INTERNET-BASED ELECTRONIC VOTING AS A PANACEA TO ELECTION RIGGING IN NIGERIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i6.20

Keywords

Internet-based, Electronic, Voting, Rigging, Transmission

Abstract

Research Problem: *Election rigging has persistently undermined Nigerian democracy from the First Republic to the present, defying numerous legislative, judicial, and technological interventions. Despite the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) in the 2023 general election, manipulation of results during collation remains a significant challenge.*
Methods/Theory:*This prescriptive paper adopts a qualitative methodology, utilizing secondary data including election observation mission reports, academic journals, books, and media sources. The study employs Machiavellianism as its theoretical framework to explain the mindset of political actors who engage in electoral manipulation.*
Results:*The analysis reveals that while technological advancements in voter accreditation have reduced multiple voting, results collation remains vulnerable to manipulation. The study identifies specific instances where collated results diverged from those displayed on the IReV portal, particularly in Rivers State during the 2023 Presidential election.*
Conclusion:*The study concludes that internet-based electronic voting machines deployed to polling booths, with real-time transmission and collation of votes to a central server, would substantially reduce election rigging in Nigeria and eliminate several electoral issues.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge:*The paper proposes a comprehensive technological solution that extends beyond accreditation to encompass the entire voting process and offers a framework for implementing internet-*

based electronic voting in the Nigerian context.
Recommendation:*The paper recommends amending the Electoral Act to accommodate internet-based electronic voting with real-time transmission, extensive public orientation through traditional and new media in English and local languages, the design of a simple user interface resembling a ballot paper format, and the implementation of backup servers to address potential system glitches or hacking attempts.*

SECTION 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Election rigging has become a pandemic in many democracies across the world. According to Ibrahim (2006:12), "the objective of electoral rigging or fraud is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted, or would have voted into office someone other than the rigged-in individual.". Election rigging is a channel that unpopular politicians employ in their quests to secure victories in elections that they are unlikely to win. Rigging contaminates the legitimate channel through which citizens in a democracy choose their representatives for executive and legislative positions. Implications of rigging are numerous and damming. It dampens citizens' participation in the democratic process, thereby leading to voter apathy. In Nigeria, it is not uncommon to see youths who are supposed to be voting on an election day playing football on the roads of major Nigerian cities during the election period because they believe that their votes will not count even if they vote. Many also stay away because of premonitions that there will be violence. Apart from voter apathy, election manipulation also discourages capable prospects that are incorruptible from contesting elections because they believe that the election is likely to be manipulated by corrupt politicians and will not be free and fair. Overall, election rigging tends to promote bad governance, as those who win through rigging don't believe that they owe allegiance to the citizens. In most extreme cases, election manipulation can lead to the termination of civil rule. In many countries where the military took over power through coup d'état, rigging of elections has been highlighted as a major reason (Mahdi, 2024).

In Nigeria, election rigging has become ubiquitous in every election cycle since independence. It has defied several electoral reforms. It can be seen in the denial of registration of political parties to entities that are considered major opponents of the government of the day. It also manifests in malfeasances like vote buying, vote inflation, ballot stuffing, vote suppression and fraudulent declaration of the loser as the winner by the electoral official. According to Adele Jinadu, political elites in Nigeria also rig elections in advance through the appointments of party members as Commissioners of the Independent National Electoral Commission (Ujah, 2024). However, in the recent general election cycles in Nigeria, manipulation of election results in the collation centers has become a major issue. It has defied the existing electoral process and technology. With the technology reform that started in 2015 with the deployment of smart card readers that were upgraded to the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for the 2023 general elections, the issue of multiple accreditations is deemed resolved, but results collation has continued to be a great issue despite the introduction of the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) for displaying election results in the 2023 general election. In the 2023 general elections, there are cases of collated

results that were different from the results that were published on the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV).

One of such examples was that of the Presidential election result in Obio/Akpor council area of Rivers State. While the result collated in the Local Government and announced by INEC showed that Bola Tinubu, the candidate of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) won the election in the local government with 80,239 votes as against Peter Obi of Labour party who was credited with 3,829 votes; the result of that election on INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) clearly showed that Peter Obi won the local government with 73,311 votes, while Bola Tinubu came second with 17, 158 in 1,211 polling units across its 17 wards that was tallied by Premium Times, "representing 94.13 percent of the results from the council area" (Ugwu and Imukodo, 2023, pg 1). The BBC also came up with the same assertion (Addeh, 2023).

