

## **THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF RAW DATA AND ELECTRONIC VOTING SYSTEM: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

Elections are the major pillars of a liberal democratic government globally. The incidences of electoral violence in every election cycle in Nigeria invariably make the application of the electronic voting system inevitable in curtailing the attendant security implications of every election outcome in the country. In Nigeria, elections are inundated by the reoccurring turmoil and trajectory of a manual raw data collation system that is prone to controversies and violent manipulation. This affects the credibility/accuracy of the electoral system. This results in the upsurge of maladroitness leaders with its attendant security challenges that necessitate exploring the use of electronic voting systems. This system is nonviolent and cost-effective, it increases participation, and credibility and guarantees the security of lives with a simple management method of casting and counting of votes. Using a time series theory and field survey method involving key informant interviews and focus group discussions as well as documentary reports, to interrogate the progress and pitfalls of the Nexus of our electoral act amendment bill and sustainable democracy to advance the current debate on electoral reform suggesting the dominance use of electronic transmission of election results as the thrust to enthrone a credible electoral system and guarantee human security. It argues that the failure of our electoral system to conduct free, fair, peaceful and credible elections is severely undermined by a lack of reform that accommodates the electronic voting system. The article concludes that if this gap is not addressed, the electoral system in Nigeria will be prone to generate controversy, manipulation and insecurity.

**Keywords:** electronic voting system; electoral violence; sustainable democracy; raw data

**Introduction**

The rejection of the trajectory of manual raw data collation systems that are prone to controversies and violent manipulation finds global expression in its deadly mutable nature and deliberate human errors among others has impacted negatively on human social, political and economic relations. This by extension, brings into focus the long overdue and agitated application of the novel electronic voting system in our electoral reform to guarantee free, fair, credible and peaceful elections. This makes it a compelling necessity to reduce large gatherings and adopt social and physical distance as a way of curtailing violence during voting. Since election is the propelling force for a sustainable democratic system, the electronic voting system ensures widespread access to the Internet and encourages more effective participation in politics. On one hand, the system not only enhances participation but also improves democracy by increasing political inclusion, generating accountability, enforcing the rule of law and augmenting responsiveness, foster social equality. On the other hand, the system makes the electoral processes more transparent, deliberative and effective as shown in advanced democracy where the paper ballot has been jettisoned for the electronic voting system. This can change how government representatives become more accountable, responsive and effective in their

functions for a sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

The article is organized as follows: the introduction is followed immediately by the highlights of the method adopted in the study. The next section centred on the theoretical underpinning of sustainable democracy as well as the conceptualization of an electronic voting system (EVS). Further analysis of the derivable benefit of the EVS and the views of sceptics was identified. The final section presents the discussion and conclusion.

### **The study methods**

The study adopted a field survey method, involving the use of focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to obtain primary data. This was complemented with secondary data obtained from media reports, published articles, and official documents using documentary/historical archives. The researchers conducted five FGDs in the following categories: one each with selected members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in FCT Abuja involved in public hearing, advocacy, orientation, and creation of awareness regarding the electoral act amendment bill on the electronic transmission of election result, to members of the public and community/religious leaders. The remaining two FGDs were conducted with the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) in FCT Abuja. There were between 6 and 10 participants in each of the FGDs. Participants in the FGDs were randomly selected but those in the KIIs were purposively selected based on availability, knowledge of the EVS and length of residency in the FCT Abuja, Nigeria. In addition to the FGDs, we also conducted 14 KIIs with leaders of CSO (4), community/religious leaders (5) and leaders of some NGOs (5). Respondents were asked to consider questions relating to the impact of EVS in helping to encourage and advocate for electronic transmission and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. The KIIs and FGDs were conducted in the English language, but also in a mixture of Hausa<sup>1</sup> and Nigerian Pidgin<sup>2</sup> where necessary. The opinions of the general public concerning the EVS were also sourced from media reports as documented in newspapers like *Vanguard*, *Premium Times*, *The Sun*, *punch*, *Daily Trust* and *The Cable*, *AIT*, and *TVC* among others. The initial round of FGDs and KIIs was conducted during different fieldwork trips between 10 September 2020 and 15 August 2020. Further KIIs were conducted in November 2021 to update the data collected earlier.

