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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BVAS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The goal of this content was to highlight the importance of BVAS to the Nigerian electoral process. Three research questions were developed and answered with the purpose of the study. Survey research designs were involved in the study. The sample for the study was 54 people in 18 villages of both districts of Kabba and Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State. 10 items of a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire were developed for obtaining data. The instrument was validated by 3 experts, 2 from INEC and 1 from Measurement and Evaluation. Cronbach alpha technique was used to determine the reliability of the coefficient of the instrument which yield a co-effective of 0.85 for the questionnaire. The instrument was administered to the respondents through two (2) questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics involving percentages. The study found that the BVAS aids in removing duplicate ballots, ghost voters, and fraudulent ballots. The improvements put into place, according to some, are a vaccine against election rigging and manipulation in our country. It was recommended that the findings of the study be utilized and therefore blending must be finished in INEC's national collation centre to further guarantee the complete transparency of the entire Nigerian election process.

Keywords: BVAS, IReV, INEC, The Electoral Process, Significance.

Introduction

The 2022 Electoral Act added more technical improvements to the country's electoral system. These technological developments should act as a stopgap to stop leaks in the democratic process. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, there have been seven general elections: 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2023. Each election has put the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigerian security apparatus to the test. Agi, U.K. (2012) However, it is crucial that they hold transparent, unrestricted, and fair elections. One of the most significant changes brought about by this act is the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System or BVAS for short. This is an innovative and inventive technique to run elections that are both

reliable and successful. This is because in most election cases, several purported irregularities and faults always turned into reasons for concern for the observers and other stakeholders. This change, therefore, made it necessary to immediately overhaul all of the steps involved in conducting our elections.

For instance, a 2015 study by the Commonwealth Observer Group, which was presided over by Dr. Bakili Muluzi, a former president of Malawi, suggested strengthening logistical planning and material delivery to prevent polling booths and the voting process from opening late. To reduce anxiety in the immediate aftermath of the election, "INEC should arrange to have reserve card readers at polling stations," and "INEC should also investigate ways to speed up the collation process to permit a timely announcement of results." Additionally, they urged INEC to build suitable maintenance capabilities and have adequate spare Smart Card Readers (SCRs) and technical support available for speedy deployment in light of the technological problems with SCRs. To verify that users are authorized to cast ballots at a particular polling location, the system is designed to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and verify people using fingerprint and facial recognition technologies. How is the BVAS put into practice? The voter's last name or the last six digits of their voter identification number are required to scan the barcode or QR code on the PVC using the BVAS.

It is possible to electronically submit voting unit (PU), registration area (RA), local government area (LGA), and state results using the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal. The BVAS consists of both hardware and software elements. The Android Operating System (OS), which is comprised of the essential software to do the several functions for which it is designed, is used to run the software component of the BVAS. The hardware section lists the actual parts of the BVAS. including the volume up/down button, microphone, LED flash, front- and rear-facing cameras, torch screen, fingerprint reader, USB Type C connector, speaker, SIM card slots, and device battery hidden under the back cover. Election Officials' Guide, 2023

Only hard work, lobbying, and the capacity to persuade can result in positive outcomes, but political parties and other civil society organizations are doing a better job of teaching and informing voters about the significance of engaging in politics and raising voter turnout. A candidate can only be optimistic about winning elections if they are certain of the public's support. A government can no longer easily impose its will on anyone. (Jamie H. 2017) said that it is no longer necessary to wait in line and establish traps at the collation centres to alter or swap the results of votes previously cast at the polling places. Collation-related anxiety, doubt, and crises have passed. The bulk of the work is completed at the polling locations, from where the results are electronically transmitted to the INEC server after the last vote has been cast. The new approach requires that election results be announced in front of everyone from the spot where they are entered and received when vote tallying is complete. Although each participating political party, security personnel, and the INEC would still receive handwritten copies of the findings, the immediate electronic communication, which was lacking in past exercises, is the important development in this case. In the several situation rooms set up by the various candidates, parties, security personnel, observers, and other monitoring groups, everyone will be able to see the results from all units. The accusation that the ruling party conspired with INEC to annul opposition party results in some districts is no longer true. This level of election monitoring, oversight, and law enforcement has served as a strong disincentive to any electoral malfeasance or fraud. Although getting here wasn't easy, the progress has

received a lot of praise. Election-rigging criminals must no longer feel comfortable with the new system since they can no longer win elections using legal means. Without a doubt, the tide is against them. INEC must have given substantial thought to the possibility of unethical attempts to subvert the new procedures and other technological manipulations and must have taken the necessary steps to make such activities exceedingly difficult or impossible.

