Understanding the Role of Technology in Free and Fair Elections in Developing Countries

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Abstract. Over the years accreditation of voters has been done using the manual method of painstakingly browsing through the voluminous voters register to verify if the voter is allowed to vote or not. Also the smart card reader has checkmated the problems of election rigging and multiple voting. On the other hand due to the aggressive voter's education campaign by the Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC), party stalwarts and agents who descend on polling units on election days to woo the electorate by offering them gift items and cash if they cast their votes in favor of a political party failed. However this paper will attempt to demonstrate how the introduction of the smart card readers by INEC reduced election rigging and inflated results as compared to previous elections. The research subscribed to the use of primary data to gather first-hand information from its respondents. This paper concluded that the smart card readers introduced by INEC have indeed tackled the menace of over inflated votes and also the voters education by INEC on not to accept gift and monies from political parties at the poling units has furtherenlightened the electorate on the rules at the polling units. However, we recommend that there should be an improvement on the smart card readers so that a voter can be accredited and vote at any part of the country. Also INEC should link up with the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) so as to make the National Identity Card become the voter's card.
Keywords. Smart Card Reader, INEC, Electorate, Nigeria, Election.
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1. Introduction

Asides from the campaign and politics done by politicians and their followers, there is another avenue where politics is done and in this case it has the capacity of changing the minds of voters either to vote for or against a political party. This occurs at the arena known to be the polling units (PU). This kind of politics involves giving of gift items branded with political party logos, slogans and even undisclosed amounts of money. This strategy has been deployed by numerous party stalwarts to gather momentum of support to clinch victory for their party. However this tactic or approach contravenes Section 101 of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Electoral Amendment Act 2010 on the conduct of the electorate and party agents at the venue of the secondary elections (Electoral Amendment Act, 2010). Unlike previous elections

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conducted by the electoral umpires, the 2015 elections on the average saw a huge success in the education of voters using the dominant lingua English, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo and this saw a tremendous breakthrough in creating voter awareness on the crimes of accepting any sort of gratifications at the venues of elections.

One of the fundamental challenges truncating and aborting elections in Nigeria is election rigging, not just any kind of rigging but the manipulation of results to favor a particular political party. But with the introduction of the Smart Card Reader (SCR) this reduced the evil or rigging to the barest minimum. However the SCR further protected the integrity of INEC and further proved that INEC as the electoral umpire of the Nigerian state is unbiased and apolitical in its structure and orientation. The SCR frustrated plans by mischief makers to rig elections. Rigging of elections begins from the voter accreditation and up to the last stages of counting of votes and filling of result sheets. Olaoye (2007), submitted that during the Second Republic, the rigging of elections was even worse than the abrupt First Republic where rigging of elections occurred from the casting of votes up to the stage of counting of votes casted. The SCR has proved to be the solution to rigging of elections in Nigeria because the device is not only responsible for accrediting of voters but to also to reconcile and make sure an egalite or equilibrium is reached between the total number of votes casted and the total number of accredited voters. This style or technique deployed by INEC under the superintendent of Prof. Attahiru Jega led organization saw to the total collapse of the plans of electoral miscreants into disarray which made them to result in the deployment of excessive use of violence like was seen predominantly in Rivers and Akwa Ibom states (Sahara Reporters, 2015). Also snatching of sensitive election materials such as the result sheet Forms EC 8A, EC 8A (I), and EC 8A (II) for Presidential, Senatorial and the House of Representatives elections. Also Forms EC 8A and EC 8A (I) for Governorship andState Houses of Assembly elections, respectively (INEC Guidelines, 2015). In an attempt to put the use of card readers in shambles, those who are of the view that democracy should not survive in Nigeria also sought to the hacking of the INEC website in order to destabilize the data collected by INEC on the distribution of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) per state, per region and per local government including the Federal Capital Territory Abuja (FCT) (Vanguard News, 2015). To this end this paper will attempt to demonstrate how the introduction of the SCR by INEC reduced the rigging of votes to the barest minimum and also how voter's education rubbished the gimmick of polling unit politics. The study consists of nine parts which make up the study as a whole.

2. Conceptual Clarification

*Smart Card Reader (SMC):*The Smart Card Reader is a device that authenticates the validity and security of a card. The card within seconds communicates with the smart card reader and decides if the card is valid or not (Wikipedia. 2015). In the case of INEC the smart card reader actually displays the photograph of the card bearer within seconds of inserting the card into the machine to accredit the electorate before casting his/her vote. The aim of this device is to ensure the principle of one man one vote and to eliminate double voting.