### **The theoretical underpinning of sustainable democracy**

Sustainable democracy can be achieved in Nigeria when the processes of elections and electronic voting are substantially prevalent in compliance with the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2022; this requires the existence of certain nurtured non-negotiable—the upholding of the tenets/indices that are sacrosanct to the virtue of democracy. These range from the rule of law and good governance, the sovereignty of the people and respect for fundamental human rights, majority rule and minority rights, independent and credible electoral process access by the citizenry to necessities of life (food, shelter, education, health, and transportation), transparency in government, a robust and independent judiciary, a free and independent press media, mass literacy, economic prosperity and social development. It also requires that strict measures be taken to rid the polity of vested financial and commercial interests. To achieve sustainable democracy in Nigeria, we must understand the function of free participation and representation by all qualified citizens in the political institutions and processes to guard their interests and concerns with substantial evidence that no voice should be left unheard or behind, and none should be subjected to any form of alienation, exclusion, and marginalization of minority groups from political decision making. This is the idea that every citizen, regardless of class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, group, culture and ethnic or religious background should have equal rights and opportunities to engage with and contribute to the functioning of these institutions and processes. These are major factors in preventing political, civil, and economic conflict and instability, which in turn affects the consolidation of democracy. These democratic institutions among others include the Independent National Electoral Commission, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, political parties and the executive, legislature and judicial arms of government.

Democracy the word, the value, the institution and the practice has won widespread acceptance, especially in the twenty-first (21<sup>st</sup>) century, despite an etymology traced to the ancient Greeks. The term democracy was derived from two Greek words, 'demos' meaning 'people' and 'keratin' denoting rule to or by people, this is the hallmark of Athenian democracy. Notwithstanding its popular appeal or perhaps because of it, there exists no generally universally accepted definition of democracy

The modern form of democracy is a system of government whereby the power to govern a state does not come from the barrel of a gun or coercive force but from qualified citizens

through popular free, fair, credible and peaceful competitive elections by registered political parties to periodically elect their office holders and representatives on a platform of a clear-cut, issues-based and accountable manifestos within the ambit of the legal framework hinges on respect for the rule of law of the country by all (high and the lowly place). Democracy focuses on the continuous political communications between the leader and the people to create trust and confidence amongst them, legitimates power rest with the people, who create authority and power is accountable to the people whom it serves (Sabo et al 2021)

The prevailing advancement in Information and Communication Technology has impacted greatly sustainable democracy globally, particularly in advanced countries. These have replaced the traditional means due to widespread access to the internet have largely improved participation in elections. Electoral institutions and processes have become more accountable, credible, effective, peaceful, free and fair in several countries where the paper ballot has been substituted for the electronic voting system.

According to Guardian Newspaper The decision of the Senate to redeem itself by reversing its earlier stance on the controversial clause 53 (3) of the Electoral Act Amendment Bill, which had sought to subject the electronic transmission of electoral results to the approval of the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) and ultimately the National Assembly, is timely, and a demonstration of how an ideal democratic system of government should work. It should be a system that thrives on the will of the people. Nigerians individually and collectively represented by Civil Society Organisations have spoken on their preference for the results of elections in the country to be electronically disseminated; it is only right that the Upper Chambers of the National Assembly listened, and acted by that preference. (2021), this emphasizes that ordinarily, the electoral process is expected to contribute towards democratic consolidation in any given society. Through elections, the electorates are provided with ample opportunity to vote for the candidates and parties that will represent their varying interests. However, in many African countries such as Nigeria, the electoral process has brought about unwarranted political instability. Nigeria, with a population of about 210 million and abundant mineral resources is being widely touted as one of Africa's brightest prospects on the global stage. Despite Nigeria's huge potential in human and material resources, the country has been bedevilled by a series of political unrest from the first republic (1960-1966). Nigeria was thrown into an avoidable 30-

month civil war (1967- 1970) that claimed over three million lives. Nigeria's socio-political history showcases different self-acclaimed Military General regimes that governed the country by Yakubu Gowon in 1966-1976, Murtala Ramat Abubakar and Olusegun Aremu Matthew Obasanjo in 1976-1979, Muhammadu Buhari 1983-1984, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1984-1993, Sani Abacha in 1993-1998 and by Abdulsami Abubakar in 1998-1999 in her sixty one years of independence. On May 29, 1999, Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief after the military relinquished power to the democratically elected government led by a former military junta Olusegun Obasanjo. From that time, Nigeria has enjoyed over twenty-two years of uninterrupted democratic rule characterized by various episodes of violence ranging from the Niger Delta militancy, IPOB to the Boko Haram Insurgency, Banditry, and Kidnapping in some parts of Northern Nigeria.

