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Impact of Electronic Card Reader Machines on Election Credibility in Nigeria: A Study of 2019 General Elections

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ABSTRACT
Since the failure of Nigeria's first 1964 General elections, she has been battling with how to run free and fair elections, hence the introduction of electronic card reader machines in 2015. The Independent National Electoral Commission had high hopes that the machines will contribute to the credibility and integrity of Nigerian elections. However, the challenges encountered during the elections as a result of the malfunction of the card reader machines in many polling units had posed many questions seeking for answers as to whether Nigeria had gotten the solutions to the process of elections transparency. This paper was focused on the 2019 elections when INEC repeated the use of card machines. Data collection was based on primary and secondary sources and descriptive survey design was used to analyze data collected. The study applied decision making theory as the theoretical framework. The hypotheses tested are; card reader machines malfunction affected election credibility in Nigerian general elections. No power source and battery drainage contributed to election non credibility in Nigeria and INEC electronically illiterate officials and illiterate voters unable to use the card reader devices affected election credibility in Nigeria. The study recommends that arrangement for durable and functional card reader device should be the interest of the INEC. The use of electronic card readers should be suspended because of the country's power predicament.

KEYWORDS: Electronic card readers, credibility, transparency, integrity, electorate or voters.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first Nigerian General Election after independence was conducted in 1964 with the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) against the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) which led to constitutional crises because of electoral irregularities. As a result of the overwhelming election irregularities and inflated figures, intercepted resulted led into the destruction of lives and property. Consequently, decision was taken to cancel the elections and hold fresh federal elections in the Eastern Region and Regional elections in the West. In November 1965, still the Western elections created crises in the country as a result of massive and unprecedented rigging, rioting and killings. The violence continued until the military coup which enthroned military rule in the country from January 15, 1966; to May, 1999 and beyond.

Since then Nigeria has been battling with the problem of how to get free and fair elections conducted. This is very important for enthroning real democracy and for empowering the citizens to make the leaders accountable.

More so, the collapse of the First and Second Republics and the abortion of Third Republic through the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election, are clear indices of irregularities of elections in Nigeria.

General Elections are elections conducted in the federation at large for Federal and State positions; [1]. These elections also include those of Local governments since Nigeria has three tiers of governments. The 2019 general elections happen to have involved four major opposition Parties that came together to form a very strong party called the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in order to challenge the dominance of the ruling party of All Progressive Congress APC in the polity. Election became the only game in town shaping and reshaping public discourse and political actions, [2]. As the Nigerian quest for free and fair elections progressed interest into 2019, the country opted for the electronics card reader machines which are ICT equipments, used in the 2015 but failed. It was supposed to be an anti-rigging biometric device used to reduce election irregularities of the country.

The card reader machines were introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2015 Nigerian General Elections, though they were opposed by many politicians. They felt that the country was not developed and ripe enough for such high level of technological equipment to be used for elections. The public outcry against the card reader machines would have been enough to discourage INEC from using it in 2019. However, because of INEC's confidence in the efficacy of modern technologies in achieving quick results as it works in the highly developed countries that in 2019 have all the infrastructures layed down, INEC still introduced it against all odds. Moreover, section 52 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) proscribed

electronic voting (e-voting). The card reader is a form of identification, not a means of casting ballots in elections.

However, irrespective of the 2015 experienced glitches in card reader malfunctionality, such as undue delay in the accreditation process, rejection of permanent voters cards, inability to capture the biometrics from finger tips in 2015 general elections, the INEC still went ahead with these card reader machines in 2019 general elections.

According to [3], "these technological solutions, such as electronic voting machines, polling station web-cams and biometric identification equipment, offer the promise of rapid, accurate and ostensible tamper-proof innovations that are expected to reduce fraud in the processes of registration, voting or vote count aggregation". Biometric identification machines authenticated the identity of voters using biometric markers, such as fingerprints, that are almost impossible to counterfeit. The technologies are particularly useful in settings where governments have not previously established reliable or complete paper-based identification system for their population, [4]. Different kinds of biometric infrastructure have been used in some African states like Ghana, Mali, Kenya, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Senegal, Zambia, Malawi and Mauritania with varying degrees of success, to improve transparency in recent elections. It was left for Nigeria to know how developed these African countries are which enabled them to successfully use these reader machines.

