.

Owing to the surge in the number of voters during the extended period of CVR, INEC discovered that there were so many registered voters in certain areas more than the designated numbers for each polling unit. Consequently, they embarked on creating of new polling units to accommodate the new registrants. As good as that initiative was, the confusion came with the allocation of voters to the new polling units. Many who had been voting before and assumed they knew where to vote were surprised on the day of voting that they had been moved to new location. The voters register and pictures of those assigned to each polling unit were not displayed until the day of the election. This made several persons moving from one polling unit to another in search of their names and by the time some discovered where they were to vote, it was past the allowed period for accreditation of voters. Therefore, many individuals were unable to vote even though they had collected their PVC. The real question that begs for answer is that since the BVAS is used to accredit voters and no person can vote twice, why apportion number of voters in a polling unit? If for the ease of voting the numbers in each polling unit has to be limited, why could not several

polling units be created in the same areas where the numbers of voters are many instead of assigning them to places far and unknown to the individuals?

Worthy of note is the enthusiasm and cooperation that the voters demonstrated to accommodate the logistics shortcoming presented by INEC deployments. The personnel and materials for the election arrived very late to many polling units in Abuja and elsewhere. By the time INEC staff settled to commence the accreditation and voting, it was getting dark. Some of the voters went home and brought their generating sets to provide light for uninterrupted voting exercise. Some others provided internet data services to ensure that the BVAS was used to upload the results to the IReV Portal before leaving the polling units. In many other places, the voters provided snacks and refreshments to the INEC staff and security personnel because they had to be there until voting and counting of votes were concluded far into the night. The voters were patient, understanding and indeed very cooperative during the 2023 presidential election as observed in Abuja.

INEC Declared Outcome of 2023 Presidential Election

The declared outcome of the 2023 presidential election fell far short of the enthusiasm, mobilization and determination of voters to select their leader. Even the huge investment of funds which is 62% increase over what was spent on the 2019 general elections (Omotayo, 2023) was not justified. It then stands to reason that the character and nature of the ruling government and its leader most significantly determines the quality and credibility of the general elections conducted in Nigeria. The insinuation of critics if the non-interference in the 2015 elections was a demonstration of Jonathan's belief in the EMB or a desire to inspire that belief (Akhaine, 2011) clearly demonstrates both the 'belief' and 'desire' of Jonathan which was lacking in the past administration. Both general elections conducted by the ruling APC and Buhari as its leader; In comparison to the democratic advancements made in 2015, the 2019 election represented a significant regression. (Amao, 2020); and the 2023 general elections was a failure in all parameters (Omotayo, 2023).

The whole hype about the deployment of BVAS technology to ensure the integrity of the ballot was all fallacy. According to Agbakoba (2023), this is one of the worst election petitions because the BVAS was only used to certify voters, as opposed to how the National Assembly had portrayed it to Nigerians when the Electoral Act of 2022 was passed. He said "If you listened to the INEC chairman, he repeatedly told us that BVAS is the magic, but it turns out that BVAS wasn't the magic, the guy stated. The Osun Court of Appeal ruling rejected the appellant's claim that the BVAS is the magic that determines over voting, hence the BVAS is no more than a tool to authenticate a voter" (Agbakoba, 2023). There hasn't really been a change because INEC continues to have the legal right to announce results through BVAS or regular paper.

It is therefore imperative to review the Electoral Act 2022 in order to remove the deliberate loopholes inserted by INEC to evade the absolute use of technology to conduct and declare election results in Nigeria. The use of technology should ensure not just the accreditation of voters and the transmission of results to the IReV portal but eliminate all forms of over voting. The ballot papers should also be made electronic so the votes are cast electronically and the collation is done via electronic devices. It will reduce human collation and manipulation of the results. Also, electronic voting would enable voters to cast their votes from any location and many individuals will not be disenfranchised because they were not at the location where they were registered to vote. It is

equally believed that electronic voting using electronic ballot papers would cater for diaspora participation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper sought to interrogate the disposition of voters and its impact on the outcome of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. It was noted that the interest and enthusiasm of the voters were stimulated to participate massively in the electoral process and the elections. This was due to the effective voters' education campaign undertaken by INEC, the media and CSO. Particularly, the emphasis on the use of technology to accredit voters and transmit election results from the polling units to the IReV portal raised the trust and expected integrity of the exercise to prevent any form of manipulation of results. The voters actually cooperated with INEC and rendered unsolicited assistance to ensure a hitch-free voting exercise and that greatly influenced the outcome of the election results.

The 2023 election expenditure was deemed the most expensive elections conducted in the history of Nigeria being 62% higher than the cost of 2019 election expenditure. Unfortunately, the outcome was adjudged a failure in all parameters (Omotayo, 2023). The hype about the deployment of BVAS technology to ensure the integrity of the ballot was all fallacy. Agbakoba (2023) state that BVAS was a mere tool for voter accreditation unlike how it was represented to Nigerians. Many voters were disenfranchised even though they had their PVC and came out to vote, they could not locate the newly created polling units where INEC had assigned them to vote on time.

Therefore, the paper suggested that the Amended Electoral Act 2022 needs to be reviewed to remove the deliberate loopholes that allows INEC to also use manual accreditation, transmission and collation of election results. Also, the use of e-voting utilizing e-ballot papers should be explored to reduce human manipulation of the process, allow voting from any location if duly registered, and permit diaspora voting in the democratic process in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

1. The 2022 Amended Electoral Act should be reviewed to remove deliberate loopholes inserted by INEC to evade the absolute use of technology to conduct and declare election results in Nigeria.
2. Embrace the use of e-voting technology utilizing e-ballot papers to reduce human manipulation of the process, allow voting from any location if duly registered, and permit diaspora voting in the democratic system in Nigeria.

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