



The Effect of Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) on Elections Credibility in Nigeria: A Study Of 2021 Anambra State Election, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The use of Bimodal Voter's Accreditation System (BVAs) as one of the biometric device introduced by INEC to ensure a free and fair election in the Anambra State 2021 election is a key to more credible and violence-free election that reposed confidence in our electoral system. The study particularly examined the level of awareness created about the use of BAVS in Anambra State 2021 election and examined the impact of BVAS on the credibility of Anambra State 2021 election. The Theory of Democracy was adopted. The research employed the quantitative research method in which descriptive survey design was used. A total of 389 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the registered voters and INEC officials who participated in the Anambra State 2021 election of which only 375 copies were retrieved and coded. The questionnaire data coded were analyzed using frequency distribution tables and percentages while the research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation. The study discovered that that awareness was sufficiently created on the use of BVAS in the 2021 Anambra State election. The study equally revealed that the use of the BVAS contributed positively to the success of the Anambra State elections in 2021. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that There should be awareness of BVAS to educate the large population of illiterates that do not understand the technology. There should be enlightenment on the need for massive turnout of voters and new computerized accreditation system should be introduced to avoid breaking down of machines or battery run out.

Keywords: *Political Party, Election, BVAS, Democratic Consolidation, Violence, Credibility, INEC, Voters.*

INTRODUCTION

Election is very important to any democratic nation; it is the faith and hope of every nation to decide the next level and phase of development. Elections provide individuals a chance to express their opinions and vote for the candidate whose objectives and views most closely align with their own (Samuel, 2023). Elections in Nigeria have been held since before the country gained its independence from British rule and it is still being held to this day. People's opinions and the right of everyone to participate in the electoral process should serve as the foundation for free and fair elections. In recent time Africa and West Africa especially has adopted the use of electronic device for elections, the paper ballot old fashioned method recorded a lot of errors such as malpractice and fraudulent activities by electorate and stakeholders. Majority of voters now have some element of trust on their vote casted (Samuel, 2023).

The majority of people in a democracy may affect changes by exercising their right to vote. When the government decides to have elections, the people get their chance to choose who leads them. Politicians have the liberty to convince the public to support them in order to win an election. Each political party must identify its policies and outline what they would carry out if elected (Samuel, 2023). New topics might be brought forward in public during elections. Nigerian citizens are free to run for office either alone or by founding a new political party if they want to bring about reforms that are not on the agenda of any of the parties (Ware, 2022).

The need to improve election and voting system give birth to the use of electronic method of election which gives rooms for actively participated sizable proportion of eligible citizens (Ware, 2022). This process is deliberate, under fair conditions, and with a range of political liberties. Unlike the paper method that does not capture a voter's bio data completely. In a democracy, people are able to organize citizens' associations and assemblies based on collaboration, sharing of interests, and participation. An election also provides a leader with the legitimacy to govern a people (Fredrick, 2023).

Without an election, a leader is basically forced on the people and this may lead to chaos. What justifications may be used to adopt authority, directions, decisions, and rulers, and what sources are used to lead the competent authority without a credible election to choose good leaders? Only election can guarantee a free and fair ground for the people's choice of leadership. A democratic election must be founded on the opinion and free will of people in order to work well. In other words, a democracy's legitimacy depends on the idea of its citizens' unfettered consent, which is frequently defined through the election process and the rules that provide candidates for office the power and capability to make choices (Fredrick, 2023).

The most important human and social needs and the main reasons for the formation of political society are peace, relaxation and individual and social interests. The majority of social theorists have concentrated on this endeavor to create a political structure. As a result, for human potential and abilities

to be realized in an individual's and society's environment as well as to advance human goals, order, peace, and stability in a political system are prerequisites (Tokumbo, 2022). On this foundation, one of the primary roles and responsibilities of a government is to maintain social peace and political stability. Elections are crucial because they have a big impact on societal harmony and political stability (Ajibola, 2022).