Polling Units (PU): A polling unit is a designated area or place designated by law where a citizen can register to or vote (Electoral Amendment Act, 2010).

Election Rigging: This can be said to be the illegal manipulation of election procedures through fraud of ballot fixing and connivance with election officials and party agents to influence the results of an election. Various methods may

include ballot snatching, ballot box stuffing, illegal printing of voter's card etc. However this is an attribute to some of the root causes of electoral violence.

Electoral Process: Elekwa (2008:30) in his study postulated that the electoral process relates to the entire cycle which begins from the provision of voters education and dissolution of the National Assembly. Furthermore, INEC (2006), in Elekwa (2008:30), deposes that the different phases of the electoral process include the following:

- a. Delimitation of electoral boundaries
- b. Registration of voters
- c. Notice of elections
- d. Nomination of candidates
- e. Election campaigns
- f. Elections, announcement of results and completion of tribunal sittings
- g. Participation of other organizations
- h. Resolution of electoral conflicts resulting from the participation of other organizations, people, groups, etc.

3. Theoretical Framework

Every research must have a theoretical framework and the theoretical framework is based on a theory or theories which are used as a basis to explain the research as a whole. A theory is a set of statements or postulations that explain a particular phenomenon (Suskie, 1995). Therefore this study adopted the Rational Theory in explaining the research topic. The rational theory of decision making originated from the field of economics because many economists use this theory to evaluate consumer or investment choices (Mas-Colell, 1995). This theory explains how a decision maker looks at every minute detail of information regarding the issue at hand before finally arriving at a decision such as its advantages and disadvantages, viability and acceptability. INEC had the problems of electoral rigging and polling unit politics at hand after critical thinking, consultations and research subscribed to the aggressive voters education to dismantle polling unit politics and deployed SCR to checkmate the fast rising case of election rigging and over inflated votes. However, before the SCR was introduced, INEC had painstakingly worked out the modalities of this sophisticated device including switching to the manual method of accreditation and resetting the SCR in case of any anomaly associated with the device and also analysed its merits and demerits. INEC on the other hand went on serious voter's education campaign both on the mass media and also on road campaigns to demonstrate to voters not to engage themselves in election related offences (Vanguard News, 2015). Surprisingly, the electorate also applied this theory even before the day of election and that was why there was low level of violence recorded during the concluded 2015 elections. Again some unknown party agents after being frustrated with the deployment of the SCR by INEC resulted to the purchase of PVC so as to tactically disenfranchise and cripple voters. Rev.Fr Godfrey Onah asserts that the sale of PVC is a sin against the state and God and therefore no man should stoop so low to any politician who approaches anyone to sell his or her PVC at any amount. Finally the electorate had made up their minds to resist any acts of intimidation and at the end of the secondary elections good news began to pour in regarding the success of the SCR and also the conduct of voters at the polling units.

4. History of Electoral Rigging in Nigeria

Rigging of elections in the Nigerian state didn't commence in the 20th century but it had been happening since the 19th century. One of the cardinal reasons why

elections are rigged is to favor a party and on the other hand inflict electoral injuries on the other parties that will make them loose momentum and eventually loose. It has mutated over time even if the objectives of rigging are the same the gimmicks and rigging modalities are perfected whenever elections are held. Right from 1959, electoral rigging has increases as Edoh (2003: 70) identified:

> Even, under the supervisory eyes of the British, during the 1959elections, incidents of violence, stuffing of ballot boxes as well as obstructions and Intimidations of opponents were reported here and there.

He went further to identify that rigging became part of Nigeria's political behavior during the regional elections of 1961 and since then it had been integrated into the Nigerian way of life (Edoh, 2003:71).

In scrutinizing and analyzing the 1964 general elections, four major political parties formed a political alliance in order to perpetuate their agenda of rigging. They include Northern People's Congress (NPC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern Peoples Forum (NPF). Thus the Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern Peoples Forum formed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). On the 3rd of June, 1964 while the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the Movement for Democratic Front (MDF) formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) on the 20th, 1964(International-IDEA, 2000:37). This alliance that was formed had an undertone to forcefully win elections at whatever cost such as when the NNA had most of all its candidates unopposed in places where it had a high popularity on the other hand, UPGA used extreme force to prevent NNA from making nominations to vie for positions in its domains (Mackintosh, 1966). On the 11th of October, 1965, the Western House of Assembly ended in chaos, extreme violence and disorder due to widespread and high level of rigging (Olaoye, cited by Omotosho, 2007:158). The military had been cunningly observing the political events and one of the reasons Nzeogwu gave for seizing power was as a result of widespread rigging of elections that made them to intervene and takeover power from the regime of Balewa.