Consequently, Nigeria recorded many challenges in the course of using card reader machines which have been mentioned above. The challenges affected the integrity, quality and management of the 2015 elections.

The quality of any election depends on the positive management and good outcome of results. This is always very important for sustained democracy if there should be very low degree of fairness, lack of accuracy and openness in the electrical processes. If the integrity of the elections is doubted, it could result to the democratic society being questioned and threatened. [5] argue that public faith in the integrity of the electoral system is a cornerstone of democratic governments. Therefore, a legitimate electoral process and public confidence in democratic government depends on both the actual and perceived integrity of an election; [6].

Statement of Problem

Many technology experts in Nigeria and outside who monitored the elections were full of praise for INEC insisting on the use of card reader machines saying that it was the best that had happened to the Nigerian electoral process in the area of election transparency.

[7]. As a result of this, the INEC was motivated to use it again in 2019 general elections which worsened the election irregularities more than the 2015 past elections. How transparent could the use of card reader machines be where the stake holders in Nigerian politics and governance were engaged, as usual, in all manner of electoral malpractices such as triple voting, more impersonation, manipulation and falsification of results, snatching and running away with ballots boxes?

There were several electoral clashes, crises and violence that often forced the government to attend to issues of election irregularities with some urgency.

Why should INEC be hailed for election transparency when they were records of card readers malfunctioning in several polling units which resulted in the rejection of permanent voters cards (PVC) by card reader machines? There were several cases of machine inability to capture the biometrics from finger tips, irregular capturing, fast battery drainage and no replacement, power failure or no electricity at all and the generators had fuel shortages. Above all, some terrains to most remote villages where the majority of voters dwell were simply inaccessible and the majority of illiterate women were unable to use the machines.

In view of the statements of shortcomings above, the following research questions are asked;

i. How does card reader malfunction affect election credibility in Nigeria?

ii. How does power failure, no power at all and fast battery drainage contribute to lack of election credibility in Nigeria?

iii. How does illiterate electorate unable to use the card readers affect election credibility in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

i. Card reader machines malfunction affected election credibility in Nigeria

ii. Power failure or no power at all and fast battery drainage contributed to election non credibility in Nigeria.

iii. Illiterate electorates unable to use card reader machines affected election credibility in Nigeria.

II. Literature Review

The Card reader is a technological device set up to authenticate and verify on the election day, a permanent voter's card (PVC) issued by Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). The device uses a cryptographic technology that has infra-low power consumption, with a single core frequency of 1.29H2 and an

Android 4.2.2 operating system [8]. In other words, the INEC card reader is designed to capture information contained in the embedded chip of the permanent voter's card issued by INEC to verify the authenticity of the voter's card (INEC) and also carry out a verification of the intending voter by matching the biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with the ones stored on the PVC [9].

The ability of the card reader machine to perform the aforementioned functions as well as keeping a tally of the total number of voters accredited at the polling unit and forwarding the information to a central database served over a Global System for Mobile (GSM) network, makes the card reader most welcome at this point in time in the nation's electoral history, Engineering Net Team (2015).

The fundamental bases for this technologically based device in 2019 general election by INEC were to mitigate electoral malpractice, allow electoral votes count, authenticate and verify voters, reduce litigations arising from elections, to ensure reliability and to protect the integrity and credibility of the election. Others include, to audit results from polling units across the country and to ensure accountability which is the basis of democracy, [10].

Irrespective of these laudable merits and goals of the card reader machines, it generated debates among stakeholders. [11] believes that the card reader machine procedure had the capacity to prevent and minimize rigging in the sense that there would not be multiple voting while the opponents believe that in the peculiar circumstances of the Nigerian situation, the card reader was designed to assist a certain political party to win the general elections. [12], irrespective of the machines non-functionality.

Above all, apart from the malfunctioning of smart card readers which led to the manual voting, the inability of the technological device to authenticate PVC, and the indiscretion of INEC officials to allow unaccredited voters to vote in some voting locations, the structural and systemic failure of the Nigeria state relating to the crises of election management contributed to the challenges encountered in the use of smart cards in the 2019 electoral process. All these factors undermined the integrity of the elections [13].

