BVAS AND ELECTION CREDIBILITY IN THE 2023 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN PLATEAU STATE

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ABSTRACT
A credible election is devoid of any sort of manipulation, one that is free and fair, and also transparent. The outcome of such an election always represents the true mandate of the people and therefore produces a legitimate authority. This article focused on the impact of the use of BVAS for the 2023 election in the conduct of the gubernatorial election in Plateau state. In this study, we adopted the Structural functionalism theory. This study relied on an ex post facto research design. Both primary and secondary data were collected through the use of key informant interviews, newspapers, and journal articles. Data were analyzed with content analysis. After a thorough analysis that relied on the two hypotheses of this study. This study discovered that; the use of BVAS for accreditation during the gubernatorial election in Plateau in the just concluded 2023 election, may have helped to remove voter impersonation and multiple voting, but on the other hand. It led to disenfranchisement and third-party manipulation. This is because of the inability of the electoral officers to adequately operate the device, and the failure of the device to capture the face and fingerprint of most registered voters in most of the polling units. Secondly, this study discovered that there were cases of result manipulation, rigging and post-election litigation, as a result of the failure of INEC to upload the result of the election at the polling unit to the IReV. The failure to do so was based on poor network, and system hacking among other things. In light of the conclusions reached during this study, the following recommendations are made: INEC must ensure thorough education on the advantages of the electronic accreditation process to prevent a repeat of the difficulties encountered during the deployment of the technology.

KEYWORD: INEC, BVAS, Plateau State, Credible Election

Introduction

Since the inception of democratic regimes in Nigeria in 1999, elections have remained constant. This is as the preachers of democracy made us believe that periodic election is one of the principles of democracy, and Nigeria with other developing countries adopted it, enshrined it in their constitution, but has failed to practice it constitutionally. Nigeria and many other third-world countries have defiled every principle of democracy, and that is involved in the conduct of elections. Election is a decision-making process, that produces representatives of the people at different levels of government, following a laid down procedure (Onyia&Ugbor-Kalu, 2021). According to Kassem & Osasona (2021), Election is seen as a legitimizing institution, working to give elected leaders the wherewithal to rule. It is a tool through which the voting public demands accountability from elected officials facilitates political recruitment, allows citizens to make informed decisions, and confers moral authority on political leaders. And as such, the electoral process ought to be credible, free, and fair. It is at this point that Nigeria failed. According to Diamond (2008; cited in Kassem & Osasona, 2021) Elections are presumed to be free and fair when they are conducted by an impartial body when the electoral administration is sufficiently skilled and resourceful to take specific steps against fraud when the police, military, and courts treat opposing candidates and parties impartially when all candidates have access to the public media, when electoral districts and rules do not materially disadvantage the opposition, and when the secret of the ballot is protected. But according to Ugochukwu (2009) noted that Candidates, voters, and observers have all expressed unhappiness with Nigerian elections. Election dissatisfaction in Nigeria is evident in the flood of cases that are frequently presented before election tribunals and courts as well as the amount of election results that are declared invalid.

In the quest for better election and election processes in Nigeria, many electoral reforms have been carried out in Nigeria since 1999, in fact, according to Akwueh (2023) electoral reforms in Nigeria started in 1960, The trip commemorated the electoral institutions that helped Nigerians of voting age choose their leaders for the country's independence and the succeeding republics, including the current fourth republic, Nigeria's election system has undergone three revisions since 1999.   The Electoral Act, used for the 2003 and 2007 general elections, was created in 2002 during the administration of the late President Olusegun Obasanjo. The 2010 Electoral Act, which was utilized to conduct three national elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019, was the result of the second revision to the electoral process that took place under the previous president Goodluck Jonathan's government in 2010. Then the Electoral Act of 2022 was passed after a difficult legislative process that included numerous critical

assessments of earlier Electoral Acts as well as other political precedents that the 2002 and 2010 Electoral Acts did not adequately cover.

After several calls for a reform that could introduce electronic voting and electronic transmission of election results in Nigeria, the 2022 electoral Act introduced electronic transmission of results through the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (B-VAS) (Akwueh, 2023). According to Oyemike (2023), The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System is a computer program designed to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and identify the voter using both facial recognition and fingerprints. In addition to the aforementioned purpose, the BVAS was employed to transmit a real-time snapshot of the result sheet at each polling place to the INEC portal, where anyone who is logged in can view it. The irregularities that occur between the Polling Units (PUs) and the result collation centres are one of the difficulties in the electoral process. Results can occasionally be altered, destroyed, or even taken over. This prompted INEC to think of transferring the results straight from the PUs using BVAS technology.

Between February and March 2023, Nigerians went to the poll and elected their leaders, governorship election was held in 24 states, including Plateau state. On the 18th of March, 2023, gubernatorial elections were conducted in 28 states in Nigeria; Plateau State was one of the states. BVAS was used for the gubernatorial elections same as it was used for the Presidential election. The use of BVAS was to avoid double voting, and uploading of election results at the polling units, to avoid or reduce the effect of election violence. The whole essence of the introduction of BVAS is to ensure free, fair and credible elections during the 2023 election. This is because as Nabiebu (2022) noted, credible elections require a sufficient foundation to be in place. Since becoming independent, general elections in Nigeria have been marred by spiralling irregularities, which have become worse with each round. These irregularities include violence, intimidation, killings, and fraud. This has undermined trust in the electoral process and harmed Nigeria's socioeconomic, political, and national security (Enang et al., 2012; Nabiebu, 2022). This has caused so much security concern during the election period. Election security was one of the major reasons for electoral reforms in Nigeria and also was one major issue the use of BVAS was meant to correct during the 2023 general elections. When the 2022 electoral Act was signed into law by President Buhari, it raised the hope of the majority of Nigeria, as the use of BVAS was meant to clear some abnormalities experienced in previous elections. BVAS was enabled to take pictures of the Form EC8A polling unit result sheet and submit them to INEC's Election Result Viewing platform (IReV). IReV is an internet platform where polling unit results are uploaded, transferred, and made

