

Research Article

Security Implications Of Election Ringing And Technology Use In The Twenty-First Century: Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election From A Technological Standpoint

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Abstract: The study looks at how elections in Nigeria and other countries set the stage for political succession. They once gave dishonest people and organizations the chance to carry out crimes of rigging to harm the electorate and other competitors. Stakeholders and the electorate are marginalized by unchecked manipulation, which results in their losing the election or having their votes stolen or canceled, all without their fault. This was the case prior to the introduction of smart card readers and permanent voter cards. The use of technology in Nigerian elections made it very difficult for results to be altered, either by dishonest people or by changing figures in an arbitrary and fraudulent manner. This electronic device is very difficult to copy or compromise due to its transparent application and built-in security mechanisms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the reasons why the smart card reader was necessary, the arguments against its usage, and its effectiveness in the 2015 presidential elections, as well as the possibility of more elections in the future.

Keywords: Pre-election environment, technological triumph, unchecked election rigging, understanding electoral fraud, and future potential.

1. Overview

In order to better comprehend the current state of electoral fraud worldwide, this series of articles aims to provide an evaluation of electoral fraud from an international comparative viewpoint. The articles also aim to offer a collection of methods and resources that could aid in the problem's resolution by the global community. This series' introductory paper explains why it's critical to concentrate on fraud in emerging democracies, defines fraud (as opposed to corruption or malpractice), and evaluates the ways in which international democratic norms and the prevention of Sulaiman, electoral fraud (2020).

Our goal is for Nigeria to occupy its proper position in the international order of countries where electoral democracy has reached adulthood, and this will be accomplished with the 2015 general election. We have an unwavering dedication to achieving that aim. Current initiatives to prevent electoral fraud are frequently judged more on the amount of money spent on the issue than on the caliber of the methods and analysis used. In actuality, certain fundamental and efficient anti-fraud measures are reasonably priced. The way election results are announced is one prominent example. Countries could decide to display disaggregated election results outside of specific polling places in order to increase transparency and lower

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the possibility of fraud. rather than merely disseminating the election management body's (EMB) centrally consolidated findings. However, in several nations that have faced serious accusations of electoral fraud in recent years, such as Kenya, Nigeria, Moldova, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe, these actions are not regular operating procedures (Ajiteru, 2024).

Nigeria's electoral history has been marked by serious instances of electoral tampering since the First Republic. Nigerian politics have never seen free and fair elections, as Eguavoen (2019, p. 27) accurately notes. Violence and malfeasance have always been a part of Nigerian elections. Nigeria adopted a parliamentary form of government in 1960, the year it gained political independence. Four years later, Nigeria encountered significant issues during the national elections. Accusations and rebuttals regarding fraud and malpractice were pervasive, resulting in the loss of numerous lives and the destruction of property. After a series of political upheavals, the first military coup d'état occurred in January 1966. Therefore, it is not appropriate to ignore the victories in the 2011 and 2015 elections. In preparation for upcoming elections, it is necessary to analyze and document these significant accomplishments. We hope that these concerns can be put to rest, even though there are many who disagree with this viewpoint (Abalaka, 2024).

According to Adebisi (2005, p. 18), who was cited by Sarah Birch, a world expert on election misconduct, there are three main ways that electoral malpractices can happen:

- i. Breaking the inclusiveness principles by influencing the structure of the organizations that oversee elections to benefit one or more candidates, fairness, transparency, or openness, as demonstrated by practices like gerrymandering, malapportionment, and excessively restrictive franchise or candidacy laws (Sulaiman, 2024).
- ii. Campaign laws that cause disparities between candidates.
- iii. Unable to watch election procedures.

Birch did not, however, foresee the possibility that election malpractices may have a primordia list slant, be essentially unchecked and unrestrained, and be carried out with impunity and violence. This was especially true for Nigeria prior to the 2020 and 2015 national elections. Corrupt politicians, corrupted security and INEC staff, and government authorities frequently actively participated in these malpractices. According to Sulaiman (2020), this was an example of the Nigerian state's character.