The arguments above notwithstanding, moreover, the card reader machines malfunctioned in the field in several polling units across the country, a situation that caused undue delay and made many registered voters to be disfranchised in 2019 general elections. Consequently, there were rejections of permanent voters card (PVC) by the card reader machines in many polling units, irregular capturing and inability to capture the biometrics from finger tips. In most cases, people had to scrub their hands on the ground just to ensure that the device recognized their finger prints, [14]. Multiple capturing whereby one person could vote many times as he wanted occurred. Furthermore, there were cases of impersonation where voters voted with cards of the dead ones. Inappropriate recording was observed where card readers recorded less or more voters numbers than originally registered.

Nevertheless, there was no proper handling of the cards during elections which caused the protective film of some card readers to remove, leading to the impossibility of the device to detect thumbprints.

No alternative power sources were available and battery drainage was rampant. The card reader devices battery was supposed to last longer and if drained, it could be recharged. It was not possible because the INEC engineers who imported and certified the machines compromised. They were not able to decode the inbuilt security code and were also unable to check how strong the battery was before receiving it. In such cases, INEC officials had to rush with the machines back to the headquarters for assistance. In many cases, the devices were unable to function since there would be no help. We could imagine the time, resources and energy spent including emotional and work stress not quantified. Some communities or villages in Afikpo North Local Government of Ebonyi State have never seen electricity in the last six years nor were there generators for INEC officials to charge the card reader's batteries when drained.

Following the wide spread failure of card readers, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood, the INEC 2019 chairman, changed the guideline and approved the use of manual accreditation procedures in the areas where the card reader machines malfunctioned, [15]. However, according to [6], the extent to which this announcement also made in 2015, had inadvertently opened the flood gate for electoral fraud, was yet to be fully analyzed. Actually, it opened the gate of fraud for those polling units to commit fraud as they could and that is why [10] observed that the Nigeria electoral system witnessed plethora of irregularities and incidents of malpractices such as over voting, result sheets mutilation, alteration of results, snatching of ballot boxes among others. This is irrespective of the INEC giant stride towards improving the Nigerian electoral system, both in 2015 and 2019; failed giant strides indeed.

III. Theoretical Framework

The study applied decision-making theory. One of the pioneers of this theory is Herbert A, Simons. He regarded decision-making theory as a cognitive process resulting in the selection of a belief or a course of action among several possible alternative options.

Decision-making means the adoption and application of rational choices for the management of private business or governmental organizations in an efficient manner, and denotes the information of general policy for

the management of organizations. It is a theory of how rational individuals should behave under risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, it is a process of reasoning based on assumptions of values, preferences and beliefs of the decision-makers. Every decision making process produces a final choice, which may or may not prompt action.

However, decision making is a very important part of an organization, and former President Goodluck Jonathan being a rational person and a democrat respected the opinion of the masses, based on the fact that Prof. Jega, the INEC boss had convinced Mr. President to use electronic card readers in 2015. The conviction included amongst others; that electronic and card reader devices could transform Nigerian elections and will engender transparent, credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria's electoral system. The president gave the INEC chairman the free hand to conduct the elections using the new technological device called card readers for the first time without proper checking of the implications that will occur during and after the elections; because the President was fully involved, he was voted out.

Coincidentally, President Buhari not minding the great negative impact the electronic card readers had in 2015, still asked the current chairman of INEC, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood, to use the same device in 2019 just because it favoured him, the President Buhari.

The initial decision made by President Goodluck in 2015 was not appropriate knowing the Nigerian environmental infrastructure, the Nigerian people's culture of ethnicity and corruption which would have been sorted out before dabbling into using electronic card reader devices.

Illiterate INEC officials and illiterate Electorates.

It was observed that the training given to adhoc and INEC staff on the use of the card readers was little or no training, which added to creating more problems. The venues provided for the training were overcrowded and not conducive. There were little or imperfect demonstrations on how to use the card readers. For instance, two card reader machines were provided for a class of over hundred trainees. Almost all the trainees did not have the opportunity to practice on how to operate the device. Moreover, in the Nigerian culture where "ima madu" who knows who reigns; many that received the half-baked training were replaced with those that had no idea of the use of the machines. All these led to the mishandling of the card reader devices which caused more damages than good results.