Statement of the problem

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in its search to improve the credibility of election results in Nigeria introduced the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in the year 2023 general elections. This BVAS was introduced to replace the previous Card Reader which was configured to only identify and recommend people for voting on election day. The BVAS was however designed to be a game changer as it was configured to identify, authenticate and accredit prospective voters during elections. The device equally can record the number of accredited voters and to as well capture and upload result sheets for onward transmission to the IREF portal i.e., the INEC general portal at the headquarters. This research work, therefore, focuses on the impact and significance of BVAS in Kabba/Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State during the last general elections.

Results Viewing (IReV) Portal for INEC

IReV is an online platform for submitting, transferring, and making available to the public polling unit-level results. IReV makes the electoral process more transparent and honest by allowing users to sign up for personal accounts and track uploaded results. Anomalies between the polling units (PUS) that occur following the announcement of results and at the stage of result collation are one of the concerns noticed during the election process. Results can occasionally be taken, switched, or even destroyed at the voting site or even on the way to the collation centres.

The IReV internet platform receives, transmits, and publishes polling unit results. IReV allows users to register for personal accounts and follow uploaded results, which increases the voting process' openness and integrity. The disparities between the polling units (PUS) that show up after the results are declared and during the result, collation stage of the procedure are one of the issues with the electoral process around election time. At the polling place or while being transported to the collation centres, results can occasionally be stolen, switched, or even destroyed. The technology improves the process's accuracy, transparency, and trustworthiness while reducing human errors and delays in result collation. I, Samson. This is made possible by INEC, which also aids in addressing the ten most significant flaws in Nigeria's election result management system, including the fabrication of results sheets, the collation of fake results, the fabrication of the number of registered voters, the fabrication of votes at polling locations, and the fabrication of Samson I results. Results from polling units need to operate with some degree of openness to increase transparency and people's confidence.

Significance of BVAS

BVAS is the town's newest electoral sheriff. Apparently, (Ignatius L. 2021) says, "It has been described as a vaccine to deal with election rigging and manipulation in our country, dispelling rumours that 70% of the equipment does not perform efficiently. He clarified that BVAS was successful during the just-concluded governorship election in Anambra State. BVAS tends to

increase election credibility while also eroding public confidence in elections, particularly when electoral technology is flawed. Most significantly, electorates are highly susceptible to manipulation.

It's comparable to how technological advancements are saving Nigerian elections by eliminating leaks and fostering fair, transparent results. The importance of BVAS is highlighted in Naira Land Forum (2022) and the Guardians of Nigeria (2023). Connotations abound regarding the BVAS. When it comes to preventing an elected official from fixing the results, the BVAS acts like a superhero.

- **Better security**
By offering a two-step authentication method, BVAS increases the security of the voting process by lowering the possibility of impersonation and other fraudulent activities throughout the voting process.
- **Accuracy**
Due to the live broadcast of election results, inflated vote totals by dishonest INEC officials are less likely to have an external influence. The BVAS helps to ensure the accuracy of the election results by removing human errors and manual voting errors.
- **Inclusiveness**
This technique ensures that all qualified voters can cast a ballot, regardless of their biometric information, in a comfortable environment, even if they do not have access to their biometric data.
- **Voter verification that is accurate**
Multiple voting, the practice of casting multiple ballots at different polling stations, is not authorized because the BVAS uses biometric information to verify voters' identities. As a result, only registered voters with up-to-date biometric information are allowed to cast ballots.
- **Transmission of results in real-time**
It is possible to send election results in real-time from polling locations to the INEC server using the BVAS, making it challenging to tamper with the outcome of an election.
- **Technology use improves transparency**
The results are transparently communicated to the central server owing to the BVAS, which enables voters to confirm that their votes are correctly counted, and the use of technology in the voting process promotes transparency and decreases the likelihood of electoral fraud.
- **Bloodshed or reduced incidence**
The BVAS ensures that only eligible voters are accredited to vote and that the results are reliably recorded and aired in real time, lowering the probability of violence during elections. Election rigging is typically accompanied by conflict and tragedy.
- **Improved Public Trust**
A healthy democracy needs citizens to have faith in the electoral process for it to function effectively, which is why employing the BVAS to ensure a free, fair, and transparent election increases public confidence in the electoral process.
- **Avoid violence**
Go to a spot and start mass thumb-printing where they steal ballot boxes! The disadvantage

of this is that opponents can go to polling places where they are ahead in the polls and stir up trouble to void the results.

- Instant voting

Voter registration and voting are now feasible more swiftly than in the past thanks to BVAS, where you will all register to vote hours before casting your ballots, accelerating the voting process and reducing canvassing between the accreditation and voting times

Methods

The methodology adopted here is a survey research design. Ali (1996), specified that survey design is mainly concerned with describing events as they are, without any manipulation of what is being observed. While Nworgu (2006), Discoursed that survey design is a procedure used in obtaining data from a sample or relevant population that is familiar with the ideas relating to the objectives of a study through questionnaire or interview. This design is suitable because the study was carried out in one of the Local Governments Area of Kogi State.