2. A Review of the History

2.1 Electoral Fraud: Definition and Interpretation

A. Recognizing the differences between malpractice, fraud, and corruption

One way to characterize electoral fraud is as any deliberate attempt to influence election outcomes by manipulating election-related information and electoral actions, potentially undermining or obstructing the will of the electorate. Outcome determinative fraud, in which the election results are altered so that the winners and losers differ from what they would

have been had the fraud not been committed, and no outcome determinative fraud, in which the results remain unchanged (i.e., the winners and losers would be the same even absent the commission of fraud), are the two primary types of electoral fraud. Although all forms of electoral fraud involve illegal activity that ought to be penalized by the law, outcome determinative fraud has more significant political ramifications, particularly because it permits a candidate or party to assume public office against the wishes of the general public (Abalaka, 2024).

For many observers, electoral fraud and corruption are interchangeable. Although fraud is undoubtedly a type of corruption, it is simply one of many possible types, albeit one of the most well-known and conspicuous. The term "corruption" describes self-serving activity that departs from the official codes of conduct that regulate the conduct of public officials. This encompasses a number of profound and systemic issues with the rule of law and governance, most often including bribery or improper use of public monies. Specifically, electoral fraud is defined as dishonest or careless meddling in the election process with the goal of preventing the results from accurately representing the will of the people according to Ajiteru (2024).

B. Assessing the extent of electoral fraud presents difficulties.

Determining the extent of fraud in a particular election process involves taking into account a number of other factors. The challenge of quantifying the extent to which fraud has impacted outcomes is a significant scope factor. For instance, what psychological or material factors might have influenced the outcome of an election, and how much might intimidation or vote buying have done so? In addition to directly tampering with election-related physical items like voter lists, ballots, vote tallies, and communication or computer equipment, "material" also refers to tampering with employment offers or termination threats, commission payments for services rendered, and verbal or written promises about future offers of food or modest cash, government contracts, and vote-buying. Anything that involves intimidating a community or individual voters is considered a "psychological" mechanism. According to Abalaka (2024), intimidation might involve the use of violence or just depriving someone of certain goods and services that they would expect from the government or local authorities.

Although fraudulent activities like creating phony voter cards or interfering with civil registries have the potential to significantly alter election outcomes, their effects may be very difficult to measure. The 2017 general elections in Guatemala are a well-known example, when the ruling party employed violence and intimidation, including pressure on government employees whose jobs were on the line, and widespread vote buying from within military garrisons. an attempt to influence the election's outcome fraudulently. The party lost elections at the municipal, parliamentary, and presidential levels by margins of 5 to 20 percent of the vote, despite this widespread fraud and against the expectations of many (Ajiteru, 2024).

For instance, voter list manipulation was common in the southern United States until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, in certain Western European nations prior to World War II, and it is still visible in many other nations today. The question of whether the outcomes of a particular election would have been different if a significant portion of the population had been granted the right to vote emerges when they are denied the opportunity to do so. There are several questions that need to be evaluated on an individual basis. Can electoral fraud, for instance, be alleged in certain circumstances? And should the election be regarded as valid if it is?

C, How IT and contemporary communication can be used to identify electoral fraud

The proliferation of contemporary communication and information technologies poses both a significant obstacle to identifying electoral fraud and a chance to improve detection techniques. By moving them from traditional to less obvious and intelligible loci (such as polling stations to computerized electoral registers accessed via the Internet), the use of electronic technology in general has made it more difficult to detect fraudulent activities, at least in part. However, an Indonesian IFES pilot program showed that an SMS reporting system can assist in identifying and isolating potential examples of electoral fraud Ajiteru (2024).

Electronic technologies have the potential to interfere with a number of delicate aspects of the political process. First, there may be network intrusions that raise questions or raise suspicions about the election's outcome. A carefully thought-out system of aggregate counting and results transmission may result in network breaches, or even merely stoppages, which the EMB can control illegally at any time. In 2000, this occurred in Peru, where stoppages occurred at several stages of the vote data transmission process before it reached the final aggregate counting level. The primary local watchdog, Transparency, condemned this violation along with other malpractices, and the elections were deemed to be rigged. Another type of breach could occur.

caused by an unintentional and total network breakdown, as occurred during a general election in West Germany in the 1980s. In such instance, manual counting was done, and the stakeholders had no reason to suspect fraud (Abalaka, 2024).