Furthermore, the illiterate electorates contributed highly to the failure of this devices because Nigeria's highest number of illiterates reside in the rural areas where the level of education is very poor and some never attended at all. These illiterate electorates were never catered or provided for by the INEC by moving their teams' to these villages for proper orientation and education on the use of the devices. Meanwhile, INEC rather hurried to test-run the device for only 21 days before the commencement of the polls and in only 12 states out of 36 states consisting 225 polling units. Imagine the mockery. Out of 119, 974 polling units, only 225 polling units were used for the hurried test-running of the device, not to talk of the voting parties. Yet all these challenges of 2015 were not corrected before the 2019 general elections hence grave challenges from card readers confronted Nigeria in the 2019 general elections. Also, the International Foundation of Electoral System Support for Electoral Reforms project" produced two smart card readers for verifying and authenticating voters and another on the process of e-transmission of results, (Training Nigerian Poll Workers on smart card readers 2019). Following this, [4] argues that the application of card readers in 2019 general elections nonetheless posed some draw backs which reflected in the conduct and management of elections. Even after the conduct of the February 23, 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections, there were allegations that the INEC was selective in its use of card readers in its conduct of the election.

These allegations led to speculations that INEC may be forced to jettison their use in March 9, 2019 Governorship, State Houses of Assemblies and Federal Area Council Elections which they denied. But the INEC still went ahead with the malfunctioned card readers and messed up the results of the 2019 elections which enthroned PMB for a second time.

IV. Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed descriptive survey design using conservation and discourse analysis. These entailed the description of the phenomenon associated with the card reader devices. Primary and secondary data collections were used.

Population of Study

The population of the study and the area was Afikpo North Local Government of Ebonyi State Nigeria and the population was 156, 611 thousand [2].

Sample Size Determination

Sample size was determined using Taro Yamani formula of the 1973 mathematical model for selecting appropriate sample size. The sample size becomes 400 approximately.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Questionnaire Collection

Description	Afikpo	North
Quantity distributed	400	(100 %)
Quantity returned	393	98. 25%)
Quantity not returned	7	(1.75%)

Source: Computed from questionnaire results September, 2021

Table 1 shows that a total number of 400 (100) questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. A total number of three hundred and ninety three (393) (98.25) questionnaire were returned while seven, (1.75%) questionnaire were not returned.

Table 2: Bio Data of (Demographics) Respondents

Age		Afikpo North
a.	18-30	140 (35.61%)
b.	31-50	180 (45.81)
51- above		73 (18.58)

Education	Qualification
Illiterate	115 (28.75%)
FSLC	160 (40.%)
WAEC	70 (17.5%)
NND and above	65 (16.25%)

Age Brackets

Table 2: shows that one hundred and forty 140 (35.6) respondents were within the age brackets of 18-30 years. One hundred and eighty 180 (45.8) respondents were within the age bracket of 31-50 while 50 years and above were seventy-three 73 (18.58) respondents.

Educational Qualification

It was observed from table 2 that majority of the respondents were holders of first school leaving certificates (FSLC) that is one hundred and sixty (40.71) respondents. Illiterate respondents were one hundred and fifteen 115 (29.26) respondents. WAEC holders were seventy 70 (17.81) respondents and HND and above were sixty-five 65 (16.54) respondents.

Table 3: Description of Data on: Card Reader Malfunction and Election Credulity

Responses	Number of Respondents	
Yes	239	60.81
No	154	39.19
Total	393	100

Computations from questionnaire results September, 2021. Card Reader device Malfunction

In table 3, two hundred and thirty-nine 239 (60.81) respondents agreed that there was malfunction of card readers in the polling units in 2019.

Table 4: Description of Data on No power source for card reader devices

The INEC Officials had many challenges in recharging the card read devices when the battery drained.

Responses	Number of Respondents	
Yes	348	88.55%
No	45	11.45
Total	393	100

Source: computed from questionnaire results September, 2021

No power source for card readers devices.

In table 4, two hundred and forty eight 248 (88.55%) respondents asserted that INEC 348 (88.5%) officials had many challenges in recharging the card reader devices. Moreover, no electricity generator and spare batteries were available. Meanwhile, only forty-five 45 (11.45%) respondents response no which was insignificant.

