



The Role of ICT in Curbing Electoral Fraud in Nigeria

Muhammad Abba Jalo^{1*}, Fred Fudah Moveh², Wasinda Joseph Malgwi³, Abdulaziz Suleiman Yahya⁴

¹Department of Information Technology, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria

²Department of Information Technology, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria

³Department of Computer Science, University of Abuja, Nigeria

⁴Department of Information Technology, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: muhammadabba@mau.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study centered on preferences of electoral fraud as a major challenge to political development in Nigeria. An electoral fraud is an illegal interference with the process of election that interferes with the mandate of the people. The statement of the problem is the abuse of the democratic principle which has led to elections losing its capacity to determine who will represent the people. This development has resulted to the masses losing confidence in the democratic exercise and the morale to vote has been killed because of the “so or die” nature of elections. This study delves into the nature and character of electoral fraud in Nigeria. The study was guided by its objectives which state that, perception of the electoral fraud has impact on Nigerian elections, electoral fraud and electoral participation in Nigeria and political instability and social disorder in Nigeria resulting from electoral fraud. The focus of this study is to examine the role of ICT in preventing electoral fraud and investigate the ugly perfection of electoral fraud. The Marxist theory of the state was adopted as the theoretical framework and sources of data collected was mainly primary data and analysis using SPSS. This research concluded that the high rate of electoral fraud is adversely undermining the process of free and fair election. Finally, this study recommended that for a total consolidation of the nascent democracy in Nigeria all hands must be on deck to eliminate electoral fraud in Nigeria.

Keywords: ICT, Electoral Fraud, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Electoral fraud has long been a critical challenge in Nigeria, undermining the credibility of its democratic processes and eroding public trust in governance. Since gaining independence in 1960, the country has experienced various forms of electoral malpractices, including ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, vote buying, and result manipulation. These fraudulent activities have been particularly rampant during periods of political instability and military rule. The First Republic (1960–1966), marked by intense political competition and power struggles, witnessed widespread manipulation of voter rolls, electoral violence, and falsification of

results (Nwankwo, 2015). This trend continued under military regimes from 1966 to 1999, where elections were frequently orchestrated to legitimize authoritarian rule. The regime of General Sani Abacha (1993–1998) is especially notorious for its blatant manipulation of the electoral process to maintain power (Obasa, 2018).

The return to civilian rule in 1999 was expected to usher in a new era of democratic governance. However, despite reforms aimed at promoting free and fair elections, electoral fraud persisted. Early post-military elections were characterized by inflated voter numbers, tampering with election results, and violence, which further eroded public confidence in the



electoral system. The persistence of these malpractices can be attributed to a combination of factors, including political competition, systemic corruption, and weak institutional frameworks. The absence of robust electoral laws and enforcement mechanisms has allowed fraudulent practices to thrive, posing a significant threat to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2015).

Recognizing the detrimental impact of electoral fraud, the Nigerian government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have introduced various reforms to enhance the integrity of the electoral process. A pivotal aspect of these reforms has been the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools, such as biometric voter registration, electronic voting systems, and electronic transmission of results. These technologies have the potential to improve the transparency and accuracy of election administration, thereby reducing opportunities for fraud. For instance, biometric systems can help prevent multiple voting and voter impersonation, while electronic transmission of results can minimize result tampering and enhance real-time monitoring of elections (Obasa & Aluko, 2019).

Despite these technological advancements, the effectiveness of ICT in curbing electoral fraud in Nigeria remains uncertain. While the introduction of ICT tools has shown promise, several challenges hinder their successful implementation. Inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent power supply, limited technical expertise, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities are significant barriers to the effective deployment of ICT in the electoral process (Obasa & Aluko, 2019). Furthermore, the persistence of electoral malpractices suggests that technology alone may not be sufficient to address the deeply rooted issues of fraud and corruption within the political system.

This study aims to investigate the role of ICT in curbing electoral fraud in Nigeria's national electoral process. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the various types of electoral fraud prevalent in the country, evaluate the effectiveness of existing reforms, and explore the potential of ICT in mitigating these malpractices. Additionally, the study will examine the challenges that hinder the successful implementation of ICT solutions and propose recommendations for enhancing the integrity of the electoral process through technology.

The scope of this study is focused on the application of ICT in Nigeria's national electoral process, with a particular emphasis on the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The research will explore how technologies like biometric voter identification, electronic voting systems, and electronic result transmission have been utilized to enhance electoral integrity. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Due to time and resource constraints, the research was conducted in a limited number of states and polling units, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to the entire Nigerian electorate. Additionally, self-reporting biases and social desirability effects could influence participant responses, potentially affecting the accuracy of the data. Moreover, while this study focuses primarily on electoral fraud, it does not extensively explore other factors contributing to electoral malpractices, such as political violence or socio-economic disparities.