Because the electronic information stored in the networks is intangible, a second set of issues arises. This relates to the results' web accessibility for the EMB and the public at large. One recent instance is the 2008 local municipal elections in Nicaragua, when opposition parties and the international community accused the EMB of fraud after results on its website changed in the days following the vote (Ajiteru, 2024).

Lastly, some tasks are more difficult for practitioners than others and undoubtedly less noticeable to election observers thanks to the application of cutting-edge technology. According to Sulaiman (2024), detecting fraud may require retracing the steps through the various electoral operational systems and closely examining sensitive electoral materials, such

as balloting records; distributing ID cards and implementing citizen identification procedures; compiling, processing, analyzing, and making public political finance records; total ballot counting; and adjudicating complaints.

D. Election officials and potential fraudsters

Election-related activities in a particular nation may involve a variety of personnel types. Electoral officials assigned to some aspect of election operations, either permanently or temporarily, from the EMB or provincial and local governments, would be on the standard election personnel list (permanent electoral). Even in democracies that are stable, officers are a very recent development. Most frequently, political parties, the government, other public organizations like schools, or random selections from voter records furnish polling station administrators. Police officers are entrusted with maintaining the security of polling places and counting centers, while political party representatives are duly accredited before electoral authorities (Abalaka, 2024).

This writer witnessed firsthand the kind of undue influence by political operators during Yemen's first general election following the civil war, where separate polling stations were set up for men and women. An imam, who was both a women's doctor and a well-known political supporter of one party, was stationed at the entrance of polling sites for women, welcoming voters as they came in. In most traditional Islamic and male-dominated communities, this is an uncommon activity that could be interpreted as an overt attempt to influence the women's vote. Prominent candidates and governors' operatives in Afghanistan took involved in ballot stuffing, ghost voting, and ghost polling booths firsthand. Political party-salaried militants, trade union employees, businesspeople, and government officials (civil or military) working within larger corruption networks are examples of election stakeholders who are formally outside the process and are more likely to commit fraud or try to sway the results of the elections in the early stages of the electoral process (such as when creating voter lists and civil registries, and the creation and distribution of identification cards), as opposed to when the votes are cast and counted. Typically, the actions of these agents involve endangering the civil or voter registration of specific groups of people, such as indigenous communities, the poor, young people, and members of opposing parties.

Although it is practically difficult to compile a comprehensive list of fraud activities that would apply to every nation, the discussion above highlights the significance of having an impartial, qualified workforce oversee the voting process. Ajiteru (2024). This is the initial line of defense against, identifying, and mitigating fraud. To assist practitioners and observers in recognizing trends, information, and systems of fraudulent activity, a more comprehensive list of typical examples will be created. distinct fraud and irregularity kinds require distinct methods of detection, prevention, and strategies and actions for mitigation Abalaka, (2024).

1. Electoral fraud and international standards

The eight democratic norms from the ICCPR can be divided into four quantifiable categories, each of which represents a distinct aspect of the electoral cycle, in order to objectively assess the effect of fraud on the political process (Sulaiman, 2024).

The underlying political framework is under category 1. the duty to conduct regular elections and uphold an electoral framework that permits the people's will to be freely expressed.

A. Security environment: Holding democratic elections requires that all regions of the nation provide a reasonably safe environment for voters and important documents on election day.

B. The electoral authority: Regardless of the outcome, the electoral management bodies (EMBs) in charge of conducting the elections should act impartially question whether they constitute an independent electoral commission or are a part of the government's executive department. The latter is the most often used model at the moment.

C. Voter information, civic education, and political communication: Fair elections that allow the people's will to be freely expressed necessitate equal opportunities for all candidates.

Free and fair elections are under category 2. the people's right to vote, as well as the duty to keep ballots private and guarantee that elections are legitimate.

A. Operations related to voting and counting: This subcategory includes the logistics and procurement involved in the electoral process. The values of openness and equitable treatment for all voters ought to direct voting methods.

B. Election results are released: Results should be released in a timely and thorough manner. Early release Releasing preliminary results improves election transparency and voter trust in the electoral officials.

C. Electoral grievance adjudication: Regardless of the institutional structure of the adjudication function (i.e., conventional court, special judiciary, electoral management organizations, or a combination), the adjudication of electoral claims, complaints, and appeals must be swift, impartial, and efficient.

D. Electoral observers: Transparency and legitimacy are increased when both domestic and foreign observers watch every step of the election process.