In the Second Republic, the norm of election rigging was even worse. According to Olaoye (2007), the level of rigging was beyond people's expectations and unimaginable proportions during the voting, vote counting and declaration of results. In the 1983 general elections, it was a similar rigging pattern under the electoral superintendent of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which was to serve as the umpire in the electoral processes actually connived with the NPN which was the ruling party to rig and manipulate elections. Numerous times accusing fingers had been pointed at FEDECO and have also been accused of electoral irregularities as opined by The FEDECO staff were variously accused of aiding and abetting the preparation of electoral fraud. Submitted that FEDECO had been compromised and were working hand in hand with NPN with the aim of clinching victory at whatever cost. However, both Kurfi and Ofonagoro concur that FEDECO was breeched, biased and compromised and were out in ensuring smooth victory in favor of NPN. During the 1979 presidential elections, five political parties contested in the elections, the parties include NPN, UPN, NPP, PRP and GNPP. However out of the five parties that contested, three rejected the outcome of the elections noting that it was marred with flaw and irregularities. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, contested the results announced by FEDECO at the electoral tribunal by challenging the return of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as president elect and after a long battle at the courts. The Supreme Court rested the case in favor of Alhaji Shehu Shagari's NPN on the 26th September 1979 (International IDEA, 2000: 343).

Under the Babangida and Abacha regimes, there were so many cases of election rigging but it was more sever under the regime of the former following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections. As Olaoye posited: That election was believed and adjudged by the 3000 accredited local And international observers to be the best and fairest in Nigeria's political history.

On the 14th of June 1993, the results of the elections was announced in many states of which the results reflected that Chief Moshood Kashimowo Olawale Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had succeeded in winning 14 states as released by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) under the chairmanship of Prof. Humphrey Nwosu. Despitethe visible indications that from the 30 states of Nigeria, SDP has won majority andwas victorious. The election was annulled on the 23rd June 1993 by the Federal Military Government (FMG) under the superintendent of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. Babangida handed over power to Ernest Shonekan but was later taking over by General Abacha who later died and General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over power. Abdulsalami, was under intense pressure to organize elections and hand over power to a civilian government which he did when he handed over power to Olusegun Obasanjo under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the first president of Nigeria's Fourth Republic on the 29th of May 1999 now adopted as democracy day in Nigeria. The 1999 elections one would think is new era of elections free of rigging, but in reality, it was actually a continuation of previous electoral frauds in Nigeria. Elections was monitored by over 15,000 elections observers from the US-based Carter Center concluded that the elections were marred by high level fraud it was impossible to give an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election (NDI, 1999:12).

The 2003 elections bear the same resemblance with the previous elections. It had been tagged by the HRW (2004) as an "abject failure." The elections were more pervasively and openly than the flawed 1999 elections. Elections for Nigeria's 774 local government councils were held in 2004 and followed much the same pattern of violence, intimidation and fraud that characterized the 2003 general elections. Nigeria's Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) observed those polls and concluded that "It is doubtful whether […the] elections can only be considered to be reflective of the will of the people". In the history of the Nigerian electoral process, April 2007 elections were the worst elections Nigeria had had. Elected officials, alongside with the very government agencies charged with ensuring the credibility of polls, reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-riddled farce. Despite the strategies designed to ensure credible polls, by consensus of all the monitors, on general elections both local and international, those elections fell, in the words of the European Union monitors 'far short of basic regulation and international standards for democratic elections' (The Guardian, April 30, 2007).

In the 2007 the same pattern followed suit as there as mass rigging, violence, arson, voters intimidation and complete anarchy predominantly in the northern part of the country where the two dominant candidates Umaru Musa Yar 'Adua of Peoples Democratic Party(PDP) and General Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) hail from. Surprisingly both the former and the later are indigenes of Katsina Statebut rom different local government areas. When the results were finally announced the candidate of the PDP was returned president elect but he later admitted that the process which brought him into power was fraudulent in natüre. Yar 'Adua later died and this led to the taking over of power by his vice president Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. As at the time of death of Yar 'Adua, he had spent only two years of his tenure and then after Goodluck completed the four year term, he contested for president and won the 2011 presidential elections under the platform of PDP.The 2011 elections was described

as a do or die affair. Violence erupted in the northern states of Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi etc. there was high degree of rigging in the north because to win the presidential polls in Nigeria the 19 northern state and the states of the south west must be captured. This led to the imposition of dusk to dawn curfew in most northern state. Elections in Nigeria have always had a romance and interwoven with violence, arson, intimidation lawlessness and other nefarious acts. It is at this point that this study will examine how the Smart Card Reader (SCR) and aggressive voter education became a game changer and checkmated the cancerous menace of election rigging and politics at the poling units.