publicly available. To view the polling unit results posted on the website, users of the portal can also set up personal accounts. Prof. MahmoodYakubu's special adviser, Prof. Mohammad Kuna, claims that it is difficult for anyone to tamper with the results that are uploaded to IReV via BVAS due to the electronic device's design (Akwueh, 2023).BVAS also have two-step verifications, The first is that it is used to verify Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), and the second enables human recognition through a biometric verification mechanism, using both fingerprint and facial recognition of voters. Thus apart from using it for uploading results at the polling units to secure the people's mandate, it is also used to check against underage voting, double voting, and other electoral manipulations at the polling units.

It is against this background that this study raised the following research questions; did the use of BVAS for accreditation reduce electoral malpractice during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau state? Did the failure to use BVAS in uploading results from polling units by INEC increase the chances of Post-Election Violence in Plateau State?

Literature Review and theoretical framework

This section is a review of relevant literature that will help to understand the basic variables of the research questions to identify the gap in the literature.

The use of BVAS for Accreditation and Electoral Malpractice during the 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Plateau State

The importance of voter verification for the integrity of the electoral process stems primarily from the conceptual and theoretical connection between elections and democracy. Electronics accreditation of voters during the election did not start with the 2023 general elections. During the general elections in 2015, Nigeria implemented an electronic voter accreditation system that was distinguished by the use of card readers that were pre-programmed with voter biometric information. Before the adoption of electronic accreditation, voter accreditation in elections held before the 2015 general elections was handled manually with a voter's register that was prone to fraud and manipulation through the addition of fictitious identities and numerous entries (Iyamu, 2023). Therefore, it was widely anticipated that the implementation of the computerized voter certification system would enhance the legitimacy of the vote. The use of BVAS for accreditation was to eliminate multiple voting, underage, and voter impersonation; which are all indicators of electoral malpractice. With the use of a portable technical gadget called the BVAS, voters can be authenticated and accredited by having their fingerprints digitally read as they arrive at a polling place.

To identify and confirm a person before they cast their ballot, it also contains facial-recognition capabilities that can read and analyze the features of voters and compare them with the INEC's database of stored photos (Acheampong, 2023). According to Iyamu (2023) the idea of "one man, one vote" is one of the most important tenets of both the electoral process and democracy in general. This notion is founded on the liberal idea that all men are equal, regardless of their sex, ethnicity, or social standing. Attempts to break this principle through the phenomena of voter impersonation and multiple registration and voting are relatively widespread, despite the importance of this principle to the election process and democracy in general. He went further to note that The rising instances of voter impersonation and multiple voting as well as attempts to commit these crimes have been one of the most significant effects of elections in the developing world in general and Africa in particular. To him, a conscious effort must be made to identify and verify the legitimacy of voters before they are permitted to cast a ballot in an election as a result of the phenomenon of voter impersonation and multiple voting. Thus, the process of identifying voters who are legitimately eligible to cast ballots in any election is known as voter authentication. It is a crucial step in the voting process. The integrity and sanctity of the democratic process are likely to be jeopardized when there is no dependable method for voter accreditation. This is why manual accreditation was jettisoned for electronic accreditation. Manual accreditation according to Iyamu (2023) is easily manipulated and encourages electoral fraud. This is why several countries of the world adopted electronic biometrics for election purposes. For instance, in Ghana, an automatic biometric identification system (ABIS) was used for voter registration, de-duplication, and adjudication during the general election in December 2020. It was noted that during the process the ABIS was essential in the de-duplication process of a total of 17,027,641 registrants who were eligible to vote in the general election. System 24 successfully identified 15,860 repeated registrations made by 7,890 distinct people who attempted to register more than once using different names by matching fingerprints and/or facial biometrics for each registrant name (Iyamu, 2023).Similar to this, iris recognition-based biometric voting technologies were utilized in Somaliland's 2017 general election to certify voters. Before a voter was allowed to cast a ballot, their identification was confirmed using an eye scan as part of the process. Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, and Namibia are other African nations that have used this strategy in their electoral processes. Kenya, Liberia, and numerous other nations. Even so, there are several drawbacks to using computerized voter accreditation systems despite their widespread use. According to Iyamu (2023) While INEC argued that the electronic voter accreditation system was essential for eradicating the issues of multiple voting and voter impersonation, detractors, including some political parties, believed that Nigeria's electoral process was not