Roberts and Edwards (1991) cited in Omotola (2007) view election as a method of selecting persons to fill certain public offices through choices made by the electorate; those citizens who are qualified to vote under the laws and procedures of the electoral system. Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary (2006) defines election as "the act or process of organizing systematic (s) election (permitting mass participation and method of choosing a person or persons by vote for a public office position in which state authority is exercised".

### **Conceptualizing an electronic voting system**

Electronic voting is a form of computer-mediated or web-based voting in which voters make their selections with the aid of a computer. The voter usually chooses with the aid of a touch-screen display, although audio interfaces can be made available for voters with visual disabilities. To understand electronic voting, it is convenient to consider four basic steps in an election process: ballot composition, in which voters make choices; ballot casting, in which voters submit their ballots; ballot recording, in which a system records the submitted ballots; and tabulation, in which votes are counted. Ballot casting, recording, and tabulation are routinely done with computers. There are two quite different types of electronic voting technologies: those that use the internet (I-voting) and those that do not (e-voting).

I-Voting; in this type, voters would cast their choices from any computer connected to the Internet—including from their home. This type of voting mechanism is sometimes referred to as

I-voting. Beyond voting in regularly scheduled elections, many saw the emergence of these new technologies as an opportunity to transform democracy, enabling citizens to participate directly in the decision-making process. However, many countries decided that the Internet was not secure enough for voting purposes. Limited I-voting trials have been undertaken in some countries, including Estonia, Switzerland, France, and the Philippines. E-voting system; Because of security and access concerns, most large-scale electronic voting is currently held in designated precincts using special-purpose machines. This type of voting mechanism is referred to as e-voting. There are two major types of e-voting equipment: direct recording electronic (DRE) machines and optical scanning machines. E-voting machines consist of three types: touch-screen machines that let voters cast votes by touching an electronic ballot on an LCD screen, punch-key machines that use a keypad for making selections on an electronic ballot, and wheel machines that require voters to rotate a wheel and press a button.

A typical DRE is composed of a touch screen connected to a computer. Ballots are presented to the voters on the touch screen, where they make their choices and cast their ballot. The touch-screen display can be used to assist the voter in a variety of ways, which include displaying large fonts and high contrast for those with limited vision, alerting the voter to undervotes, and preventing overvotes. A DRE directly records the cast ballots and stores the data in its memory. Thus, a single machine is used for composition, casting, and recording of votes. The third step, recording of the cast ballot in a memory device, is invisible to the voter. However, a voting session is typically initiated through the use of an activation card. A poll worker, upon verification of eligibility, sets the card to enable one voting session. After the session, the voter returns the card to the poll worker for reuse. The threat of DREs not recording the votes as cast has led some individuals and organizations to argue that a paper audit record must be produced for each cast ballot by adding a printer capability to their DREs. The resulting systems produce both an electronic record and a paper record. However, problems in handling and monitoring the paper record, both by voters and by election officials, have led to much criticism of these hybrid systems. Many jurisdictions have discarded them in favour of optical scanning technology systems whereby, a voter fills out a paper ballot and inserts it into an electronic scanning device. Scanners can reject improperly marked ballots, allowing the voter to start over, thereby reducing discarded votes.

### **Drivable benefits of electronic voting system**

The game-changer for democracy, however, is not the revitalization of the manual or traditional method of political participation like elections, petition-signing and protests through digital tools. Rather, the real change in how democracy works, government rule and representation is delivered comes from entirely *new means of e-participation* or the so-called *digital democratic innovations*. While the internet may boost manual or traditional forms of political participation by increasing the number of citizens engaged, democratic innovations that rely on ICT tools may alter and advance the value of participation, thus in the long run altering the nature of democracy and its institutions in several ways. Under a new amendment of Clause 52 (2) of the Electoral Act Amendment Bill, the Senate resolved that "voting at an election and transmission of results under this Bill shall be by the procedure determined by the Commission, which may include electronic voting. Guardian (2021). INEC repeatedly stated that it was ready for the electronic transmission of results and that the available national infrastructure, including mobile network coverage, was adequate to provide for the electronic transmission of election results. Premium Times (2021)