5. Smart Card Reader (SCR): The Game Changer

As mentioned earlier in the narratives above, various groups and individuals had been subscribing to the use of Machiavellian gimmicks to win elections. This has been happening since the 1959 elections through the use of violence, ballot snatching, and even scaring away of voters. In some cases the total number of accredited votes was equals to the total votes casted and in other cases the total votes casted was greater than the population of an entire state. After the 2011 elections, it took INEC four years to prepare on how to reduce electoral rigging to the barest minimum thus the SCR was born after numerous consultations with experts. This time around things had to be done right and INEC was bent on ensuring the principle of one man one vote was applied throughout the period of election. The process began with the voter's registration process and continuous voter's registration before the 2015 elections where the biometric data of voters was collected and at the production stage it eliminated multiple voter's registration. As the day of election closed in individuals and groups became intimidated and agitated due to the efficiency and effectiveness of the SCR. For the All Progressives Congress (APC) the use of the SCR was a welcome development but on the contrary, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) felt intimidated and threatened when the spokesman of the PDP campaign organization told the Nigerian state that the party will oppose the use of SCR (Vanguard News, 2015). This move by the PDP only meant on thing in the minds of Nigerians which was to rig the elections successfully if the SCR were not used. The issue of if the SCR was to be used or not sparked a very serious controversy between the APC and the PDP. The PDP on one hand see the use of SCR as baseless but the APC sees the SCR as the only way to checkmate inflation of voters register and results and the antidote to election rigging (Vanguard News, 2015).

6. How the SCR Works

The process begins with inserting the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) into the SCR and within seconds, the machine will detect the authenticity of the card and also display the picture of the bearer. The next step it to cross-reference the finger print of the bearer to confirm if the card truly belongs to the person in possession of the card. In an interview with Kayode Idowu the chief press secretary to the INEC chairman and Vanguard News reiterated the fact that "if the finger print of the person agrees with the finger print on the imbedded chip and it will say Verified and that means the person is free to vote. If it does not belong to the person, the response would be 'Not Verified' and it says it loud for everybody to hear. If it says that, party agents are there, observers are there, voters are there and an INEC staff says go and vote or not and everybody keeps quiet. " (Vanguard News, 2015). INEC had invested into the SCR technology to reduce election rigging and it is almost impossible to compromise the SCR. Kayode affirms this when he posited that it will take a collective effort of the community, INEC staff and the

manufacturer to compromise the SCR. Indeed SCR has exposed the ways elections were rigged in the past with a political party having a huge amount of votes and INEC had no way of tying the number of votes and number of voters. Below are tables that shows a comparison of election results of some states in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Table 1 analyses the 2011presidential elections without the use of SCR and table 2 analyses the 2015 presidential elections with the use of SCR.

Table 1. *2011 Presidential Elections without SCR*

S/N	State	PDP	CPC
1	Abia	1,175,984	3,743
2	Ekiti	135,009	2,689
3	Jigawa	419,252	663,994
4	Adamawa	508,314	344,526
5	Cross Rivers	709,382	4,002
6	Benue	694,776	109,680

Source: INEC, 2011

Table 2. *2015 Presidential Elections with SCR*

S/N	State	PDP	APC
1	Abia	368,303	13,394
2	Ekiti	176,466	120,331
3	Jigawa	142,904	885,988
4	Adamawa	251,664	374,701
5	Cross Rivers	414,863	28,368
6	Benue	303,737	373,961

Source: INEC, 2015

looking at the tables above, the difference is very clear to say that the 2015 elections conducted with the SCR has reduced electoral fraud like was seen in the 2011 elections. For instance, PDP in Abia state in 2011 scored 1,175,984 and in 2015 the same PDP in Abia state scored 368,303. However this has proven beyond reasonable doubt that if not for the introduction of the SCR, the 2015 poll results would have led to massive rigging and might have ended up in the cancelation of the 2015 elections as a whole.