The regulation of the transfer of political power from one group to another is one of elections' most significant roles. As a result, the fear of totalitarianism, tyranny, or enjoying privileged privileges and an authoritarian political system mostly vanishes. Therefore, no one has the authority to cede sovereignty to a specific person or organization. Therefore, everyone in charge of society's political administration recognizes that only via fair elections can the people will be represented in the exercise of power. Another important reason for election is to Control power and preventing tyranny and dictatorship rulers has always been one of the main concerns of humanity throughout history. This includes averting tyranny and dictatorial rulers. Experience has shown that more patriarchal tyranny has been practiced by regimes that were established without a broad public basis and with no one's permission. Elections are one of the many ways that the alternation of power is possible in democratic systems (Ajibola, 2022).

The smart card reader was used on the previous elections in Nigeria, despite its effect it comes with some lapses and limitations, which are device failure, poor network coverage, and manipulation by some corrupt stakeholders these limitations are the major reasons for a better method of conducting elections, which has led to the use of BVAS in the Anambra State election 2021. Despite the use of smart card reader in the Anambra State 2021 election, there were still some flaws and issues that arise. This is because INEC on their part have not been steadfast in the quest to eradicate electoral malpractice from the electoral system. This necessitates this study to carry-out an analysis of the use of bimodal voter's accreditation system (BVAS) in Nigeria emphasizing on the Anambra State 2021 election.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the effort of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) to address and tackle the issues arising from the use of card reader, the device has in recent times witnessed the inability to deliver effectively and timely in some major polling units especially during the recently conducted elections. This was largely noticed in the 2015 general elections such as the Presidential, National Assembly and state elections and the Anambra State 2021 election. This is due to lack of elaborate awareness is one of the major problems of the card reader; large number of citizens especially in the rural communities is completely unaware of the proper use of the device. The lack of proper sensitization of the electorate and poor level of information about the card reader brought a lot of misconception on the use of the device. Despite the effort and role played by the smart card reader there is great need to confront the challenges which arised from the use of smart card reader during and after the elections. The need for an improved and better method of conducting elections, more advance technology was introduce such as the BVAS. However the card reader in most case breakdown in the pulling units and some of the device also malfunctioned on the day of the election.

The era of the use of smart card reader was face with a lot of problems and challenges such as duplication of Permanent Voters Card is now a culture that has come to stay in Nigeria including all form of electoral malpractice, therefore the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and authenticate voters – using the voter's fingerprint – in order to prove that they are eligible to vote at a particular polling unit. The BVAS was introduced to correct the lapses of the smart card reader in other to come to a credible and reliable electoral process.

Nigeria electoral procedure is eaten by the evil electoral stakeholders to influence the process and result by all means not thinking of the interest of the general populous, all the ruling party want to hold power for life because of personal interest, to achieve this, they plan out their approaches that will allow them manipulate the election result by hook or crook. Most politicians in Nigeria considered politics as do or die affairs, and it is peculiar with the developing countries just like Nigeria, some politicians come out to declare their interested to contest for position and want to win at all cost.

Though efforts has been made by the government and private individuals to avert this numerous problem(s) which hinder the effective use of smart card reader and BVAS, but all efforts made so far have proved abortive as the electoral system has continued to suffer deep. It is therefore hoped that this study will go a long way in addressing the aforementioned problems and proffering lasting solutions to the problems associated with the use of smart card readers and BVAS especially in the Anambra State 2021 election which this present study seeks to address.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on credible elections in Nigeria. The specific Objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the level of awareness created about the use of BAVS in Anambra State 2021 election;
- ii. determine the effect of BVAS on 2021 elections in Anambra State

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions below.

- i. What is the level of awareness created about the use of BAVS in Anambra State 2021 election?
- ii. What is the effect of BVAS on the credibility of 2021 election in Anambra State?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Digital Electioneering and the introduction of BVAS in Nigeria Election

The technology metrics such as reliability, user ability, and security of BVAS as key determinant in the adoption process was measured to ascertain the variance. The variable measured the readiness of INEC in terms of technology resources such as hardware, software and other ITC equipment and facilities which was made available in order to achieve the main aim of E-voting success such as the successful administration of Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS).