Since their early inception, digital tools and widespread ever-evolving access to the internet have significantly altered the traditional pattern of participation in politics, making them more effective. With the new realities, electoral processes have become more transparent and effective in terms of cost and management in several advanced democracies where the paper ballot has been augmented by electronic voting machines. Petition-signing has become a more extensively enduring and powerful tool as individual citizens no longer needed to be anxious on the trajectory to sign a sheet of paper, but could instead be simultaneously anchored by the millions via e-mail and have their names added to virtual petition lists in seconds. Protests and demonstrations have also been immensely energized in the internet era.

The concept of election verifiability through cryptographic solutions has emerged in the extant academic literature to introduce transparency and trust in electronic voting systems. It allows voters and election observers to verify that votes have been recorded, tallied and declared correctly, in a manner independent from the hardware and software running the election. Three aspects of verifiability are considered; individual, universal, and eligibility. Individual



verifiability allows a voter to check that his/her vote is included in the election outcome, universal verifiability allows voters or election observers to check that the election outcome corresponds to the votes cast, and eligibility verifiability allows voters and observers to check that each vote in the election outcome was cast by a uniquely registered voter.

In other optical scanning systems, voters compose their votes on a computer screen. Once a ballot is completed, the computer prints an optical scanning ballot. The voter verifies the ballot and then inserts it in another device that scans and tabulates the vote. Both these systems are considered electronic voting systems. Cryptographers, on the other hand, have devised systems that allow voters to verify that their votes are counted as cast. Additionally, these systems do not enable the voter to prove to a third party how they voted (thus reducing the risks of vote buying or selling and coercion). These cryptographic systems, called end-to-end (E2E) secure, are the preferred systems from a security point of view. Thus, there is considerable academic interest in fully developing these systems to help Nigerians vote effectively. All the electorate needs in Nigeria With the incorporation of EVM is a computer, an electronic card reader, their ID card and their PIN, and Nigerians can vote from anywhere in the world.

Optical-scan machines use an electronic reader to record the vote, but not to cast it. The machines require voters to mark their choices on a paper ballot, which is then scanned into an electronic reader to record the vote. Since voters are not directly recording their votes into the computer, the machine is not a DRE. This doesn't mean that optical-scan machines are free of the glitches and programming errors that can plague e-voting machines. The paper ballots, however, give officials the ability to catch problems if they examine the ballots through a hand count and compare them against the digital votes.

The E-voting machine system contains a memory chip and a removable memory card. When voters cast their ballot, votes are recorded to the chip and the removable memory card. At the end of an election, INEC officers remove the memory card and take it to a collation or tabulation centre, where the cards are loaded onto a computer and the votes are tabulated to produce unofficial election results. Later, the election officials compare votes stored on the memory chip with those tabulated from the memory cards to ensure that no one changed votes on the cards after they were removed from the machines. Some e-voting machines have modem chips that allow INEC officers to send unofficial results through a phone line to the collation or tabulation

centre. Critics say this method is insecure, however, since it could allow intruders to access machines through the line and alter votes or the machine's software. However, this can be resolved using an audit trail; Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail and End-to-end auditable voting systems

On the one hand, election officials say the printing machines save costs (to produce paper ballots), make it simpler to produce ballots in multiple languages, and let them make last-minute ballot changes easily. The machines also allow most disabled voters to cast ballots without assistance (the machines have an adapter that turns ballot text into speech for visually impaired voters and allows movement-impaired voters to cast ballots with a mouth pointer). Election officials also say the machines produce faster and more accurate results than other types of voting machines on manual systems. On the other hand, critics of e-voting, among them many respected computer security experts, say the machines are badly programmed and prone to hacking. The voting software is proprietary, so no one knows what's inside the machines except the voting machine manufacturers. E-voting machines sometimes fail to boot up, fail to record votes or even record them for the wrong candidates – that is, in cases when someone notices a problem. A machine can appear to perform properly from the outside, but record votes inaccurately. Without a paper backup trail or some other means to verify votes, there is no meaningful way to determine the integrity of the machines or an election. In another question and answer section, responded that the NASS will pass the bill to empower INEC to transmit election results electronically, however, if the President declines assent, they go ahead and do the needful (Anonymous, 2020d).