The research problem this study addresses is the persistent manipulation of election results during the collation stage in Nigerian elections, which has defied technological interventions focused on voter accreditation and result viewing. The central question is: can internet-based electronic voting with real-time transmission eliminate the vulnerability that currently exists at the collation stage?

The objectives of this study are to: (i) examine the nature and extent of election rigging in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, with particular focus on collation-related manipulation; (ii) evaluate the effectiveness of existing technological interventions in addressing election rigging; (iii) propose an internet-based electronic voting framework as a solution to collation-related manipulation; and (iv) identify potential challenges and remedies for implementing internet-based electronic voting in Nigeria.

While scholars such as Campbell (2011), Cheeseman and Klaas (2018), and Birch (2011) have extensively documented election rigging in Nigeria and other democracies, and while the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has progressively introduced technological interventions including smart card readers (2015), BVAS (2023), and IReV (2023), existing scholarship has not adequately addressed the vulnerability of results collation to manipulation despite these technological advances. Previous studies have focused primarily on voter accreditation and result transmission rather than proposing a comprehensive solution that would eliminate manual collation entirely. This paper addresses this gap by proposing internet-based electronic voting machines that automatically count and transmit votes in real time, thereby removing the collation stage where manipulation has persistently occurred. The paper adopts qualitative methodology. It utilizes secondary data such as the reports of the election observation missions, relevant books and journals on the subject matter.

SECTION 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Election rigging, also known as election manipulation or fraud, is any act that violates the regulations governing the organization of an election. Nwabueze (2005:1) sees election rigging as:

... electoral malpractices which are palpable illegalities committed with a corrupt, fraudulent or sinister intention to influence an election in favour of a candidate(s) by means such as illegal voting, bribery, and undue influence, intimidation and other acts of coercion exerted

on voters, falsification of results, fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as winner.

Cheeseman and Klass (2018) classified election rigging into six types. According to them, election rigging can be seen in gerrymandering, vote buying, hacking of election digital platforms, engaging in repression to prevent other candidates from campaigning, adding fake votes, or facilitating multiple voting to improve a given candidate's performance and duping donors into legitimizing poor-quality polls. Birch (2011) infers that manipulation of electoral institutions, manipulation of vote choice and manipulation of electoral administration are the major aspects of election manipulation. However, she believes that manipulation of electoral institutions and manipulations of vote choice are usually preferred by political leaders to manipulation of electoral administration. Apart from gerrymandering, all the rigging types that were analyzed by Cheeseman and Klass (2018) and Birch (2011) are relatable to the Nigerian electoral system.

Vote buying, for instance, is increasingly becoming a common feature of the Nigerian election. Nichter (2008) sees vote buying as a phenomenon that offers particularistic benefits in exchange for vote choices. It can be done before, during and after the election. For Schaffer (2002), vote buying is a wholly economic transaction whereby an electorate sells his vote to the highest bidder, and for Caplan (2006), vote buying is a system through which voters delegate their rights to their rulers. Vicente (2008) classified vote buying into crude vote buying, which is based on purely cash transactions, and door-to-door vote buying, which signifies the visitations of electorates by candidates to buy votes. Hasen (2000) classified vote buying into non-core vote buying and core vote buying. To him, the former is implicit, and the latter is explicit. There is also “abstention buying", which is an unconventional method of vote buying where a voter is paid to prevent him from voting, thereby reducing the vote of an opponent in his stronghold (Heckelman, 1998; Cox and Kousser, 1981). Vote buying can also be on an individual basis or community-based. It is community-based when a community is induced, and every member in that community is expected to go with the purchaser (Hasen, 2000). To be clear, vote buying is illegal under Nigerian law. Sections 22, 121, and 122 of the Electoral Act 2022, the law that governs the administration of the electoral system in Nigeria, emphasize that vote buying is a punishable offense. The Act prescribes varying punishments for offenses such as the purchase of a voter's card, bribing of voters to influence their voting choice, and for those who want to know who a voter will vote for in a polling booth. Vote buying became more popular with Nigerian politicians after some aspects of the Nigerian electoral system became digitalized in 2019 when the card reader technology was introduced for voters' accreditation procedure to arrest election rigging. Bratton (2008) noted that in vote-buying transactions in Nigeria, the political elites offer money as well as non-monetary items such as commodities and jobs.