The Biomodal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) was first introduced in India, Brazil, Estonia, Philippines and was successful while other countries that have unsuccessfully tried or canceled to implement it are; Argentina, United States, Belgium, Canada, Japan, Mexico, France, Peru, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Guatemala, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Netherland, Germany, Paraguay, Norway, Switzerland, Nigeria, and others (Awudu, 2022). The content analyzed showed that INEC introduced the administration of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in the Anambra Saturday 6th November 2021 election as a result of the failure and challenges of the Smart Card Reader, it was administered to first verify the genuines of PVC and the fingerprint or authentication of the voters during accreditation. The new device was used to replace the smart card reader used in the previous election since 2015 (Awudu, 2022).

The first activities scheduled by INEC are the end of campaign by political parties which is at midnight Thursday 4th November 2021. The Independent National Commission (INEC) ensures every other activity was stopped before the Election Day and election went smoothly at every polling unit. The administration of the BVAS made accreditation and voting fast, due to the capture of existing data's in the system. The biometric systems work correctly and without failure major cities where there was more number of voters (Benoit and Lewis, 2014).

In Anambra State during the 2021 election, a comprehensive audit of BVAS was conducted which prevented possible disenfranchisement of voters and inspired public confidence in electoral technologies being deployed by INEC for future elections. However, [Bimodal Voters Authentication System \(BVAS\)](#) was criticized that there were several cases of the malfunctioning which was also center on the issues of Network coverage as was the case of Anambra State in the 2021 Gubernatorial election (INEC, 2020). Findings by Stephen (2021) revealed that the BVAS machines were malfunctioning during the Anambra State 2021 elections. The BVAS machine was a major issue in the Anambra governorship election for many polling units. This is because the machine cannot authorize fingerprints and facial recognition as the officials in the polling units had problems with the BVAS machine. The BVAS machine had only been able to accredit one voter as at 10.38am. The BVSAS has also been said to be cost effective, the machine must be spread across all polling unit leaving the government with urge amount of expenditure as observed by Stephen (2021).

The Effect of BVAS on the credibility of 2021 Anambra State Elections

The chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Professor Mahmood Yakubu introduced the administration of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in the Anambra Saturday 6th November 2021 election as a result of the failure and challenges of the Smart Card Reader, it was administered to first verify if the PVC and the fingerprint is genuine or authentication of the voters during accreditation. The new device was used to replace the smart card reader used in the previous election since 2015 (Egbebum, 2021). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), deployed the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) device in the Anambra State Governorship election in bid to test the technology in for the sake of other general elections and how it will affect the elections to get a reliable, credible, free and fair election (Fredrick, 2023).

The BVAS has the dual capacity for fingerprint and facial authentication of voters. This is to guard against voting by identity theft where one person uses another person's Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) to vote using the incident form (Roseline & Moses, 2022). With this development, the use of the incident form is abolished. No voter without genuine PVC will vote. No voter who was not successfully accredited electronically using the BVAS will vote (Vanguard, 2021). At the same time, the BVAS is also equipped with a camera. Therefore, it has the capacity to snap Polling Unit level result and upload same to the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal so that citizens can view results as election is concluded in each Polling Unit. Therefore, there is no need for the Z-Pad since its functions have been embedded in the BVAS (Erhabor, 2018).

The first activities scheduled by INEC are the end of campaign by political parties which is at midnight Thursday 4th November 2021. The Independent National Commission (INEC) ensures every other activity was stopped before the election-day and that election went smoothly at every polling unit (Riker, 2021). The administration of the BVAS made accreditation and voting fast, due to the capture of existing data's in the system. The biometric systems work correctly and without failure major cities where there was more number of voters. In reality, biometric technologies and related matching processes cannot be expected to work with 100 per cent accuracy (Erhabor, 2018).