The population of the study comprises the villages in Kabba /Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State.

The sample of the study was 28 villages in Kabba/Bunu L.G.A. However, there are two districts within L.G.A. The districts are Kabba and Bunu. In kabba district, there are a total of 15 villages while in Bunu, there are 13 villages based on the total number of villages in both districts, the researcher randomly selected 10 and 8 in Kabba/Bunu respectively. Therefore 18 villages and the total number of villages for the study. Therefore, three respondents each will be used in each of the selected villages and a total number of fifty-four (54) villages were used for the study.

The instrument used was mainly the questionnaire. It was designed to collect information from respondents on the significance of BVAS in the electoral process.

Questionnaire was administered to the same group at an interval of two weeks. The villages used were not involved in the main study. A correlation coefficient of 0.85 was obtained which indicates high correlation. Thereby making the instrument reliable for use in the study.

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics involving percentages.

To facilitate understanding and reading, the research results are described first, followed by the discussion section. Results from subtitles and discussion subtitles are presented separately. This section should be the largest part, at least 60% of the article's entire body.

3.1 Findings

This section presents the analysis of data collection and the result therein in tabular form. The data were collected from the responses of respondents in Kabba/Bunu L.G.A. Simple percentage was used to analyze data collected for the study. The higher the percentage of an item, the presence of such an item as a factor impact of BVAS in the electoral process.

Research Questions 1: What is the significance of BVAS to the electoral process?**Table 1:** Significance of BVAS

S/No	ITEM	SA	A	SD	D
1	BVAS positively impacted the 2023 general elections to achieve free and fair elections	20(37%)	17(31%)	10(19%)	7(13%)
2	It ensures the accuracy of the election results	19(35%)	20(37%)	12(22%)	3(6%)
3	It ensures that all qualified voters can cast a ballot	30(56%)	14(26%)	4(7%)	6(11%)
4	It improves transparency	49(90%)	4(7%)	1(3%)	0(0%)
5	There is no record of	30(56%)	14(26%)	4(7%)	6(11%)
6	BVAS is an advanced device of card reader	20(37%)	15(28%)	10(19%)	9(16%)
7	BVAS and IReV facilitate the aims they were intended for	30(56%)	10(19%)	8(14%)	6(11%)

Table 1 shows thirty-seven (37) out of fifty-four (54) representing 68% of the respondents agreed that BVAS positively impacted the 2023 general elections to achieve free and fair elections. While only seventeen (17) representing 32% of the respondents disagreed that BVAS positively impacted the 2023 general elections to achieve free and fair elections. This indicates that the impact of BVAS in Kabba/Bunu LGA is high.

However, thirty-nine (39) out of fifty-four (54) representing 72% of the respondents agreed that BVAS ensures the accuracy of the election results. With only fifteen (15) representing 28% indicating that BVAS does not ensure the accuracy of the election results. Similarly, forty-seven (47) out of fifty-four (54) respondents representing 87% agreed that it ensures that all qualified voters cast a ballot. Seven (7) representing 13% disagreed with this.

Out of fifty-four (54) respondents, fifty-three (53) representing 97% of the respondents agreed that the device improves transparency. Only one (1) representing 3% of the respondents disagreed.

Forty-four (44) out of fifty-four representing 82% agreed that there are no records of over-voting. While only ten (10) representing 18% do not agree that there are no records of over-voting.

Likewise, out of fifty-four (54) respondents, thirty-two (35) representing 65% agreed that BVAS is an advanced device of the card reader. While only nineteen (19) representing 35% disagreed that BVAS has been an advanced device of a card reader.

Moreso, forty (40) out of fifty-four (54) respondents, representing 75% agreed that BVAS and IReV facilitate the aims they were intended for. While only fourteen (14) disagreed to this.

Research Questions 2: What are the constraints to BVAS operations?**Table 2:** Constraints to BVAS operations

S/No	ITEM	SA	A	SD	D
1	BVAS could not record the thumbs and faces of certain voters	25(46%)	18(33%)	8(15%)	3(6%)
2	There were cases of the device not capturing where poll unit is not bright enough when taking the photo for the facial authentication	24(44%)	20(37%)	7(13%)	3(6%)
3	There were cases of malfunctioning of the devices	45(83%)	7(13%)	2(4%)	0(0%)
4	Deprived the transmission of results in some polling units	24(44%)	15(28%)	10(19%)	5(9%)

Table 2 presents the constraints to BVAS operations. Forty-three (43) out of fifty-four (54) respondents representing 79% agreed that BVAS could not record the thumbs and faces of certain voters. While only eleven (11) representing 18% disagreed.