ready for the deployment of such technology and that it was a method for manipulating the results of the election. However, the executive summary of his findings shows that there was no statistically significant influence on the credibility of the election from the electronic voter certification process. This finding was supported by some key stakeholders who were interviewed, who generally noted that while the electronic accreditation process may have helped to increase the credibility of the 2015 general elections, one cannot completely discount the impact of other factors, such as the de-politicization of the electoral process by the incumbent government of President Goodluck Jonathan, who made sure INEC had the resources it needed to ensure its independence. As it can be seen Iyamu's study is limited in time and scope to this study. In a more recent work by Obinne & Osuagwu (2023) who predicted that in no distant time, Nigeria will adopt a fully electronic voting system, noted that Voters must have solid faith in the procedures used to gather and tally their ballots for democracy to function. Unfortunately, it has been demonstrated that online vote manipulation and electoral fraud are possible when it comes to real-world e-voting systems. According to our case studies, the vast majority of the nations that initially embraced electronic voting have switched back to manual elections as the enormous vulnerabilities have been exposed. Elections in Nigeria since 1964 have been filled with fraud and manipulations (Obinne & Osuagwu, 2023). Giving their remark on the outcome of the 2023 election Obinne & Osuagwu (2023) noted that, while The IREV INEC Result Viewing Portal and the BVAS Bimodal Voter Accreditation System were implemented by INEC in response to accusations of irregularities in the 2019 election, which led to an improvement in voter accreditation for all elections. To prevent fraud, these technologies were created to ensure transparent accreditation and uploading of polling unit results for citizens to examine in real-time on Election Day. But Election administration by INEC was a deliberate decision. It is a premeditated attempt to rig the election rather than a glitch in technology or a logistical issue.Ikelebe (2016) asserts that because of the flawed electoral system, there are usually disputes in election tribunals and courts following elections.

The use of BVAS for uploading Results and Post-Election Violence in Plateau State

The 2022 Electoral Act made provisions for legal backing for the deployment of technology by INEC for the 2023 general elections (Sulaiman, 2022; Acheampong, 2023). The technological device was to be used for electronic transmission of results among other things, BVAS was that technology. For the elections in 2023, INEC has implemented the BVAS machine to help prevent fraud and multiple voting. The use of BVAS for the 2013 General election, which includes uploading results through the

result viewing portal is to ensure a free, fair, and also to reduce doubt on the outcome of the election, thereby reducing or avoiding post-election violence. The above idea is in line with the thought of Obinne & Osuagwu (2023) who noted that The IREV INEC Result Viewing Portal and the BVAS Bimodal Voter Accreditation System were implemented by INEC in response to accusations of irregularities in the 2019 election, which led to an improvement in voter accreditation for all elections. To prevent fraud, these technologies were created to ensure transparent accreditation and uploading of polling unit results for citizens to examine in real-time on Election Day. The use of ICTs has improved electoral credibility according to Shittu&Onyeukwu (2019), but it hasn't significantly decreased electoral violence in Nigeria, according to the conclusion, as electronic devices have moved this electoral disaster from physical to electronic violence and from manual to digital electoral manipulation. In Nigeria's digitalized elections, there are also issues with equipment failure, system hacking and inadequate logistical support. According to Condra, Long, Shaver, & Wright (2018) Violence used to sabotage elections exposes the government's incapacity to create a monopoly on the use of force and calls into question the victor's legitimacy. According to Peter &AbdulRahmany (2018), the integrity of the Independent National Electoral Commission is among the factors that can warrant electoral violence.

Election-related violence has occurred in the Nigerian state before, as far back as the pre-independence elections, according to Ladan-Baki (2016). In Nigeria, candidates are allowed to use any means necessary to rig and win elections, including breaking the state's monopoly on violence by using terrorism. He went further to note that People in positions of power frequently employ thugs and law enforcement to terrorize party members, and this can occasionally result in the kidnapping of a candidate's family. Having focused his research on the 2015 general election Ladan-Baki (2016) discovered that the 2015 election recorded violence, especially in the South-South geo-political zone. The summary that he made was that candidates or political parties incite violence at an election when they notice that the majority do not support them. They can snatch the ballot box, ballot papers, electronic gadgets, and even result sheets. And also when election results are manipulated or results aren't announced right away, emotions rise and violence breaks out. The work of Ladan-Baki in 2016 is limited in time and scope to this study, as he covered only the Presidential election of 2015. According to Ogele (2020) who extended his study to include the 2019 election, Violence poses a danger to the democratic underpinning of participation, competition, and legitimacy in both the short and long terms. According to him, Due to the severe consequences that are linked to the occurrence, electoral violence in Nigeria has drawn attention from all around the world. Violence before

and after elections is now a more frequently seen event. Political transitions, various parts of nation-building, and ideas of democratization itself are all greatly threatened by the existence and divisive forces of elections. For instance, when party supporters believe the election was rigged against their candidates, post-election violence erupts. The afflicted community typically experiences election apathy, there are numerous instances of missing election materials or locked polling places, and occasionally voters are intimidated into casting their ballots (Ogele, 2020). Ogele who traced electoral violence from 1964 to 2019, identified 4 causes of electoral violence which include; stake, expectation, incentives, and outcome, according to him, the outcome is associated with post-election violence which results from the announcement of the result. According to him, a party that is the minority, and is certain that they will be excluded after the election spurs up this kind of violence to avoid or prevent their political exclusion. Post-election violence of 2011 in Nigeria fits into this kind, thus, Ogele tagged it the most devastating post-election violence in Nigeria.