Category 3: Franchise Rights. the equal and universal right to vote.

A. Gender and minority representation, electoral formulas, and political rights: It is imperative to refrain from excluding any sizable portion of the population or prospective candidates, as well as from interfering with the voting process. Fair laws, decent intentions, and the impartiality of law enforcement public authorities must put this into practice. Periodic, legitimate elections should be allowed by the legal framework. Helping to bridge the political divides of society at the voting booth, such as those based on geography, ethnicity, culture, gender, or ideology, is the primary problem of electoral legislation. Elections in a nation can be evaluated for progress by comparing them to past elections in that nation, as well as to regional and international experiences (Sulaiman, 2024).

B. Voter lists and voter registration: All people of voting age (usually 18 and older) should be able to register to vote. Additionally, protections preventing multiple registrations by a single individual should be put in place to prevent double voting, and voter registries should be updated on a regular basis to reflect changes and deaths. It needs to be guaranteed that no sizable portions of the populace are being denied the right to vote, either legally or practically.

Category 4: Participation Rights. the individual's right to run for office and take it if elected.

A. Political parties and candidates: There should be eligibility rules for political party and candidate registration and certification. However, accreditation standards shouldn't be so strict that they exclude important political actors (individuals, groups, or movements) due to arbitrary election officials' choices or unjustly onerous obstacles (financial, support signatures, etc.).

B. Campaigns: When it comes to campaigning, the freedoms of speech, movement, and demonstration ought to be protected. The criminal law's restrictions on personal offenses serve as the primary source of speech restrictions. Freedom of expression and protest should only be restricted by an obvious need to maintain public order (for example, a norm for protests is that they would only need to be reported to public authorities, not authorized).

C. Media: At the very least, legal laws and practice should provide all parties fairly equal access to publicly-owned media. The norm for private media is that fares shouldn't be higher than those for commercial advertising, and no competitor should be excluded from access. The election legislation often contains the primary judgment on media use during the campaign, but occasionally a comprehensive Code for Media is created independently. Violations can result in anything from monetary fines to license or business suspension. Moreover, the right to respond ought to be governed in accordance with the accepted norm, according to Abalaka (2024).

3. The Nigerian State and Free and Fair Elections

The nature of the Nigerian state and its resistance to accountability and transparency in the electoral process must be taken into consideration while analyzing the country's propensity for violence and election tampering in its electoral system. The ownership of the state is, in fact, the subject of an ongoing conflict between progressives and primordialist forces. The diversity of ethnic groupings and the political economy of the country are the primary causes of Nigeria's essentially anarchic state and society. Due to a skewed federal structure, its economy is primarily a mono-product one (Agbu 2019). Its political structure and governance have been distorted since political First, by colonialists; second, by the ethnicized political class; and third, by military politicians. The character of the Nigerian state is thus derived from

the various experiences of colonial rule, the numerous attempted, aborted, and successful coups d'état (eleven as of the last count in 2017); ethnic politics; the civil war (1967–1970); and deep-seated mistrust among some ethnic nationalities and settler/indigene crises throughout the nation (Moru 2018). For instance, there was widespread rigging in the 2003 general election, with some results allegedly written in people's homes and in some cases, announced before the elections had even taken place (Abalaka, 2024). In other places, fake thumb-printed ballots were used.

The 2003 general election, for instance, was blatantly rigged. According to Abalaka (2024), some results were allegedly written in people's houses and in other instances, they were made public before the polls had taken place. In other locations, voting boxes were filled with fake thumb-printed ballots that were used to calculate the numbers for pre-selected winners. In several regions of the nation, the government employed security personnel to harass and threaten voters. To sway voters to support unpopular candidates, money was employed. Actually, Max van den Berg's team from the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM) identified 12 states with high levels of fraud and irregularities and came to the conclusion that the "minimum requirement for democratic elections were Sulaiman, (2024).