In the same vein, forty-four (44) respondents out of fifty-four (54) representing 81% agreed that there were cases of the device not capturing where a poll unit is not bright enough when taking the photo for the facial authentication. While only ten (10) representing 19% disagreed.

Also, fifty-two (52) out of fifty-four (54) respondents representing 96% agreed that there were cases of malfunctioning of the devices. While only two (2) representing 4% disagreed.

Furthermore, thirty-nine (39) out of fifty-four (54) respondents representing 72% agreed that an unstable network deprived the transmission of results in some polling units. While only fifteen (15) representing 28% disagreed.

Research Questions 3: How is BVAS remarkably different from the Card readers?**Table 3:** BVAS is remarkably different from card reader

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D
1	BVAS remarkably different from the Smart Card readers	21(39%)	18(33%)	8(15%)	7(13%)
2	BVAS performs the combines functions of the Smart Card Reader	26(48%)	14(26%)	11(20%)	9(17%)
3	BVAS is capture three stages of the voting process	28(52%)	17(31%)	9(17%)	0(0%)
4	Card Reader only displayed the picture and scans fingerprint of the voters	25(46%)	15(28%)	10(18%)	4(8%)

Table 3 above shows that thirty-nine (39) out of fifty-four (54) representing 72% of the respondents agreed that BVAS is remarkably different from the Smart Card readers. While only fifteen (15) representing 28% of the respondents disagreed.

Also, forty (40) out of fifty-four (54) representing 74% of the respondents agreed that BVAS performs the combined functions of the Smart Card Reader. While only nineteen (19) representing 26% of respondents disagreed that BVAS performs the combined functions of the Smart Card Reader

Forty-five (45) out of the fifty-four (54) representing 83% of the respondents agreed that BVAS captures three stages of the voting process. While only nine (9) representing 17% of respondents disagreed that BVAS captures three stages of the voting process.

Similarly, forty (40) of out fifty-four (54) representing 74% of respondents agreed that Card Reader only displayed the picture and scanned fingerprint of the voters. While only fourteen (14) representing 26% of respondents disagreed Card Reader only displayed the picture and scanned fingerprint of the voters.

3.2 Discussions

The result of the findings as presented in table1 show that BVAS significantly impacted the electoral process in Kabba/Bunu LGA. The finding is in disagreement with (Ignatius L. 2021) who found that BVAS is a vaccine to deal with election rigging and manipulation in our country. And (Agi, U.K, 2012) said that they hold transparent, unrestricted, and fair elections with BVAS.

Table 2 shows some of the constraints to using BVAS in Kabba/Bunu LGA of Kogi State. This is in agreement with (Temitayo, 2023) who found that there were reports of presiding officers complaining about the machine's difficulties to capture the thumbs and faces of some of the voters.

Findings from Table 3 shows that BVAS is remarkably different from the card reader in Kabba/Bunu LGA of Kogi State. This is in agreement with (Election Official 2023) which stated that the system is made to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and verify users using fingerprint and facial recognition technology to show that the voters are allowed to cast ballots at a certain polling place.

4. Conclusion

As encouraging as it is to use BVAS, IReV, and other new electoral innovations introduced by INEC to increase electoral validity and boost public confidence in the electoral process, INEC needs to be reminded that these technologies are not infallible like all other technologies.

Using BVAS and other electoral technology might undoubtedly minimize election tampering and increase public trust in the outcomes, but there have been some issues with its application. In light of this, INEC must exercise extraordinary caution and thoroughness while putting BVAS and other cutting-edge voting technology into practice. S. and Gbenga. 2023: Gbenga. Without a doubt, hacking efforts grow as new technologies develop. With just the press of a pin, dishonest INEC employees may still manipulate elections and alter voter preferences despite advanced technology. In order to hold future elections, including the upcoming

governorship election in Kogi State in November 2023, BVAS must be entirely impregnable, according to INEC. Prior to the Kogi State Governorship election in November 2023, the electoral body could test the BVAS in a variety of scenarios to gauge its dependability, efficacy, security, and competence.

The BVAS required regular software updates and functional wideband access, which required 4G technology for simple downloads, according to experts in evidence knowledge. The absence of dependable 4G network coverage in many areas of the nation, especially in outlying areas, is another major barrier to implementing the new electoral technology. INEC needs to thoroughly examine BVAS to prevent the possibility of voter disenfranchisement. INEC must take into account the possibility of criminal attempts to undermine the new procedures and other technological manipulations to put in place the essential safeguards that will make such attempts exceedingly difficult or impossible.

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