By addressing these issues, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on electoral reforms in Nigeria and offer insights into how ICT can play a critical role in strengthening democratic governance and ensuring credible elections.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to investigate the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in curbing electoral fraud in Nigeria. The methodological framework included a cross-sectional survey using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key informants to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the electoral process and associated fraudulent activities.

Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was adopted, allowing for the collection of data at a single point in time. This approach provided a snapshot of perceptions and experiences related to electoral fraud in Nigeria. The structured questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, enabling quantitative analysis of the data, while qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in electoral processes.

Sampling and Sample Size

This involved both purposive and stratified random techniques to ensure representativeness. Key informants—such as officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), members of civil society organizations, political party representatives, and election observers—were selected purposively based on their expertise and direct involvement in electoral processes. For the quantitative component, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. Polling units were stratified by geographical location (urban vs. rural) and population size to ensure balanced representation. From each stratum, polling units were randomly selected, and eligible voters within those units were approached to participate in the survey.

The sample size was determined using a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure broad representation across Nigeria's diverse political zones. Initially, local government areas were randomly selected from each political zone. Subsequently, political wards within these local governments were randomly chosen, followed by the selection of polling units within the wards. At each polling unit, eligible voters were randomly selected to participate in the survey, ensuring a diverse and representative sample.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire, developed based on the research objectives and reviewed by electoral experts to ensure content validity. The questionnaire included sections on demographic information, perceptions of electoral fraud, personal experiences with electoral malpractices, and suggestions for improving electoral integrity. Closed-ended and Likert-scale questions facilitated quantitative data collection. In addition to the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to provide qualitative insights. Semi-structured interview guides were used to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on electoral fraud and the role of ICT in mitigating such practices. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Trained enumerators administered the questionnaires at selected polling units, explaining the study's purpose and obtaining informed consent from respondents. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Enumerators provided guidance to ensure the accurate and complete filling of questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Data analysis incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and R software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and their responses to survey questions. Inferential statistical techniques, such as chi-square tests and regression analysis, were employed to identify relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to electoral fraud and the implementation of ICT tools in the electoral process.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the research. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and data were stored securely to protect participants' privacy. The study adhered to ethical guidelines set forth by Nigerian universities and followed the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and well-being.

In summary, the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study provided a robust framework for investigating the role of ICT in curbing electoral fraud in Nigeria. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a comprehensive analysis of the issue, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing electoral integrity.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents provide insights into the distribution of opinions on electoral issues.

Gender Distribution: The study comprised 30.7% female and 60.6% male respondents, indicating higher male participation.

Age Group: The majority (56.7%) fell within the 18-25 age group, followed by 26-35 years (25.2%), 36-45 years (8.7%), and 46-55 years (0.8%).

Educational Level: Most respondents (64.6%) had tertiary education, 19.7% held postgraduate degrees, and 6.3% completed secondary education.

Occupation: Students comprised 39.4% of respondents, followed by employed individuals (20.5%), self-employed individuals (17.3%), and unemployed individuals (14.2%).

Perception of Electoral Fraud

Electoral Fraud as a Significant Problem: A total of 39.4% agreed and 33.9% strongly agreed that electoral fraud is a significant issue in Nigeria, while only 3.1% disagreed and 7.9% strongly disagreed. This underscores concerns about the integrity of elections.

Impact of Electoral Fraud on Election

Credibility: About 47.2% of respondents agreed and 27.6% strongly agreed that electoral fraud undermines election credibility, while 2.4% disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed.

Effectiveness of Permanent Voter Cards

(PVCs): While 39.4% of respondents agreed that PVCs have reduced electoral fraud, 24.4% disagreed, and 14.2% remained undecided, indicating mixed perceptions.

Bio-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and Electoral Integrity: BVAS was perceived positively, with 44.9% agreeing and 14.2% strongly agreeing that it improved voter accreditation integrity, though 11.8% disagreed and 12.6% were undecided.

INEC Result Viewing (IReV) and Electoral Confidence: IReV was seen as enhancing electoral confidence, with 39.4% agreeing and 11.0% strongly agreeing, though 20.5% disagreed and 13.4% were undecided.

Perception of Vote Buying

Vote Buying as a Prevalent Issue: The majority of respondents (43.3%) agreed and 37.0% strongly agreed that vote buying is a significant issue in Nigerian elections, with only 0.8% disagreeing and 4.7% strongly disagreeing. This suggests that vote buying is widely recognized as a problem.

Political Candidates and Vote Buying: A significant proportion (40.9%) agreed and 37.8% strongly agreed that political candidates and parties engage in vote buying, while only 1.6% disagreed and 3.1% strongly disagreed.