Electronic Voting Machine (also known as EVM) is voting using electronic means to either aid or take care of the chores of casting and counting votes. An EVM is designed with two units: the control unit and the balloting unit. These units are joined together by a cable. The control unit of the EVM is kept with the presiding officer or the polling officer. The balloting unit is kept within the voting compartment for electorates to cast their votes. This is done to ensure that the polling officer verifies your identity. With the EVM, instead of issuing a ballot paper, the polling officer will press the Ballot Button which enables the voter to cast their vote. A list of candidates' names and/or symbols will be available on the machine with a blue button next to it. The voter can press the button next to the candidate's name they wish to vote for.

Perfect whenever you need to collate votes and display information quickly, the system is a time-saving and error-reducing device. You'll also be able to eliminate human error in the vote-counting process, ensuring that the result of any poll or election is 100 per cent accurate. You can also see how many people have voted to ensure that all of the responses have been received. The alternative of paper voting is not only slower but can also put a huge amount of pressure on vote counters which is how errors can creep in. The server needs to be very effective to prevent hackers from guiding against its integrity in delivering maximum capacity in the election period free from error. (Anonymous, 2020e).

It produces some great, clear graphics which show the results in a way that makes it easy for everyone to understand the outcome. Because these are produced electronically, there is no need to sit for hours trying to figure out how to best present your findings, and there will be no disputes over the accuracy. With EVM, you get the results you need quickly and efficiently every single time. EVD offer a complete line of hybrid voting options, combining web-based, telephone and paper ballots that will increase voter participation, reduce expenses, and improve accuracy. Votes remain anonymous and secure. It also boosts voter turnout by letting voters easily cast their votes from a computer, tablet or smartphone in minutes with our intuitive web ballot. On the availability of the network, the server should provide an alternative way in case of non-availability or tech failure and accept data when connected to the network. (Anonymous, 2020f).

Electronic voting technology intends to speed up the counting of ballots, reduce the cost of paying staff to count votes manually and provide improved accessibility for disabled voters. Also in the long term, expenses are expected to decrease. Results can be reported and published faster. Voters save time and cost by being able to vote independently from their location. This may increase overall voter turnout. The citizen groups benefiting most from electronic elections are the ones living abroad, citizens living in rural areas far away from polling stations and the disabled with mobility impairments. For the country, electronic voting may improve the country's image abroad on sustainable democratization processes. Voter intent; Electronic voting machines can provide immediate feedback to the voter detecting such potential problems as undervoting and overvoting which may result in a flawed or spoiled ballot. This apparent

immediate feedback can be helpful in successfully determining voter's intent. (Anonymous, 2020g).

While traditional means of political participation can become more effective by reducing the costs of participation with the use of ICT tools, one cannot yet be assured that it will become less subject to distortion and manipulation. In the most recent United States elections, computer scientists claimed that electronic voting machines may have been hacked, altering the results in the counties that relied on them. E-petitions can also be easily manipulated if safe identification procedures are not put in place. In these times of post-facts and post-truths, protests and demonstrations can result from strategic partisan manipulation of social media, leading to democratic instability as has recently occurred in Brazil. Nevertheless, the distortion and manipulation of these traditional forms of participation were also present before the rise of ICT tools, and regardless, even if the latter do not solve these preceding problems, they may manage to make political processes more effective anyway in COVID-19 era and beyond

Ake (1964) asserted that those who win state power can have all the wealth they want even without working, while those who lose the struggle for state power cannot have security in the wealth they have made even through hard work. The capture of state power inevitably becomes a matter of life and death. That is one reason why our politics is so intense, anarchic and violent". Comparatively, it has been discovered that elected and appointed government representatives of the people at the local, state and federal levels earn higher wages and allowances than their counterparts in advanced democracies like the US, UK and Europe. Hence, the struggle for political power through any means makes violence inevitable in Nigeria's political space. In this regard, the carnage of electoral violence such as wide-scale murder, kidnapping, vendetta, innuendo and arson as well as the nature, extent and magnitude of the ugly electoral violence and rigging in Nigeria's political history since independence have assumed alarming proportions can only be curtailed and avoided with the application of EVS in our Electoral Act to sustain a violent free electoral system.