There are similarities between the work of Ogele (2020) and an earlier work by Peter &Abdul Rahmany (2018), both accepted that if the outcome of an election falls short of the expectation of the opposition or even the masses, it surely causes post-election violence. Both scholars also used the post-election violence of 2011 as a good example. Peter &Abduk Rahmany focused more on post-election violence, and they used the Frustration-Aggression theory to explain that every violence is a result of unmet expectations. According to them, some institutions have vital roles to play before, during and after the election, and if any of them fail to play there, it leads to what they call institutionally induced violence. Peter and AbdulRahmany gave the example that the absence of post-election violence after the 2015 Presidential election was because the ruling party did not manipulate the result, thus any attempt to manipulate election results against what the people expect invariably brings about violence. Such could happen when the BVAS that was made to transmit results electronically for transparency fails to do so. Peter & AbdulRahmany also noted that post-election violence is not only peculiar to Nigerian society, but also to other African countries, according to them, the post-election violence in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria has taught us important lessons. The first is that the three nations' experiences demonstrate that electoral violence is firmly ingrained in the historical, political, and socioeconomic structures of the countries and that it was also sparked by election results, including claims of electoral fraud. Post-election violence can cause political instability, political apathy, human displacement, and much other political and economic damage to society (Peter & AbdulRahmany, 2018). Shittu & Onyeukwu (2019) on their own noted that electoral irregularities, which are marked by violence in Nigeria, were blamed on the country's outdated voting procedures, which mostly

involve manual computation of the voters' register and sloppy recording of election results. These procedures allow for electoral fraud and violence, such as the declaration of fake election results, multiple voting by minors, intentional falsification of manual results, and intimidation. People's confidence in Nigeria's electoral process has declined as a result of its inadequate electoral system, which is mostly supported by manual voting techniques that are rife with fraud and lack an electronic database. The conduct of elections in Nigeria is currently characterized by the introduction of advanced Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) devices, which were largely deployed for the 2003, 2007, 2011 2015, 2019, and even the last 2023 elections to ensure that every eligible vote counts while also assisting citizens to access and share relevant electoral information, organize electronic caucuses, and improve the credibility of the electoral process. However, according to Shittu & Onyeukwu (2019), The use of ICTs in elections has drawn interest and concern from a variety of electoral stakeholders, including voters, electoral commissions, political analysts, and observers, even though it is crucial to the success of elections in Nigeria. They concluded that, while proponents of the use of ICTs in elections call for their continued use due to their strong belief that the technology can reduce electoral fraud and establish violence-free elections in Nigeria, many detractors claim that ICTs have made elections more fraudulent and violent by relocating structural violence and electoral fraud from physical to digital violence. Yielding their voice to electronic transmission of results, Obinne & Osuagwu (2023) noted that, the risks associated with transporting election results by conventional transportation methods are considerable, including attacks by political thugs, resentful party members, or manipulation by dishonest INEC employees. These limitations cast doubt on the necessity of continuing to use the old paper ballot system and have a detrimental impact on its dependability.

Gap in Literature

From the review of literature capturing the major variables of the research questions and showing the relationships that exist among them, we discovered that first, On the nexus between the use of BVAS for accreditation and electoral malpractice; scholars like Sulaiman (2022) Iyamu (2023), Obinne&Osuagwu (2023), Banjo (2023), Oyinloye&Onibiyo (2023), Ikhenoba (2023), few others wrote on the provision of the use of BVAS for accreditation as a welcomed development, as it is meant to eliminate, multiple voting, under age, and voter impersonation. However the practice was heavily criticised by scholars like Oduola, Sawaneh, & Hassan (2020); Nnoruga (2023) and Ikhenoba (2023) who attributed it to failure on the part of the electoral umpire, and even lack of expertise and knowledge by electoral officers, and

also on the malfunctioning of the device. Ogieva&Ayisebiya (2023) noted that it is because the people are not fully conversant with the innovation in the electoral system. None of the scholars wrote in direct relation to the gubernatorial election of Plateau State. It is the above gap in literature as it relates to the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau state that this work will fill.

On the nexus between the use of BVAS for uploading results and post-election violence, scholars like Shittu&Onyeukwu (2019) Sulaiman (2022), and Obinne&Osuagwu (2023) gave reasons for the adoption of Information Communication Technology as a means of transmission of election results (BVAS for the 2023 general elections) and also reasons the Electoral Act of 2022 introduced it, all agreed that it would made to eradicate doubts that do normally arise from election outcomes, these outcoms include post-election violence. Condra et al (2018), and Peter &AbduRalmany (2018), blamed the causes of post-election violence on the manipulation of election outcome by the majority party, which is a result of the lack of integrity of the party of INEC as the electoral umpire; while Ladan-Baki (2016) blamed it directly on the government and politicians. Both Ladan-Baki (2016), AbdulRahmany (2018) and Ogele (2020) agreed that post-election violence arises as a result of the outcome of the election not being what the people or opposition party expects. From the above, it is only Obinne&Osuagwu (2023) that their study had a direct impact on the just concluded general election, but yet, not about the gubernatorial election in Plateau state.

Theoretical Framework

The structural functionalism theory was adopted as it is seen as the most suitable theoretical framework of analysis for INEC and the use of BVAS for the conduct of the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau state, Nigeria.

As is well known, structural functionalism is a theory that attempts to explain the fundamental role played by political structures in the political system. It also serves as an investigative tool. In essence, it clarifies the connections between the individual pieces (structures) and the entire system (the political system) on the one hand. The functions of each are used to explain the link (Olaniyi, 2001; cited in Banjo, 2023) Structural functionalism has the following basic major assumptions:

(i) Society has fragments of structures and their functions work independently and inter-dependently. Thus, there is a clear difference between the ideal function of any organization or societal component and its real function in society.

(ii)   There is a relation between a political structure and its function and it may be

influenced by certain factors in its function or malfunctioning.

(iii) Society or the political system should be studied using the real function it is performing and not the proposed or ideal function which may not be applicable in some given conditions.

(iv) The political system or the nature of a society determines the structure and functions of organizations and their systems and subsystems. For example, an advanced democratic society might have a better structure that functions accordingly than backward democratic or developing democracies.