In addition, there were a number of difficulties and flaws with the April 2017 general elections. These resulted from inadequate planning and extensive election manipulation by the government through law enforcement, particularly the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the police. This election was marked by a number of irregularities, such as the late arrival of officials and materials, ballot paper theft, vote buying, harassment, chanting, shooting, and taunting of voters, the absence of secret voting, police interference, ballot snatching and stuffing, political violence and intimidation, police and electoral officials' partiality, improper voting procedures, delayed election start, and voting by minors (TMG 2017, p. 132). Following an assessment of the deployed observers' reports The Domestic Election Observation Group concluded that the entire election was a charade and did not meet the minimal requirements for democratic elections after noting that there had been numerous documented lapses, significant irregularities, and electoral malpractices across the nation (Abalaka, 2024).

While the majority of domestic and foreign observers deemed the 2015 general elections to be mainly free, fair, and credible, some disagree, citing instances of what they believe to be electoral fraud. In contrast to previous electoral practices, the purpose of this article is to present compelling evidence supporting the assertion that the PVC and SCR were, in fact, the jokers in the pack, employed to ensure freer, fairer, and more credible 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Ajiteru, (2024).

4. Electing and the pre-election environment

Since an election is a process, it is important to look at the circumstances surrounding the 2015 presidential election. An already tense atmosphere prevailed, where INEC, the electoral administration organization, was continuously scrutinized. Many people, not just politicians, thought that its leadership had already been compromised in favor of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which is in power. Except in a few cases, experience shown that this was true for the other management bodies and their employees, thus this belief was not out of the question. Many people believed that the election's outcome was already known. However, the rise of President Goodluck Jonathan and General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd), as the two main political figures With Buhari's enormous following in the country's north and his political background, both suggested that this election would be unique in that it would be fiercely contested (Abalaka, 2024).

To guarantee the coordinated participation of all security agencies during election periods, an interagency consultative council on election security (ICCES) was established (Jega 2019, p.6).

A better framework for conducting future elections involving INEC workers, security agencies, development partners, the media, and political parties has been reviewed and prepared by INEC after the 2011 elections. Among the lessons learned from the 2011 elections were:

- i. Timely and sufficient preparation is necessary for successful elections.
- ii. Effective collaboration and partnerships are key to successful elections.
- iii. Transparency is key to successful elections.
- iv. Lastly, elections are not ideal.

INEC started planning for the 2015 elections early in order to build on the successes of the 2011 elections, based on the lessons learned from those elections. A thorough examination of INEC's organizational structure and human resources, the creation of new election management policies, and strategic planning and election planning were the three main topics of focus that were outlined. In conclusion, the commission did the following to get ready for the 2015 elections:

- i. Created a comprehensive strategic action plan and a strategic plan for the years 2018–2023.
- ii. Finished a thorough electoral project plan in preparation for the 2015 elections.
- iii. Carried out the commission's reform and reorganization.
- iv. Completed the process of eliminating duplicate entries in the voter biometric register, which included ongoing voter registration across the country.
- v. Drafted a gender policy to align the commission's work with international best practices and make it more gender sensitive.
- vi. Recommendations for constitutional action, the Electoral Act, and legal framework enhancements based on the 2011 election experience.
- vii. Reorganized the Electoral Institute by reassembling its board and appointing a new director general.

With assistance from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a graphic design center was established, enabling the commission to create election materials in-house for the first time. started a program to remap and restructure polling places and examine electoral constituencies (Jega 2019, p.11).

In the lead-up to the 2015 elections, INEC implemented a number of reforms, including these. But the most innovative tactical move introduced and put into use the smart card reader and permanent voter cards. Even though desperate politicians tried to prevent the adoption of this gadget, it was the "joker" that made it very difficult to rig the elections. Despite claims to the contrary, it is clear from INEC's election preparation efforts that this was the primary, if not the sole, factor in the 2015 elections' success. Challenges to the 2015 elections were expected to include money, the attitude of the political class, civilian apathy, and instability, particularly in the northeast of the country and its effects on election conduct. In fact, INEC's attempts to expand the number of voting places encountered strong resistance from certain of the interested parties who thought this was the precursor to election tampering. But as the elections went on, it seems that these obstacles were greatly overcome (Abalaka, 2024).

5. Smart Card Readers and Permanent Voter Cards:

5.1 The Technical Triumph

This section starts by explaining what smart card readers (SCR) and permanent voter cards (PVC) are and what they were supposed to do during the election.