Furthermore, social distancing (also known as physical distancing) includes infection control actions intended to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by minimising close contact between individuals. Methods include quarantines; travel restrictions; and the closing of schools, workplaces, stadiums, theatres, or shopping centres. Individuals may apply

social distancing methods by staying at home, limiting travel, avoiding crowded areas, using no-contact greetings, and physically distancing themselves from others. With this as the new normal way of life limiting our social interaction will be the only practical necessity to encourage the use of EVS during election. This will go a long way in reducing the spread to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

### **Views of sceptics on electronic voting system**

It has been demonstrated that as voting systems become more complex and include software, different methods of election fraud become possible. Others also challenge the use of electronic voting from a theoretical point of view, arguing that humans are not equipped to verify operations occurring within an electronic machine and that because people cannot verify these operations, the operations cannot be trusted. Furthermore, some computing experts have argued for the broader notion that people cannot trust any programming they did not author.

Skeptic views on electronic voting systems note that "computer security experts unanimously disagreed on whom to listen to; the doubts here are targeted to the computer, not with the fact that the computer application is being used in voting or elections. The DRE machines themselves must have voter-verifiable paper audit trails, a kind of Software application used on DRE machines. Critics further drive home their argument that these machines must be open to public scrutiny to ensure the accuracy of the voting system. It is necessary to verify ballots because computer machines can sometimes malfunction, and compromise voting.

Many critical security issues have also been associated with electronic voting machines, such as using a default administration password. The fear of voting machines making unpredictable and inconsistent errors and the key component of openness of a system to public examination from outside experts as well as the creation of an authenticable paper record of votes cast and a chain of custody for unalterable clean voters records to guarantee that election results are collected and reported accurately.

There has been a contention issue in advanced democracies in the United States, United Kingdom, Europe and India, that electronic voting, especially DRE voting, could facilitate electoral fraud and may not be fully auditable. In addition, electronic voting has been criticized as unnecessary and expensive to introduce. The doubt is more obvious that people without internet access and/or the skills to use it are excluded from the service. The so-called digital

divide describes the gap between those who have access to the internet and those who do not. Depending on the country or even regions in a country the gap differs. This concern is expected to become less important in future since the number of internet connectivity and coverage tends to be intensified.

## **Discussion**

The study examined the security implications of manual raw data election results and the emergence of the novel electronic voting system as a panacea for sustainable democracy in Nigeria with specific reference to factors influencing election disputes due to manual collation systems devoid of any digital innovation in some of the issue understudied regarding the extensive application and use of electronic transmission of election results to curb violence. In agreement with findings in the field, the study found that one of the factors influencing and encouraging election dispute in Nigeria is the history of violence, manoeuvring or manipulation and lack of a credible electronic voting system. This ugly experience has great setbacks to a sustainable democracy due largely to the facts the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is empowered by law to serve as an unbiased umpire to deploy a credible system like the electronic transmission of election results that would guarantee a free, fair and peaceful election. This point sufficiently captured the submission of (Anonymous, 2020h) arguing that facilitating a smooth take-off of stable effective and efficient access to electronic voting systems will curb violence as well as promote a speeding legislation of the Electoral Act amendment Bill toward a sustainable electoral process.

Meanwhile, the general assumption that undergirds INEC functions was informed by its constitution recognized, organizational structure, rules and regulations. It has been discovered by the International Institution for Democracy and Election Assistance (IDEA, 2019), observers that the electoral process in Nigeria raises informed judgment of credibility, for instance, incidences such as outright and arbitrary shifting of election dates devoid of stakeholders consultation, inconclusive elections and controversial supreme court judgment in a governorship election where the candidate came third in such election as well as the denial of INEC having a server in a presidential election tribunal was the last straw that broke the camel's back and intensified the clamour for EVS and eventual electronic transmission of election results. This

position was corroborated by (Anonymous, 2020a), that the people are in dire need of electronic transmission of election results and INEC should be empowered to deploy it in the next election.