Application of the Theory

The theory is appropriate for this study since it identifies the functions built into democratic institutions and states. And these institutions might be thought of as a system of structures, each serving a different purpose. More importantly, the safety and sustainability of these institutions are heavily reliant on the practices and protocols connected to their given roles. However, the given functions also have a role in the institutions' demise and/or failure. As witnessed in African nations like Nigeria, where the political establishment uses election umpires to torpedo electoral processes for their self-serving interests, these elements can make or break the socio-political climate of the state, raising concerns about institutional weaknesses in governance.

The institution which this work is studying is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In Nigeria, elections are supervised by the Independent National Electoral Commission. It was founded in 1998, not long before Nigeria's military government gave way to a civilian one during the election campaign (Banjo, 2023). For the election to be credible in Nigeria, it largely depends on the actions and performance of the INEC. According to Ikhenoba (2023), the goal of INEC is to function as an independent and effective Election Management Body (EMB) to conduct free, fair, and credible elections for a long-lasting democracy in Nigeria. By achieving Nigerians' objectives, it hopes to rank among the top Election Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide. But the real question is: "Has INEC changed its strategy to hold fair elections that would support Nigeria's budding democracy?". This corresponds with the first assumption of the structural Functionalism theory, which states that 'Structures in society are fragments, and their functions are interdependent and independent. Thus, there is a definite distinction between an organization's or societal component's ideal role and its actual function in society". Before the 2023 general elections, INEC promised Nigeria a free, fair, and credible election. Nigerians accepted the use of BVAS for accreditations and

uploading of results as they believed that it would make a difference in our elections, but Nigerians faced disappointment in the actual reality of the use of BVAS. According to Acheampong (2023), INEC overpromised and later under-delivered on her promises. From our first research question on the use of BVAS for accreditation, INEC might have succeeded in eliminating multiple voting, and impersonation with the use of BVAS, but the same BVAS ended up disenfranchising many on the day of election. This is a result of many factors ranging from the malfunctioning of the machine to lack of training by electoral officers, and many other factors. This corresponds with the second assumption of this theory that 'There is a relation between a political structure and its function and it may be influenced by certain factors in its function or malfunctioning'. Disenfranchisement is also a form of electoral malpractice, thus Ikhenoba (2023) raised the question, but did the BVAS eliminate all forms of electoral malpractice?

The second research question is on the use of BVAS for uploading results. Both the second on fourth assumptions of the Structural-functionalism theory can be used to analyse the hypothesis of this research question. First was that there were both human and technological factors that made electoral officers fail to upload the result online with the BVAS as stipulated by INEC. Prof. Mahmood Yakubu's special adviser, Prof. Mohammad Kuna, claims that it is difficult for anyone to tamper with the results that are uploaded to IReV via BVAS due to the electronic device's design (Ikhenoba, 2023). The failure of INEC to fulfil its promise might have made the electorate lose faith in its credibility and also plugged the state into crisis and other post-election violence which they experience now in Plateau state. However, the analysis of this study will either accept or reject this hypothesis.

Hypotheses

1. The use of BVAS for accreditation did not reduce electoral malpractice during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau State.
2. The failure to use BVAS in uploading results from polling units by INEC increased the chances of Post-Election Violence in Plateau State.

Research Design

This study shall employ the ex-post-facto research design which according to Kellinger, (1968, p.360) is the research in which the independent variable or variables

have already occurred and in which the researcher starts the observation of a dependent variable or variables. He then studies the independent variable in retrospect for their possible relations to, and effect on, the dependent variable or variables. In other words, the researcher establishes a causal relationship between an outcome (dependent variable) and a possible cause(s) (independent variable) that took place in the past. It is researched based on events that have already taken place, hence, its attribution to "after the fact". Thus, the possible causes $X1, X2, X3……$ bringing about a particular outcome, Y cannot be manipulated by the researcher.

The ex-post facto research design is represented below:

| R | | B_1 | | B_2 | | B_3 | X | | A_1 | | A_2 | | A_3 |
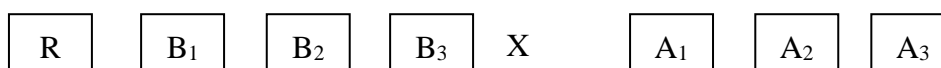
Where

| O | = Observation |

| R | = Random assignment of subjects to experimental groups and random assignment of experimental treatments to experimental groups |

| X | = Independent experimental variable which is experimentally manipulated |

| Y | = Independent experimental variable |

| B | = Before observation |

| B | = After observation |

The analytical routine involved in testing the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y) is based on concomitant variation. This is to be demonstrated that (X) is the factor that determines (y). This implies that whenever (X) occurs, there is a likelihood that (Y) will follow later. The criteria for inferring causality have been summarized by Seltiz, Jahoda and Cook (1977), as follows:

a) Co-variation between the presumed cause and the presumed effect.
b) Proper time order with the cause preceding the effects.
c) Elimination of plausible alternative explanations for the observed relationship.

Thus, our study aimed at explaining whether the use of BVAS for accreditation and also for uploading of results during the election(X) each undermines and impacts negatively on electoral malpractice and post-election violence in Plateau state(Y), is an ex-post factor research as the likely cause (X1, X2) are facts that have already occurred and can no longer be manipulated by using an experimental manner. We hence, hypothesize that X1, X2= Y. where the Xs represents the likely causes (the use of BVAS for accreditation and failure to fully implement the use of BVAS in uploading of results from polling units by INEC) and Y represents the outcome (Electoral Malpractice and post-election violence) in Plateau state.