Although the electoral umpire, INEC has touted the BVAS as an unbreakable system that prevents any form of electoral malpractice. However, like every other technology out there, the BVAS is not without its loopholes. Also, the loopholes associated with the voting system can affect the credibility of an election (Stephen, 2021; Guardian Newspapers, 2021). The Executive Director of Yiaga Africa, Samson Itodo, noted a comprehensive audit of BVAS will prevent possible disenfranchisement of voters and inspire public confidence in electoral technologies being deployed by INEC for future elections. Thus the criticism of the [Bimodal Voters Authentication System \(BVAS\)](#) was that there were several cases of the malfunctioning which was also center on the issues of Network coverage (Richard, 2018). In many polling units in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State. Anambra East is one of the 21 local governments in Anambra where a governorship election was held. The local government consists of about six towns, Umuoba, Agulere, Umulere, Nnado, Ngsube, and Igbaremu. The outgoing governor of the state, Willie Obiano, is from the local government. Mr. Obiano whose polling unit is at Eri Primary School, Unit 004, Otuocha 1, Aguleri, Anambra East LGA, exercised his franchise hitch-free (Yiaga, 2021).

However, in many polling units observed by PREMIUM TIMES reporters, the machines malfunctioned and did not authenticate many voters' fingerprints, as well as facial recognition, making the entire process slow and cumbersome. As of 10:37 a.m., nobody at the Polling Unit 005 WARD 11, Otuocha 1, Wri Primary School 2, Anambra East LGA, had been accredited. The Presiding Officer, Abong Mathews, who spoke to PREMIUM TIMES reporter, said that voting started at 8:30 a.m. and none of the 756 total registered voters at the centre had cast a vote. He complained about the malfunction of the BVAS machine (Premium Times, 2021).

The BVAS machine has been a major issue for us here," he said. "The machine cannot authorise fingerprints and facial recognition." When PREMIUM TIMES visited PU 007, WARD 12, Otuocha 2, Oche primary school II, the officials also had problems with the BVAS machine.

The Presiding Officer (PO), who refused to disclose his identity, said the BVAS had only been able to accredit one voter. The BVSAS has also be said to be cost effective, the machine must be spread across all pulling unit leaving the government with urge amount of expenditure (Stephen, 2021, Premium Times, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Democracy:

The general consensus among scholars in the recent time appears to support the view that the theory of "democracy" has attracted an overwhelming influx of interpretative connotations and that there are now almost as many definitions of democracy as there are writers on the subject. This development no doubt makes precise definition of democracy a herculean or highly elusive task. The lack of precision and accuracy in the definition of democracy may have prompted Obah-Akpogwogaha (2021), to assert that "the language of democracy is particularly clustered". Therefore, democracy in its clusteredness has produced diversity and variation both in conceptualization and practice throughout ages. For instances, and as rightly observed by (Obah-Akpogwogaha, 2021), "the Athenian democracy was substantially different from nineteenth century English democracy which in turn, is different from democracy in the United States in the 1960's". In similar fashion and stemming from the general distortion over the concept of democracy, democratic practice has equally assumed various forms as it is clothed in many names direct and indirect democracy, people or popular, authoritarian, consociational, grassroots and guided democracies, that the concept of democracy has become somewhat confusing, if not misleading. Perhaps, it is in recognition of the general confusion and distortion over the concept of democracy that Awudu (2022) made the following observation: Democracy is an inherently difficult concept. It means many things to many people.

As a general summary theory, it holds numerous implications and connotations which are frequently complex and often contradictory'. To this, the model conceptualization of democracy held by individual scholar over the world has been greatly influenced by their local environment as dictated by prevailing political circumstances. Sadaro (2019) and Ojie (2020) in an opinion survey, based on repeated empirical data have buttressed the fact of environmental circumstances of individual conceptualization of democracy when he observes in the following words, that: "People around the world have different conception of what democracy means: when asked to define the term, a typical American may conjure up images of election campaigns and voting booths, but a typical Nigerian may define democracy mainly in terms of prosperity and relative economic equality. For a Nigerian student, democracy may above all mean freedom of speech or safeguards against arbitrary arrest, for Japanese, it may mean more power for elected officials and less for the unelected bureaucracy (Ihikunle and Eweniyi, 2018).