Importantly, in consonance with empirical findings, revealed that the factors that also affect election to scramble for state's resources are the survival of the fittest and winner-take-all syndrome. Tailor (2016) articulates that politicians engaged in ethnic-based campaigns with a promise of rewarding loyalists with juicy appointments to the exclusion of others. It was discovered that the excluded ethnic largely react with self-help which usually leads to unimaginable levels of violent dimension. This was a daunting trend expressed to offer a solution by (Anonymous, 2020c), that the NASS as the true representatives of the people should guarantee its assurance to do what the people want as a panacea to curb violence for peace and security in Nigeria. While the Senate also approved that political parties in Nigeria should adopt direct primaries to choose candidates for all elective positions and shall be monitored by the INEC, this position, however, was resisted by the president's refusal to assent to the bill alternatively suggested indirect primaries or concessions and the Coalition of United Political Parties, CUPP, criticised the Senate over its position on direct primaries, National Secretary of the CUPP, High Chief Peter Ameh, in a chat with Vanguard, said: "Why should the method of selecting/electing political party representatives be forced down their throat? "It is absurd and uncalled for. This direct primary is a direct assault on parties to freely determine the most suitable means of conducting their internal affairs. "This is interference in the affairs of the party by taking away the right of party organs to make decisions for the smooth running of party activities. What Party A wants is different from Party B with this ongoing debate Peoples Democratic Party PDP chides the Senate, All Progressive Congress APC over the direct primary model

Omotola (2017) put the record straight that despite all pretences to masquerade INEC as independent, it appears in most cases as an extension of the ruling party. Scholars had maintained a common ground on the obvious irregularities recorded in the 2007 and 2019 national elections in Nigeria whereby the apparent weaknesses of the manual collation of election results were exposed as a "do or die affair". Added to the preceding was the expression by (Anonymous, 2020b), that there is growing agitation to mount pressure on our representatives and they would not relent until electronic transmission of election results is included in the

current Electoral Act Amendment Bill before the national assembly. It is only when that is done that irregularities and manipulation of election results will be minimized.

## **Recommendations**

To ensure the institutionalization of the electronic voting system and true democracy in Nigeria under a perilous COVID-19 era, the paper has come up with the following recommendations.

First, the expected amendment of the electoral act should be speedily passed into law by the National Assembly to support digital innovations and make our democracy work effectively for a more inclusive and more deliberative political engagement. Real democratic inclusion takes place when the latter is understood not in terms of the number of citizens and volume of participation but in terms of the groups targeted and the policy issues addressed by the new means of e-participation. Several digital democratic innovations have been created that specifically address women, youth and other vulnerable groups that usually have not only lower participation in electoral politics but also have their interests left aside by elected politicians. Mechanisms for digital oversight have evolved to specifically allow women to raise their voices against the multiple forms of gender inequality/violence, and in many cases help law-enforcement officials to identify offenders and increase surveillance.

Second, the government should allow the citizens to play a greater role in the implementation and evaluation of policies while improving public service delivery, enforcing the rule of law, and rendering governments more accountable.

Third, government at all levels should ensure that citizens are allowed to contribute, make suggestions to their political agendas, oppose their adopted policies, and vote online on the issues our representative must vote on in the Nation Assembly that will address challenges regarding electronic voting system and sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**



These new digital institutional designs discussed above not only enhance participation, they also improve democracy by increasing political inclusion, generating accountability, reducing cost, enforcing the rule of law, increasing acceptability of election results and augmenting responsiveness and responsibility in this era and beyond. Electronic voting and electronic transmission of results also enhance social equality, as they include traditionally disadvantaged groups and provide channels to voice their underrepresented demands. Just a few years ago one could argue that the digital divide rules out low-income citizens, but today the widespread use of smartphones is almost making computers as a device necessary to access the internet obsolete. It is not by chance that higher numbers of active smartphones per capita are found in some of the poorest countries, and that such mobile internet devices have proved an efficient tool to include citizens in highly unequal societies. Correcting some of the democratic deficits provided new ways to deal with social inequality, new forms of e-participation may not change democracy as quickly as they evolve and spread, but they have certainly already made it more diverse and inclusive through institutional digital innovation.

## Notes

1. This form of English is predominantly and commonly spoken by a majority of people in Nigeria, including less educated citizens.
2. Hausa is the predominant language spoken in the middle belt of Nigeria and one of the researchers understands and fluently communicates effectively in the language.
3. The poll lasted for twenty-one days and was conducted in a way that makes it impossible for a respondent to vote more than once from the same computer or mobile device.
4. This observation was made during a series of focus group discussions with Civil Society Organizations and persons concerned with electoral reform and the Electoral Act amendment bill before the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly between 20 and 21 February 2020
5. FCT is the Federal Capital Territory and Aso Rock is Nigeria's president's Seat of power and is located in Abuja

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