Method of Data Collection/Data Analysis

The study shall rely on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. For our primary source, we shall rely on the survey method of data collection using documents, and in-depth interviews. Because respondents are reporting themselves by talking about themselves or revealing themselves in surveys, they are also known as self-report methods. According to Okeke, Orji, and Aniche (2014), survey methodologies include (i) questionnaires and (ii) interviews. Hence, we will source our primary data with the use of a Key Informant Interview (KII). We interviewed 3 officers of INEC in Plateau state, we also identified and interviewed 4 strong party members of the APC, PDP, and LP in the state. Making 15 interviews, the respondents will be selected through purposive sampling, which includes party stakeholders and top INEC officials in the state. For our secondary sources of data collection, we adopted the documentary method of data collection. Data gathered from these aforementioned sources were used to evaluate the information on the use of BVAS for the gubernatorial election in Plateau state. To analyze the corpus of qualitative data generated for this study, we adopted content analysis.

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LOGICAL DATA FRAMEWORK

Research questions	Hypothesis	Variables	Main indicators	Data sources	Method of data collection/research design	Method of data analysis/theoretical framework
1. Did the use of BVAS for accreditation reduce electoral malpractice during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau state?	The use of BVAS for accreditation did not reduce electoral malpractice during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau state	(X) The use of BVAS for accreditation	1. Fingerprint identification 2. Facial capturing for identification	- Oral Interview - Books -Newspaper - Magazine - Journal - Articles - Internet	In-depth oral interviews for the primary source and Documentary method for the secondary source	Content Analysis/ Structural-Functionalism Theory.

		(Y) Electoral malpractice during the gubernatorial election in Plateau state	1. Disenfranchise ment 2. Under age voting 3. Voter impersonation 4. Third-party manipulation			
2. Did the failure to use BVAS in uploading results from polling units by I+NEC increase the chances of post-election violence in	The failure to use BVAS in uploading results from polling units INEC increased the chances of post-election violence in	(X) The failure to use BVAS to upload results from polling units by INEC.	1. Network failure 2. human manipulation of the result 3. system hacking	- Oral Interview - Books -Newspaper - Magazine - Journal	In-depth oral interviews for the primary source and Documentary method for the secondary source	Content Analysis/Struct ural-Functionali sm Theory

Plateau state?	Plateau state	(Y) Post-election violence in Plateau state.		- Articles - Internet		
			1. attacks on Communities in Mangu LGA 2. Post-election litigation between the APC and the PDP governorship candidates 3. Violence leading to the disappearance of 14 BVAS for			

			Jos North local government			

EMPIRICAL VERIFICATION

Hypothesis 1. The use of BVAS for Accreditation and Electoral Malpractice during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau State

In this section, we will analyze the first hypothesis of this study, which is the tentative answer to the first research question. The discussion will be under the following sub-themes: Poor configuration of the device and disenfranchisement of electorates; Poor knowledge of the device by INEC officials and third-party manipulation.

Fingerprint recognition and Disenfranchisement

The BVAS is an electronic machine, and as such requires adequate configuration before and after use. After the Presidential election held on February 25, it was noticed that some of the BVAS machines used for the Presidential election were not configured for the gubernatorial election. In Plateau state which is our area of concentration, there were recorded cases of poor configuration of BVAS machine; this was captured by Adinoyi (2023) on ThisDay online news, when he noted that poor turnout and improper configuration of BVAS mar election in Plateau state. According to him, the result of the fieldwork he undertook showed that Initial difficulties were encountered at the Rabin voting unit on Rukuba Road; nonetheless, the BVAS configuration still displays the date of the presidential election, which was held on February 25, 2023. The Returning Officer claimed that the BVAS's setting must have caused the problem. He returned the BVAS so that it could be set up properly. According to Obinne&Osuagwu (2023) To prevent fraud, BVAS was created to ensure transparent accreditation on Election Day.

Before the introduction of BVAS, the smart card reader that was used during the 2015 and 2019 elections was also not accrediting some registered voters, smart card reader is only used to capture the voters' card. Thus, BVAS came with another identification model, which includes, capturing fingerprints and faces. When BVAS was first used in 2021 for the bye-election in Delta State according to Donald (2023) some presiding officers complained that the machine had difficulties capturing the thumbs of some of the voters, especially the aged. This same scenario repeated itself in some polling units in Plateau state during the 2023 gubernatorial election, and this is mostly attributed to poor configuration. Findings from our correspondence unfolded that;

> *Some registered voters whose names were found on the voters' accreditation paper, were unable to vote because the BVAS could not capture their fingerprints, and also their faces, whereas the majority also, the BVAS was only able to capture their faces, and were unable to capture their fingers. Those whose faces were captured were allowed to vote, but those whose both fingers and faces could be captured were not allowed to vote (KII, 2023).*

The above report was given by 80% of those we interviewed. According to them, most of those who were not accredited also had their names omitted from the paper, while some of them waited till the end of voting to know if the BVAS could later recognize them, but to no avail (KII, 2023). It is known that without accreditation, no electorate will be allowed to vote, as it will not tally with the number of accredited voters that the BVAS records. It is in this vain that the PDP guber candidate in Plateau state has to tell his supporters never to vote without BVAS accreditation (Pwanagba, 2023). This is because any vote cast out of the BVAS accreditation will be counted as over-voting, and the 2022 Electorate Act empowered INEC to cancel elections where there is over-voting.