In Nigeria, both electorates and selectorates are recipients of vote-buying. EU EOM observers witnessed multiple cases of vote buying in the 2019 and 2023 general elections. In its 2019 reports, the Mission claimed that its observers witnessed vote buying in places like Sokoto, Borno, and Kano, and it also mentioned institutional vote buying like the TraderMoni scheme that was introduced in 2018 by the Federal Government as an interest-free loan to traders, but it was targeted towards the general election as a form of vote buying (EU EOM, 2019). Similarly, the Mission claimed in its 2023

report that incidences of vote buying increased in 2023 more than in 2019, and its observers witnessed vote buying in Sokoto, Kano, and Akwa Ibom. (EU EOM, 2023). Also, at a time when there was a serious cash crunch in the country, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) claimed it seized N32.4m allegedly meant for vote buying a day before the 2023 Presidential election in Lagos State (Sanni, 2023).

There is also a recurring issue of the selectorates' inducement. Usually, most Presidential primaries of major political parties are a sort of bazaar. For instance, in 2022, there were reports about inducement in foreign currencies in the presidential primaries of the PDP and APC. Sam Ohabunwa, one of the aspirants who participated in the PDP Presidential primaries, recounted how delegates were induced with $10,000, $15,000 and $20,000 by the "four leading contestants " (Adepegba, 2022, 1), and this had an effect on their choices. Similarly, Rotimi Amaechi, one of the leading Presidential aspirants who participated in the Presidential primary of the APC, insinuated that the highest bidder won the primary (Ibunge, 2022).

Political exclusion is another form of rigging that is also applicable in the Nigerian electoral system. It is in two forms: exclusion of candidates and electorates. In Nigeria, there were cases of candidates' exclusion that were done through the use of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), an agency that was created by President Olusegun Obasanjo. One of such cases was that of Atiku Abubakar. Towards the 2007 Presidential election, EFCC indicted Atiku Abubakar for corruption and subsequently recommended his exclusion from contesting the 2007 Presidential election under the banner of Action Congress (AC), but he took the case up to the Supreme Court and won on April 16, 2007, just a few days before the election (Edike, 2009). Even though he lost the election, he believes that his participation was good for Nigerian democracy (Kumolu, 2013).

Similarly, the exclusion of electorates is a common trend in the Nigerian electoral system. It can be through the action or inaction of the election management body or the political actors. Usually, the Independent National Electoral Commission's timetable for registration of voters and collection of voters' cards is flawed in each general election circle and it usually disenfranchises millions of Nigeria. For instance, towards the 2023 general election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) disclosed that only 3,444,378 Nigerians, representing 32.8 percent out of 10,487,972 that registered online, were able to complete the registration at the physical centers (SERAP, 2022). Unofficial voters' disenfranchisement or exclusion is done by politicians through their cronies. The European Union Observation Mission reports for the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria detailed how several Nigerians were prevented from voting by political thugs in 2019, and similarly, in 2023, there were voters' intimidation and interruption of voting by political thugs (EU EOM, 2019; EU EOM, 2023). The Commonwealth Election Observation Mission also reported vote suppression across the country, especially in non-indigene-dominated areas in Lagos (The Commonwealth, 2019).

There is also the issue of repression of opposition candidates by incumbents to prevent opposition candidates from campaigning. In the Nigerian electoral system, there were incidences of incumbent Governors preventing their political opponents from using their preferred campaign venues and sealing the opposition party's secretariat (Godwin, 2023; Odiegwu,

2023). There was also a more grievous issue of preventing electorates from casting their votes. The EU EOM (2019) detailed how several Nigerians were prevented from voting by political thugs who were carrying weapons. However, this particular incidence was more pronounced in the 2023 general election. During the 2023 general election, reports from multiple sources highlight voters' intimidation and interruption of voting by political thugs in places like Lagos and Rivers State, leading to serious voter suppression in those States (EU EOM, 2023).