For a black South African, democracy may mean the absence of white domination, for an Italian, it may mean a system of government that is free of political corruption. To be sure, people in all countries may agree that democracy entails a combination of such things as voting, rights, economic opportunity, free speech, parliamentary lawmaking, etc. Even so, people will often differ about what democracy primarily mean to them, depending on the political circumstances under which they live". In the liberal perspective of democracy, Ojie (2020) describes democracy in the following words: "The essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect principle governing officials and hold them accountable for their action. Democracy also impose legal limit on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedom to their citizens" (Ojie, 2016).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research is quantitative method and as such the descriptive survey design was adopted to investigate the effective of Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) on 2021 Elections in Anambra State. The population of this study is the total registered voters in the election which is One Million, Two Hundred and Ninety Three Thousand, Three Hundred and Fifteen (1,293,315) voters. The Sample size was determined using Taro Jamane 1964 formula. 389 copies of the questionnaires were administered to the three senatorial districts in Anambra State in which 375 were duly retrieved which was used for the analysis. The data from the research instrument was analyzed using simple percentage count and the research questions stated was answered using Mean and Standard Deviation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The research questions stated formed the basis of data analyst. Therefore, the following research questions were answered quantitatively:

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness created about the use of BAVS in Anambra State 2021 election?

Table 1: A descriptive analysis on the level of awareness created about the use of BVAS in Anambra State 2021 election

Variables	N	Sum	Mean (X)	S.D	Remark
Level of awareness	5	375	2.67	1.63	Agree
Use of BVAS	5	375			

Source: Field Survey, (2023)

As shown in Table 4.30, the calculated mean (2.67) is greater than the standard mean value of 2.50 ($2.67 \pm 1.63 > 2.50$) indicating that the level of awareness created about the use of BAVS in Anambra State 2021 election is average. This implies that awareness created about the use of BAVS helped in improving the Anambra State 2021 election.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of BVAS on Anambra State 2021 election?

Table 2: A descriptive analysis on the effect of BVAS on Anambra State 2021 election

Variables	N	Sum	Mean (X)	SD	Remark
Impact of BVAS	2	375	2.74	1.66	Agree
Voter's	2	375			

Source: Field Survey, (2023)

As shown in Table 4.33, the calculated mean (2.74) is greater than the standard mean value of 2.50 ($2.74 \pm 1.66 > 2.50$) indicating that the impact of BVAS on the Anambra State 2021 election is positive. This implies that the use of BVAS have positive impact on the Anambra State 2021 election.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were made:

- i. The study discovered that awareness was sufficiently created on the use of BVAS in the 2021 Anambra State election. This awareness was created inform of voters education on national televisions to sensitize the voters on the use of the BVAS in the election.
- ii. The study revealed that the use of the BVAS contributed positively to the success of the Anambra State elections in 2021. Though this does not articulate that they were no infractions or limitations. They were also some pockets of violence and voter buying which have potent effect on the overall credibility of the elections in Anambra State

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that with the introduction of the BVAS into the Electronic registration and voters system, the entire process has been able to gain more accuracy and permanent voters registration has been verified and authenticated genuinely. However, there are some setbacks experienced using the BVAS to verify and authenticate permanent voters card especially in the Anambra State 2021 election. These setbacks includes; large illiterate population that do not understand the technology, hence, the need for aggressive education and awareness of BVAS; turnout has been hampered by problems with new computerized accreditation system with some machines breaking down or running out of battery; the literacy level of some ad-hoc staffs does not qualify them to operate the machines; there were many case of multiple registration and the cards were detected, this slow the process of voting; network coverage is also a problem of the BVAS, some of the geographical location has network problems this slow down the process and in some Polly unit accreditation could not take place on time in line with the election scheduled time; and the road networking is very poor, as INEC official stayed a longer time on the road trying to get to their destination than more time assigned for the exercise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, following the recommendations were made:

- i. INEC should ensure the location for accreditation is network friendly to avoid delay and short changing in the area where the network is strong and available.
- ii. INEC should be vibrant and vigilant in the administering of the BVAS, for this will make a great history in Nigeria come 2023.
- iii. There should be awareness of BVAS to educate the large population of illiterates that do not understand the technology. There should be enlightenment on the need for massive turnout of voters and new computerized accreditation system should be introduced to avoid breaking down of machines or battery run out.
- iv. The issue of network coverage of BVAS should be properly looked into before the election since some of the geographical location has network problems which slow-down the voting process in some polling unit and hinders accreditation.

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