The scenario above implies that most registered voters were disenfranchised during that governorship election by not being accredited by the BVAS. A disenfranchisement is an act of depriving some of his or her rights, the franchise is the right of every citizen of Nigeria who is 18 years and above to vote and be voted for in an election. When any electorate who is duly registered is deprived of the right to vote, it could be classified as electoral malpractice. Electoral malpractice can be defined as illegal interference with the electoral process. It is also known as electoral fraud. It is illegal to deny any electorate the right to vote in any election under any circumstance, except the court declares such on strong ground. Electoral malpractice can be in the form of changing the information about the electorate, which renders them

unqualified to vote. According to information from our respondents on why some of the electorates were not accredited:

> *Before the election, the ruling party collected the PVC number from the registered voters, who are mostly youths, promising them empowerment. As such the number was used to buy their votes, so on Election Day some of them could not be accredited because their information had been manipulated (KII, 2023).*

Another response was that:

> *In the process of removing underage registered voters, INEC might have deleted the names of eligible voters from their list, which is also why there were records where some electorates did not even see their names on the registered list in the hard copy (KII, 2023).*

The above report represents that of 65% of the respondents we interviewed. From the analysis above, we deduced that due to the poor configuration of the BVAS, which is a human factor or human manipulation of the machine, most registered and eligible voters were denied the right to vote. This is evidence of electoral malpractice in the just concluded gubernatorial election in Plateau state. Saleeman (2022) recorded that during the Osun gubernatorial election; there were cases where BVAS could not capture both the fingerprints and faces of some electorates. Thus collaborates with this finding of this study.

Facial capturing and Third Party Manipulation

Due to a lack of critical analysis of the social environment in which these projects are transplanted, the majority of ICT development projects and initiatives in developing nations encounter implementation, sustenance, and maintenance challenges (Obinne & Osuagwu, 2023). Nigerians are still learning the use of modern technology; the society has not fully transformed into a technological society like in Europe, Asia, and America. Developing nations like Nigeria adopt Western ideologies, cultures, and technologies without first determining if their people have the intellectual capacity to understand and value these ideas. Rarely are due diligence investigations ordered to determine the viability of such foreign concepts.

Most of the party stakeholders we interviewed reported that part of the failure of BVAS in accreditation is a lack of training of the INEC ad-hoc staff. According to the respondent:

> *it took INEC officials more than 5 hours to synchronise the BVAS due to poor knowledge of the machine, this also happened during the Presidential election, which made voting start almost by 1 pm in some polling units. During the gubernatorial election, some officials were finding it hard to capture the faces of voters because they didn't know how to operate the device; in some polling units, locals were the ones helping the INEC officials operate the machine (KII, 2023)*

this inefficiency made the BVAS not to be fully implemented in capturing the faces of some electorates that came out to vote. Facial capturing is supposed to be the second means of identification if fingerprint recognition fails during accreditation, but it is unfortunate that almost in every polling unit there were up to 10 persons who came out to vote but could but, because even the facial capturing failed to identify them when fingerprint fails to recognize them (KII, 2023). This even caused a delay during the election.

This delay due to inefficiency by INEC reduces the trust people have in INEC and also increases the chances of electoral malpractice. According to Nnoruga (2023);

> *INEC lacked efficient planning and transparency during critical stages of the electoral process, while on election day trust in INEC was seen to further reduce due to delayed polling processes…(p.64)*

Although BVAS did not give room for multiple voting and to some extent impersonation; there were cases of third-party manipulation of voters' choice in some polling units. The report from our correspondence is that;

> *ruling party agents were using their influence and money to lure people into voting for their candidates during the gubernatorial election; voting buying was rampant because some of the voters insisted they would see cash because they could vote, and due to the cash crunch, only the rich party were able to get cash available and influence the decision of the voters in their favour (KII, 2023).*

According to Donald (2023), most voters were chased out of the polling units on Election Day because they refused to comply with what the electoral thug wanted them to do.

> *On election day, electoral officials at some polling units were exhibiting acts of incompetence, making the locals crowd the table and ballot box, thus no more secrecy for anyone who wanted to cast his or*

her vote, most people were influenced into voting for a particular candidate (KII, 2023).

From the analysis above, we can deduce that due to poor knowledge of the use of BVAS at the election date, there were indicators of third-party influence and manipulation, which is a form of electoral malpractice. This is why Onuragu (2023) wrote that Election-related fraud is known to occur occasionally in Nigerian elections since the country is not vigilant or frank in identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting those who do it. The majority of Nigerian citizens do not turn out to vote during the elections as a result of this mockery and negative impact on the entire process as a lighthearted event. It then means that the introduction of BVAS has not been able to eliminate electoral malpractice, and may not if proactive measures are not put in place to prosecute offenders. We can now accept the hypothesis to this first research question that states that; the use of BVAS for accreditation did not reduce electoral malpractice in Plateau state. This calls for improvement in the use of BVAS for subsequent elections.

Hypothesis 2. The use of BVAS for uploading Results and Post-Election Violence in Plateau State

This section is set to interrogate the second hypothesis of this study. Our discussion will be anchored on the following sub-themes: System hacking and Post-Election litigation; Poor network and Tension at Polling Units leading to the Disappearance of the BVAS machine.

System hacking and Post-Election litigation between PDP and APC Governorship candidates in Plateau state

The BVAS as earlier said is an electronic device, which at some point uses the internet, and is also prone to internet manipulation. The BVAS was meant to upload the result of the election electronically at the polling units after voting. The INEC promised Nigerians that the result of the outcome of 2023 elections will be transmitted electronically at the polling units. However such was not the case in all the polling units during the gubernatorial election in Plateau state. The IReV is a portal connected to the INEC server, it is prone to human manipulation, even by INEC itself, taking the clue from what happened during the Presidential election, where most people accused INEC of manipulating the result in IReV, INEC could have done better during the gubernatorial election, but it was not so (Jaiyeola, 2023). According to our respondents:

After the election on the 18th of March, the result we uploaded was replaced with forged results, especially that of the House of Assembly election; INEC could not explain the discrepancy in the election result (KII, 2023).