A. PVCs, or permanent voter cards

Prior to the general elections on March 28 and April 11, 2015, the Independent National Electoral Commission created PVCs for 68 833 476 individuals listed in the biometric voter registration. Following voter registration in 2011, the temporary voter card (TVC) was superseded by the PVC. INEC claims that durability, security, and quality and cost-effectiveness were key considerations when INEC produced the permanent voter cards. These

cards were made with an average lifespan of 10 years in mind, and they have a lot of parts and unique features (such as base substrate, security printing, customization, lamination, and chip embedding) (INEC FACTSHEET on PVCs and Card Readers, 2015). All of the biometric information of a valid bearer, including fingerprints and a picture of the face, is stored on an embedded chip in the PVC. To guarantee complete voter authentication and verification, it would be swiped into a smart card reader at the polling station on election day before the voter could cast their ballot. Because of its security characteristics, PVC is difficult to counterfeit. Voters who had In the general elections of 2015, their PVCs were permitted to cast ballots. Up until Sunday, March 8, 2015, the PVCs were available for pickup at distribution locations throughout the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

B. SCRs, or smart card readers

In contrast, smart card readers were employed for electronic voter authentication for the first time in Nigeria's electoral history during the 2015 general elections. The card reader makes use of a very safe cryptographic technology that is frequently seen in gadgets like pay terminals that must conduct secure transactions. With a single core frequency of 1.2GHz and an Android 4.2.2 operating system, it uses incredibly little power. Prior to the elections, the card reader units reportedly underwent quality assurance. were proven to be dependable in terms of processing speed, battery life, and simplicity of use after undergoing integrity and functionality testing. Voter verification was supposed to take 10 seconds on average, however the reader failed multiple times, so the experience varied. This occurred in spite of the fact that, in certain states and the Federal Capital Territory, the card readers were put through stress testing prior to the elections that were held on March 28 and April 11, 2015 (INEC FACTSHEET on PVCs and Card Reader 2015).

In fact, INEC visited the field on March 7, 2015, to evaluate the PVCs and SCRs' dependability in advance of the polls. The testing was conducted in 225 of the 120,000 polling places and 358 of the elections were scheduled to take place on this day in 2019, with 155 000 voting points. The exercise was regarded as a successful endeavor across 12 States in the six geographical zones of the nation, notwithstanding a few glitches. The goal of the exercise—verifying the authenticity of PVCs voters present at polling stations and biometrically authenticating the person presenting a voting card to confirm that the cardholder is the authorized one—was largely supported by the field reports. The experiment's true goal was to guarantee that only qualified voters cast ballots and that only those legitimate votes would be recorded. In this sense, the disclosure of this Technology made sense. However, the technological issues were so serious that several political stakeholders voiced doubts about its feasibility, and some publicly called for its postponement or non-use. Ultimately, the degree to which this electronic technology contributes to the legitimacy and openness of the elections will determine whether it is successful or not (Ajiteru, 2024).

The INEC Chairman's principal press secretary, Kayode Idowu, claims that there are many benefits to using these card readers. One of these is that the card reader can only scan PVCs issued by INEC once it is configured. Voting would not be possible for anyone who arrives at the polling station without a PVC or with a card that was not provided by INEC. The SCR also reads The cards cannot be faked because the integrated chip on the PVC, not the barcode, shares a secret code with the PVC. By comparing the voter's fingerprints with those stored on the integrated chip, the card reader verifies the voter's identification. Voting with another person's PVC is prohibited. The card reader records all of the cards it has read, including the information of all verified and unverified voters. It then sends the data it has gathered to a central INEC server using a GSM data service. INEC will be able to audit polling unit results and perform various statistical analyses of voting demographics thanks to the information sent to the server. Additionally, officers of collection shall additionally be able to audit polling unit result sheets and check for any changes to accreditation statistics using data sent by the card reader (Idowu 2019).

The card reader was set up to only function on election days in order to guard against fraudulent use. Furthermore, the device could not be utilized anywhere else without requiring reconfiguration by approved INEC workers because it was customized to specific polling units. The commission purchased 26,000 card reader spares and over 35,000 backup batteries that could be quickly deployed in case of a malfunction while in use (Idowu 2019). The implementation of SCRs in Ghana's 2012 general elections led to observations that made this necessary (Abalaka, 2024).