The Nigerian electoral system is also known for incidences of adding fake votes or facilitating multiple voting to improve a given candidate's performance. Campbell (2011) wrote on the issue of election rigging when he was serving in Nigeria. In particular, he mentioned the 2007 Presidential election, which Yar'Adua won. He believed that the election was massively rigged by the administration of President Obasanjo. Campbell (2011) detailed the electoral infractions witnessed by the United States of America on the day of the 2007 Presidential election. He noted that Election Observers reported that they saw no ballot paper in some places, and polls opened late and closed early in many polling centers. According to Campbell (2011), rigging was massive because international and local observers estimated that turnout was in the region of 14 million, but Yar'Adua won with 24 million votes, and Buhari had 6.6 million votes. Campbell (2011) also noted that there was a consensus among all international observation bodies that the election was rigged in favor of Yar'Adua by INEC.

In the recent Presidential and National elections that were held in Nigeria in 2023, the EU EOM (2023) report stated that there was a lack of transparency in the collation process and noted that INEC failed to state the calculation process it adopted to arrive at the winners of the Presidential and National Assembly elections. The report also noted that INEC did not ensure that the original results sheets were the same as the results sheets that were uploaded on the election portal, IREV. This was one of the serious infractions of the Presidential elections. The River State Presidential election result, for instance, showed that Peter Obi of the Labour Party won the election in the State based on the results displayed by INEC on the IREV, but INEC declared Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress as the winner in the State (Addeh, 2023).

In all, it is clear that there are divergentperspectives on election rigging in Nigeria. While Campbell (2011) attributes the 2007 election rigging primarily to institutional manipulation by the Obasanjo administration, the EU EOM (2003) reports emphasized procedural irregularities such as ballot box stuffing. These divergent perspectives suggest that election rigging in Nigeria operates at multiple levels: institutional, procedural, and technological. However, neither perspective adequately addresses the specific vulnerability created by the manual collation process, which this paper seeks to address.Also, while scholars have documented various forms of election rigging and proposed electoral reforms, the specific proposal for internet-based electronic voting with real-time transmission as a solution to collation-related manipulation remains underexplored in the Nigerian context.

Electronic voting has been described by many scholars in different forms. Norbert and Harald (2004) see electronic voting as a voting method that is supported through the use of electronic devices and the permissible processes include voters' registration, electronic counting, and internet voting. Alvarez and Hall (2004) specified that what they meant by "internet

voting" was actually "remote Internet voting." According to them, remote Internet voting is voting by using a computer that is not under the physical control of election officials; the ballot is cast over an Internet connection. Apart from remote Internet voting, they also mentioned kiosk Internet voting, polling place Internet voting, and precinct Internet voting as other forms of Internet voting. For the purpose of this paper, the type of electronic voting being referred to is the one tagged as polling place Internet voting by Alvarez and Hall (2004). Internet voting from a designated and controlled polling station has been used by countries like India and Brazil (Ardita and Jordi, 2015). One of the motivations for the use of electronic voting in these countries is their huge population. According to the World Health Organization(2026), India's population was 1, 438 069, 596as at 2023, and Brazil's population was 211,140,729 as at 2023 (WHO, 2023). Managing a non-electronic voting system in such high-population countries will be susceptible to complex logistical issues and even manipulation. Conducting an election with ballot papers along with manual collection of results in a population of almost one and a half billion people, as in the case of India, will be very challenging; it may take many days, if not many weeks, before the collation is completed, and there may also be complications in the entire process. Brazil, which currently uses electronic voting, has a smaller population than Nigeria and has operated electronic voting for all its elections since 2000 without any major setbacks. Nigeria can definitely replicate Brazil's success story in electronic voting.

SECTION 3

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials for the paper were sourced based on the following criteria: (i) publication date from 1999 to 2024 to capture the Fourth Republic electoral cycles; (ii) geographic focus on Nigeria; (iii) thematic relevance to election rigging, electoral technology, or democratic governance; (iv) inclusion of primary observation data where available; and (v) publication in peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, or credible media sources. Thematic analysis was conducted using the following steps: (i) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of sources; (ii) generation of initial codes based on types of election rigging identified; (iii) grouping codes into broader themes including accreditation-related rigging, collation-related rigging, vote buying, and political exclusion; (iv) reviewing themes against the data to ensure consistency; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the narrative analysis presented in this paper.

The following table highlights the data sources and respective themes covered by the paper.

