

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND CREDIBLE ELECTION IN NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2019 ELECTION

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Abstract

The conduct of credible election is often described as a pre-condition for the stability of democratic governance. This is because credible election has the potential of providing quality leadership, increase government legitimacy and contribute towards its sustenance. Perhaps, this explains why credible election has been described as an instrument of measuring quality of governance and development, especially in developing democracies. Arguably, African fledgling democracies have been trying to conduct credible elections in the last two to three decades but with little progress. This paper investigates the application of election digital technology and the extent to which it influences credible election in Nigeria. Three components of election technology which include the card reader machine, voter register, and electronic transmission of result were used to measure election credibility which is define in this paper as inclusiveness, transparency and accountability. Using qualitative data, the study revealed that election technology has changed the pattern and layers of electoral process but did not significantly improve transparency and accountability of electoral process. Though, the study found that the number of voters have increased to over eighty-four million however, the quality of voters' register was low as there were reported cases of missing names and wrong demographic information of voters. It was also found out that voters' turnout was the lowest since 1999 as thirty- four percent of the registered voters participated in the election as against forty-four percent during the 2015 election. The adopted technology as the study shows could neither detect nor resist cases of multiple and under-age voting, proxy-voting, and manipulation which were very much prevalent during the 2019 election. These challenges have contributed to citizen's distrust on INEC organizational capacity to conduct credible election in Nigeria. It also gave rise to the increase in the rate of election litigations at election tribunals to over eight hundred after the election. Thus, the paper recommends comprehensive review of the 2010 electoral act to accommodate complete digitalization of electoral process in Nigeria. It also recommends the development of a fortified and automated data bank for all registered voters so as to detect and filter out multiple voting and under-age voters as well as guard against manipulation of collation process. This will go a long way in ensuring inclusiveness, accountable and transparent electoral process in the country.

Keywords: digital technology, democracy, credible election, political parties