Additionally, the INEC PVC collation exercise and INEC attributed the poor results of continuous registration in 12 States to computer glitch. Opponents of the new voter accreditation technology contended that INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega ought to have implemented it more sparingly during the state gubernatorial elections before implementing it extensively during the national election. In theory, though, Nigerians applauded the innovation because they believed it would help stop the country's vote misconduct. Many people were concerned about the timing, which became problematic when Jega waited for over four years before making plans to employ the SCRs. A lot of people thought the INEC Chairman did not conduct a thorough test run of the SCRs; also, INEC employees and ad hoc employees lacked enough training on how to use the card readers (Odiakose 2019).

Later, INEC developed the concept of an incident form for people whose fingerprints the card readers were unable to read, after initially insisting that only those cleared by the SCR would be permitted to vote. It was undeniable that there were multiple instances of SCR hitches. Even the PDP's presidential candidate at the time, Goodluck Jonathan, and his spouse were not exempt. Following multiple unsuccessful attempts to read his thumbprint using five different card reader equipment, Jonathan and the First Lady were ultimately given incident papers for certification. A similar situation occurred in Enugu, forcing Senator Ike

Ekweremadu, the Deputy Senate President, to advise the Independent National Electoral Commission to abandon the use of SCRs for the polls when he was unable to obtain accreditation with the system. Ekweremadu eventually received the incident form as well. Ekweremadu asserts that the card reader ought to have been put to the test in a supplementary election or by-election prior to the primary poll. Due to the card readers' terrible failure in Ebonyi State, electoral authorities were forced to distribute incident forms in order to accredit voters. Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, a native of the state and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), directed INEC to address the shortcomings in the accreditation procedure associated with the SCRs to lend legitimacy to the surveys (Odiakose 2017).

Notably, some INEC officials blamed the card readers' malfunction on INEC engineers who were unable to decipher the card reader's built-in security feature. According to reports, the card reader's security code is intended to update the voting date and time. According to one source, some of the cards had to be reprogrammed because they were originally scheduled for February 14 and were postponed to March 28 (Odiakose 2020).

As a result of the card reader equipment failing in multiple locations, Attahiru Jega modified the election's rules on March 28. He gave his approval for manual accreditation to be used in places where during the National Assembly and presidential elections, the SCRs failed. INEC acknowledged that accreditation had been sluggish in many locations and had not started at all in others in a statement released during the election, after millions of disgruntled voters had returned home disappointed. "Even though the 2015 general election guidelines stipulate that elections in polling units where card readers malfunction and cannot be replaced will be postponed to the following day," INEC stated. The guidelines had to be reexamined due to the magnitude of this challenge. Therefore, the commission determined that the presiding officer would manually accredit voters at polling places where card readers did not function. The presiding officer was also required to Once you are certain that the individual presenting the PVC is the owner, mark the voter's register (Ajiteru, 2024).

In the north of the country, during the votes on March 28, there was also the concerning problem of minors being given PVCs. Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Gombe, Bauchi, and Kogi States were among the states that were found to be involved in this malpractice (Nnaji 2015). The wave of underage voting that marked the election in the north had been denounced by a group of European observers headed by Dirk Verheyen and Joelle Meganck. According to their findings, children produced legitimate PVCs. How did this occur? Maybe INEC should provide us some answers. Additionally, INEC was charged with using the PVCs as a tool to suppress voting in the south. For instance, while there Only 2.6 million votes were cast in 2015, compared to almost 5 million votes cast in the 2011 elections from the southeast. On the other hand, Lagos State received only 1.4 million votes, while Jigawa and Kano States

(Jigawa was formerly a part of Kano State) received 3.1 million, more than twice as much (Nnaji 2015). Jega's reaction, which only threatened to arrest any young voter who showed up to vote on election day, was not very persuasive when the issue of underage voting was brought to INEC's attention many months before to the election. Thousands of minors were allegedly permitted to cast ballots on March 28 against Jega's promises. If this is accurate, This development is detrimental to our democracy. Additionally, it can incite other parts of the nation to do similar malpractice in upcoming elections if this conduct is left unpunished and the offenders are not held accountable (Abalaka, 2024).