Impact of Vote Buying on Electoral Fairness: About 46.5% of respondents agreed and 30.7% strongly agreed that vote buying undermines electoral fairness. Only 2.4% disagreed and 5.5% strongly disagreed.

Personal Witnessing or Experience of Vote Buying: A striking 62.2% of respondents reported personally witnessing or experiencing vote buying, supporting the notion that it is widespread.

Effectiveness of Efforts to Combat Vote Buying: While 37.8% of respondents believed that efforts to curb vote buying were ineffective, 29.9% thought they had been effective, and 23.6% were undecided, indicating a lack of confidence in current interventions.

Voter Intimidation

Experience of Voter Intimidation: While 50.4% of respondents reported never feeling intimidated while voting, 40.9% experienced voter intimidation, indicating that it remains a significant concern.

Location of Voter Intimidation: A majority (36.2%) experienced intimidation both inside and outside polling stations, while 19.7% reported it inside polling stations and 17.3% outside.

Perpetrators of Voter Intimidation: Political party supporters were identified as primary perpetrators by 42.5% of respondents, while smaller percentages attributed intimidation to election officials, security agents, and individuals.

Influence of Voter Intimidation on Voting Behavior: About 40.9% of respondents or someone they knew changed their vote due to intimidation, demonstrating the impact of intimidation on electoral choices.

Reporting of Voter Intimidation: A significant 44.9% of respondents did not report voter intimidation, 19.7% were unaware of reporting mechanisms, and only 15.7% took action, suggesting the need for better reporting channels.

Perceived Changes in Addressing Voter Intimidation: Nearly half (48.0%) saw no improvement in addressing voter intimidation, while 23.6% observed some progress, and 16.5% were uncertain.

Impact of Voter Intimidation on Election Outcomes: A majority (66.9%) affirmed that voter intimidation significantly impacts election results, while only 11.8% disagreed, reinforcing its influence on democratic processes.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal significant concerns regarding electoral malpractices in Nigeria.

Vote buying is widely recognized as a prevalent issue, with many respondents acknowledging its impact on electoral fairness. Similarly, voter intimidation remains a major concern, primarily attributed to political party supporters. The influence of voter intimidation on electoral choices underscores the urgent need for stronger enforcement mechanisms to protect voters.

Despite technological interventions such as PVCs, BVAS, and IReV, perceptions of their effectiveness remain mixed. While some respondents acknowledged improvements in electoral integrity, others expressed reservations, indicating that further reforms are necessary to enhance transparency and public trust.

Efforts to curb vote buying and voter intimidation have been perceived as largely ineffective, highlighting the need for stronger institutional frameworks and voter protection strategies. Increasing public awareness and strengthening enforcement mechanisms will be critical to improving electoral integrity in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underline that the principles of democracy, especially those founded on the consent of the people, are universally accepted. However, the failure to adhere to these principles has significantly hindered political development in Nigeria. Electoral fraud, in its many forms, impedes the democratic process by denying citizens their right to free and fair elections, thereby stalling the process of democratic consolidation. This is evident in the political culture of voter apathy, with electoral violence and the use of thugs by political parties further exacerbating the issue.

The Marxist theory of the state, which was used to frame the analysis, argues that the state often serves the interests of the dominant

class, which, in Nigeria's case, involves political elites using electoral fraud to maintain their hold on power. This manipulation has a detrimental effect on the electoral system and undermines the very essence of democracy. The persistent use of political thugs and ballot stuffing by state-controlled political parties has contributed to low voter turnout and eroded the electorate's ability to choose their representatives freely.

The study concludes that electoral fraud continues to be a significant barrier to the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy. The practices of manipulating elections for personal or political gain have undermined the political system and negatively affected the overall development of the nation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers several recommendations aimed at improving the electoral process and fostering democratic consolidation in Nigeria:

Sovereign National Conference: A National Conference should be convened to facilitate a fundamental restructuring of Nigeria's political system. This would provide an opportunity to develop a new government that is rooted in a true democratic constitution and policies focused on the welfare of the people, including full employment, social security, and sustained infrastructure development.

Prosecution of Electoral Offenders: A legal framework should be established to hold accountable individuals who use their political power to rig elections or enrich themselves at the expense of the electorate. This would help to ensure that those who engage in electoral fraud face legal consequences for their actions.

Elimination of Electoral Fraud: Comprehensive measures should be taken to eliminate electoral fraud by promoting electoral justice and transparency. This would

enhance the integrity of the electoral system and contribute to the full consolidation of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

In conclusion, the successful consolidation of democracy in Nigeria is contingent upon the eradication of electoral fraud, the establishment of a fair and transparent electoral system, and the promotion of political inclusivity that empowers citizens to participate in the democratic process without fear or intimidation.

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