7. Data Analysis

This part of the research is concerned with the analysis of data collected from the respondents through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to 50 respondents which included 10 questions. 5 were aimed at getting the views of voters above 18 on the politics of the polling unit while 5 questions were aimed at getting the views of people as regarding the performance of the SCR. The study area was a market area at Katsina Local Government Area, Katsina State Nigeria. The reason for selecting this area is because the market area is a place where people of different works of life and orientation converge. Table 3 below explains how the data was collected and analyzed using percentages.

Table 3.

S/N	ITEM	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)	MAJORITY
1	Is the use of SCR by INEC a good step	Yes-47 No-3 Total-50	Yes-97 No-3 Total-100	Yes
2.	Has the SCR reduced	Yes-50	Yes-100	Yes

	years of vote rigging	No-0 Total-50	No-0 Total-100	
3.	Did the SCR reduce the stress of accreditation of voters	Yes-33 No-17 Total-50	Yes-66 No-34 Total-100	Yes
4.	Is the SCR a reliable device to be used in future elections	Yes-48 No-2 Total-50	Yes-96 No-4 Total-100	Yes
5.	Do you think the SCR integrity can be compromised	Yes-49 No-1 Total-50	Yes-99 No-1 Total-100	Yes
6.	Did the voters education by INEC reduce polling unit politics	Yes-39 No-11 Total-50	Yes-78 No-22 Total-100	Yes
7.	Do you think the party agents failed in their quest to woo voters on election day	Yes-43 No-7 Total-50	Yes-86 No-14 Total-100	Yes
8.	Were voters more aware of election rules after the voters education	Yes-50 No-0 Total-50	Yes-50 No-0 Total-100	Yes
9.	Do you think the voters contributed in ensuring a free, fair credible elections?	Yes-50 No-0 Total-50	Yes-50 No-0 Total-100	Yes
10.	Do you think electronic voting should be used in the 2019 elections	Yes-30 No-20 Total-50	Yes-60 No-40 Total-100	Yes

Source: Research Survey, June 2015

Table 3 above shows that 47 (97%) of the respondents agree that the use of SCR by INEC is a good step towards the right direction. 50 (100%) of the respondents are of the notion that yes, the use of SCR by INEC has indeed reduced the rigging of votes. 33 (66%) identified that the SCR has reduced the stress and tediousness encountered in the voters accreditation process. 48 (96%) have agreed that the SCR is a reliable device that has been tested and trusted and it can be used in future elections in Nigeria. 49 (99%) of respondents have concurred that the SCR is almost impossible to be compromised because it is a highly sophisticated device. 39 (78%) see the impact of voters education deployed by INEC to prevent polling unit politics of wooing voters on election day. 43 (86%) of the respondents agree that with the serious campaign by INEC for voters to shun politics within 300 meters of the polling unit. The voters refused to participate in such politics. 50 (50%) of respondents agree that during the 2015 elections, voters were more informed on their conduct before, during and after elections. 50 (50%) of the respondents agree that the success of the 2015 elections was not only the effort of government alone but with the collaboration of the citizens of Nigeria. 30 (60%) of the respondents are the view that with the success of the SCR in the 2015 elections, electronic voting should be used in the 2019 elections.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the years, elections in Nigeria were conducted with evil vices such as rigging and violence marring the elections. Electoral bodies had to print voluminous pages of voters register and cross check before a voter was allowed to vote. But with the SCR, it eliminated issues of time, fraud and delays in voter's accreditation. The SCR deployed by INEC was a very good move in redeeming its image as apolitical because Nigerians had lost confidence in INEC. The objectives

of the SCR was achieved with little or no hitches. Politics of the polling units was a waste of resources, time and energy by party agents because INEC had moved one step ahead to educate voters on not to sell their votes or PVC cards. Voters were educated by INEC using the three main languages in Nigeria to communicate to the grass root and in some cases had to use broken or Pidgin English to reach out to the voters. The campaign paid off and party agents were in most cases chased away, lynched by angry voters and in some cases the security agents were called to arrest such people. 1-There should be an improvement on the smart card readers so that a voter can be accredited and vote at any part of the country. 2- INEC should link up with the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) so as to make the National Identity Card become the voter's card. 3- With the success of the SCR this has indicated that Nigeria has evolved hence the use of electronic voting should be used for the 2019 elections. 4- The PVC should be improved on as regarding its quality because there were reports of some PVCs became obsolete after having contact with fluids. 5- INEC needs to overhaul its penalties for electoral offences and needs to make the punishment of crimes more sever.

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