The south-south region of the country, which includes Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River, did seem to have higher instances of electoral manipulation than other regions. This can be the result of a technical glitch or a purposeful attempt to thwart the procedure. Nevertheless, it's crucial to remember that despite all of these purported electoral irregularities, Muhammadu Buhari, the APC's presidential candidate, stated that the implementation of the PVC and In 2015, free, fair, and reliable elections were guaranteed by INEC's biometric card reader. He claims that without these actions, the votes would not have been counted. He pointed out that in earlier riggings, the results were proclaimed on radio stations and television stations and written in party offices and sitting rooms, while people who objected were frequently asked to appear in court (Abuh & Azimazi 2018, p.7). Buhari is the finest person to know this, having run for president four times in a row (Sulaiman, 2024).

6. Future Potential and Lessons Learned

The use of PVC and SCR in the 2015 general and presidential elections could teach us a few things. The main takeaways center on the progress achieved in guaranteeing more credibility. for the election procedure, but also with regard to the issues that arise while using technology. It is also important to remember that the typical issues that arise during Nigerian elections were not always prevented by the deployment of this technology. In the northeast, Boko Haram launched automatic attacks during the presidential elections (Ajiteru, 2024). Six people were killed as a result, and there were gunshots in Lagos and Imo States, security lapses in Enugu and Awka, and an explosion in Jigawa State (Musari 2018). The general elections were rigged even if PVR and SCR technology were used. These include the use of PVCs by minors to vote in the country's north, overcounting, duplicate voting, cancellations, and ballots that have been stolen, as was the case in Cross River and the states of Akwa Ibom. No election is flawless, as the INEC Chairman has often stated, and this is accurate. Overall, the election met the electorate's overwhelming wishes and minimal expectations, which is what matters (Abalaka, 2024).

The process was slowed significantly by the fact that PVC verification frequently took up to ten minutes during the election. This was precisely the case during the PVC and SCR test-run in Nassarawa, Rivers, and Ebonyi, where the SCRs experienced notable malfunctions (Thisday 2019). It would have been expected that INEC would have taken appropriate action

to prevent this from happening again. However, it may be argued that Nigerian voters and computerized biometric devices were the real winners of the 2015 presidential election. The 2019 general elections should take this technology's advancements into consideration. If accepted by the National Assembly and included in the Electoral Act Sulaiman (2024), electronic voting may also be investigated in the future, beginning with the next gubernatorial elections.

Once more, the PVC and SCR may have provided information about Nigeria's population and demographics that had long been thought to be untrue. Ten million fewer people cast ballots in the 2015 elections than in the 2011 ones (Nkemdiche 2018, p.17), raising the question of where all of the votes in the 2011 elections came from. Only 2.5 million votes were needed to win the presidency, which is the lowest margin of victory since the Fourth Republic. Thus, this technology holds significant promise for national planning as well as the confirmation of current national data.

7. Final Comment

It was anticipated that the SCR would increase election credibility and eradicate malpractice and electoral tampering. This anticipation was largely met, and the votes were counted in spite of several issues, so it could be concluded that the progressives prevailed. As has been noted, elections that are based on a national register of votes that is both quantitative and qualitative are considered trustworthy. According to Sulaiman (2020), elections based on the aforementioned become legitimate if there is widespread participation and ballot and citizen safety and securitization. To put it another way, election security is still crucial for both staff and the electoral process and needs to be treated with seriousness. Despite a few instances of police misconduct in certain states, it should be highlighted that the Nigerian police were extremely polite and performed better than expected for the 2015 elections, providing the necessary security cover for free and fair elections and the deployment of the SCR (Abalaka, 2024).

The card reader's deployment did lessen the prior tendency to manipulate elections and undermine the electoral process. The records in INEC's database, which are typically impervious to human manipulation, are expected to be relied upon and serve as credible evidence at the Election Tribunal, even in cases where there were successful violations of the electoral process, particularly through the use of violence (Ajiteru, 2024). It should be noted that the PVCs used in the 2015 general elections were produced using the 2011 Voter Register, the first voting register to be electronically created. If the SCR is successfully implemented in this election, it may be the first step toward fully electronic voting in the general elections in 2019. Despite efforts to compromise the elections, it was quite difficult due to the transparent application of this device and the security mechanisms it had. Because of INEC's actions, especially the implementation of the SCR, the Nigerian people prevailed this time. Nigerian

democracy has a bright future thanks to technology advancements based on field experience during this election, Sulaiman (2024).

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