It is also possible that a third party can hack into the portal to manipulate the uploaded result. According to Obinne and Osuagwu (2023), Cyber-attacks have become a brand-new menace to global information technology infrastructure. As a result, INEC would be vulnerable to cyber-attacks due to the use of the internet for electronic voting. As real as the dread of desperate politicians stealing ballot boxes and rigging the polls is the threat of cyber-attacks in e-elections. Even the world's most powerful nations are not immune to it. Hacking of the IReV system can also be an attempt by big political parties to change the result in their favour. This is what Jombo and Bamigbose (2023) were trying to say when they noted that, Nigeria's electoral process is frequently marred by rigging attempts or actual rigging. This unhealthy behaviour is commonly engaged in by election officials, security workers, and party officials, usually in exchange for monetary rewards. Election results frequently fall short of voter expectations, which can be a breeding ground for unresolved problems. No wonder there has been post-election litigation concerning the outcome of the gubernatorial election. If there was transparency with the result uploaded, there wouldn't be a need for litigation.

The APC governorship candidate in Plateau state rejected the outcome of the gubernatorial election (Audu, 2023). When we interviewed officials of the PDP, APC, and Labour Party, all sides agreed that there were cases of rigging and result manipulation. According to them;

The results uploaded to the IReV were manipulated by the opposition; BVAS were stolen after the voting to alter the result there, we saw discrepancies between the actual result that we have in our hand, and the one declared by the returning officer (KII, 2023).

Post-election litigation breeds conflicts among opposition parties and can lead to other post-election violence, but this can only be when the process or outcome of the election is devoid of people's mandate. According to Jombo and Bamigbose (2023), every election in the nation has had its results tainted by electoral petitions brought about by-election cheating, which over time leads to tensions and their associated effects on national security. A transparent and credible election does not raise doubt, and the people's mandate is respected, there will not be a need for litigation.

Poor Network and Tension Arising at Polling Units Leading to Disappearance of BVAS Machine in Jos North LGA

Another issue that put the credibility of the gubernatorial election in Plateau state into question is the inability of the BVAS to upload the result at the polling unit due to poor network. According to Nnaruga (2023), the failure to transmit the election results was one of the main factors that worked against a free and fair election in Nigeria in 2023 in terms of transparency. The issue of the poor network was the major challenge faced when trying to upload the result to the IReV. Our correspondence said that in some cases, the INEC official with some of the locals has to drive to a distant place to get the network to upload the result. In other instances, the electoral officials were allowed to go with the result and upload it at their local government office, whether they did or not, nobody from those polling units knew about it. This curse led to post-election violence, which led to the disappearance of some BVAS machines.

> *The INEC employee from the ICT Department (HOU Communication System), Mr. John Sokzen Cornelius, the technical supervisor for Jos North Local Government, stated that 14 BVAS were missing and that 14 officials from 14 Polling Units (PUs) had fled with our supplies, including BVAS. The problem was raised and has now reached a national level (Bere, 2023).*

When we interviewed key party agents about the missing BVAS, they reported that the ruling party wanted to use the UNEC officials to rig the election, thus, they first created chaos at those polling units and absconded with the BVAS machine. But those BVAS machines were later recovered, and INEC officials were also arrested, and to be prosecuted. Our correspondence said;

> *The ruling party wanted to rig the election with the snatched BVAS but was disappointed when the PDP candidate was declared the winner, so they had no choice but to bring out the missing BVAS after 4 days (KII, 2023).*

According to Bere (2023), The 14 Bimodal Voter Accreditation Systems (BVAS) that vanished and reappeared during the governorship race alarmed the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) branch in Plateau. It was claimed that a member of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) planned to "disappear" with the voting equipment along with politicians. On March 21, 2023, in Jos, the party's state chairman, Chris Hassan, was accused during a press conference. The INEC officer claimed that there was a riot at those polling units that made him run away

with that machine. However, the central issue is that the inability of the BVAS to successfully upload the result due to poor network is part of the reason for this snatching of the BVAS machine. From the analysis above, we accept the second hypothesis of this study which states that the failure to fully implement the use of BVAS in uploading results from polling units by INEC led to post-election violence in Plateau state.

CONCLUSION

After a thorough analysis that relied on the two hypotheses of this study. This study discovered that; the use of BVAS for accreditation during the gubernatorial election in Plateau in the just concluded 2023 election, may have helped to remove voter impersonation and multiple voting, but on the other hand. It led to disenfranchisement and third-party manipulation. This is because of the inability of the electoral officers to adequately operate the device, and the failure of the device to capture the face and fingerprint of most registered voters in most of the polling units.

Secondly, this study discovered that there were cases of result manipulation, rigging and post-election litigation, as a result of the failure of INEC to upload the result of the election at the polling unit to the IReV. The failure to do so was based on poor network, and system hacking among other things.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the conclusions reached during this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. INEC must ensure thorough education on the advantages of the electronic accreditation process to prevent a repeat of the difficulties encountered during the deployment of the technology.
2. INEC should also build a server against hacking, and also include, and make provisions where the result can be computers direct to the BVAS and not uploaded as a picture. They should also ensure electoral offenders are prosecuted accordingly.

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