Table 5: Data showing Illiterate INEC Officials and Illiterate Electorates

The voters were not given adequate orientations or training on how to use card reader devices

Responses	Number of Respondents	
Yes	361	91.86
No	32	8.14
Total	393	100

Computation from questionnaire September, 2021

Table 5 shows that three hundred and sixty-one 361 (91.86%) respondents agreed that the both the INEC staff and voters received little or no orientation or education while thirty-two 32 (8.14%) responded No to the elections table. These assumptions were defeated, because of the failure of the card reader devices.

No power source for card readers recharge.

The result of the analysis on table 4 showed that majority of the respondents 88.55% attested that the card reader devices batteries drained and there was no alternative power source to recharge. [7] argues that it was not possible for the recharge since the INEC officials were not given spare batteries. Electricity is a taboo in Afikpo North for over 6 years.

Furthermore, [1] attributed the battery problem to INEC engineers who imported the devices and were not able to decode inbuilt security code and to check how strong the batteries were before receiving them. Furthermore, during the 2015 general elections, the wide spread failure of card reader devices made Prof. Jega, the then INEC chairman to change the guidelines and approve the use of manual accreditation in the areas where the card readers were ineffective [14]. It is a very great shame for Nigeria going back to square one. That is why [5] said that the Jega's announcement inadvertently opened the flood gate for electoral fraud and the error is yet to be analyzed. In all these challenges, little or no effort was made to rectify the problems before 2019 general elections. Hence, a total failure was recorded and the expected transparency and credibility were not achieved which resulted to increase in tribunal cases after the 2019 elections.

Illiterate INEC Officials and Illiterate Voters

From the results of table 5, 91.86% of respondents agreed that the INEC staff and voters received little or no education and proper orientation concerning the use of the devices. In the case of adhoc and real staff of INEC, the venue provided for the training was overcrowded and not conducive with imperfect demonstrations on how to use the devices. Two card readers were provided for a class of over hundred trainees. There was no opportunity for them to practice and it was not practicable topeep. The complication becomes that the officials were novices with the machines of which they should have been masters. Invariably, there must be a glitch everywhere meanwhile, the voters were not different. The voters were not given any advocacy orientations or demonstration on how they were to use machines or as practice, they say makes perfect. Seeing the machines for the first time was on the Election Day in the polling units, for many had phobia if the card reader would harm them. Having the highest number of illiterates in the rural areas which records 90 million individuals who are functional illiterates (LLEM International, 2021) the INEC would have mapped out sufficient time for advocacy, orientation and demonstration of the card readers before the Election Day in 2019.

Furthermore, the INEC hurried the test run of card reader devices for only 21 days before the commencement of poll in only 12 states out of 36 states was not scientific enough and the number of state were small. The rural areas would have been the point of focus for INEC indeed.

V. CONCLUSION

Conclusion from the study shows that card reader device was introduced in Nigeria by INEC to mitigate electoral malpractice, authenticate and verify voters, reduce litigations arising from elections crises and to ensure reliability, integrity and credibility of elections in Nigeria. However, the malfunctional effects of the card reader aborted this laudable objective. Hence, the impact of card reader on election credibility on the 2019 general elections was negative, although the defaulted devices had elected PMB twice.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The card reader introduced by INEC was to give Nigeria credible election results but failed as a result of malfunction. The INEC management did not buy quality and durable machines for the 2015 and 2019 elections. However, INEC in future should make adequate arrangements for card readers that are very functional by test-running them properly before the elections proper.

No power source and battery drainage were challenges encountered. The use of electronics card readers should be suspended in Nigeria until Nigeria develops adequate necessary infrastructures that will enable smooth running of card reader devices. On a serious note, Nigeria should go back to the Option A4 Model of voting as advocated in 1993 by Prof. Humphrey Nwosu. That election was judged to be the best in Nigeria's history and it still remains the best till date even though it was annulled by IBB. Nigeria for now has not moved beyond 1993 in the electoral process.

Finally, education is the foundation of knowledge at every stage, as human beings keep on learning. The proper training of adhoc and INEC officials is very crucial in order to have full knowledge of the card readers and have full control of them in the field. Furthermore, there should be voters advocacy, orientation and proper demonstration of how cards should be used. Training of the INEC officials and voters should never be a hurried event.

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