SOURCE TYPE	NUMBER	KEY THEMES COVERED
Election Observation Reports (EU EOM, Carter Centre, NDI)	5	Accreditation irregularities, collation, manipulation, violence
Academic Journals	12	Types of rigging, theoretical perspectives, comparative analysis
Books	8	Historical context, institutional
Media Investigation (Premium Times, BBC)	4	Specific election irregularities

Policy/Institutional documents	3	INEC procedures, Electoral Act provisions

The study acknowledges limitations including reliance on secondary data and the inability to conduct primary observation of electoral processes. However, the use of multiple observation mission reports and investigative media sources triangulates findings and enhances reliability.

SECTION 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A paradigm that explains the thought process of political actors when they rig elections is Machiavellianism. According to Machiavelli (1532), a ruler (the Prince) is only judged by the result, and he should "have the credit of conquering and holding his state; the means will always be considered honest, and he will be praised by everybody". This philosophy has been interpreted to mean "the end justifies the means," i.e., a ruler should undertake any method or approach to achieve his goals, irrespective of the goodness or morality of the approaches he undertakes to get them. Corrupt politicians resort to this when they contest elections they are bound to lose. This philosophy is undemocratic as it deprives the people of the right to hold their government accountable in a democracy. Democracy is referred to as the government of the people, by the people, for the people (Lincoln, 1863) and a government "by the people" implies that the people have the power to elect the representatives that govern them. When an election is rigged, the people are handicapped, and their elective function and power are taken away from them. In Nigeria, unscrupulous politicians use "the end justifies the means" when they know they cannot win: they suppress their opponents' votes through violence, they alter election results at the collation center, they procure multiple votes, and they buy votes, among other malfeasances.

However, while Machiavellianism provides a useful framework for understanding why politicians rig elections, it is insufficient for explaining the systemic nature of election rigging in Nigeria. Machiavelli's framework focuses on individual rulers' behaviour, but Nigerian election rigging is institutionalized and involves multiple actors including INEC officials, party agents, and security personnel. This suggests that the problem is not merely individual amorality but systemic failure. Therefore, while we use Machiavellianism to explain the psychological disposition of political actors, we argue that the theory must be supplemented with institutional analysis to fully understand the persistence of election rigging.

Alternative theoretical frameworks such as institutionalism would focus on the rules and structures that enable rigging, while rational choice theory would emphasize cost-benefit calculations. Machiavellianism complements these perspectives by explaining the moral reasoning (or lack thereof) that permits politicians to justify rigging. However, unlike previous applications of Machiavellianism to electoral politics, this paper applies the theory specifically to the collation stage of elections, demonstrating how the distance between polling units and collation centres creates opportunities for manipulation that politicians exploit.

This paper proposes an extension of Machiavellianism to account for institutional contexts. We argue that Machiavellian behaviour

is not purely individual but is enabled and constrained by institutional structures. In the Nigerian context, the manual collation system provides structural opportunities that facilitate Machiavellian behaviour. This suggests that addressing election rigging requires not only changing individual behaviour but also restructuring institutional arrangements to remove opportunities for manipulation.

SECTION 5

ELECTION RIGGING IN NIGERIA

Faulty elections have been a bane of Nigerian democracy since the First Republic. The Western Region of election of 1965 was deemed rigged, leading to a landmark post-election crisis that shook the nation and ultimately largely culminated into the first military incursion into Nigerian politics in January 1966 (Aliyu, 2026). The military coup of December 31, 1983, also followed a disputed and violent general election in 1983. There were accusations and counter-accusations of rigging by all the major parties (May, 1983). After Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, elections continued to face credibility issues. Campbell (2011) believed that each of the general elections that were held in 1983, 1999, 2003, and 2007 was successively less credible than its predecessor. The Presidential election of 1999 was considered by numerous observation groups as not credible. For Instance, the NDI/Carter Centre noted that its observation team observed various irregularities across the nation. They listed abuses of the electoral process such as ballot stuffing, voters' intimidation and inflation of results. In an election that was won by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) by a margin of 18 million votes over 11 million votes polled by the only challenger Chief Olu Falae of the Alliance between Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All People's Party (APP), the observers reported that Olu Falae referred to the election as "a farce" (The Carter Center and NDI,1999, pg.11). The Carter Foundation, in a letter signed personally by President Jimmy Carter asserted that "there was a wide disparity between the numbers of voters observed at the polling stations and the final results that have been reported from several states, regrettably, therefore it is impossible to make accurate judgment regarding the outcomes of the Presidential election" (The Carter Center and NDI,1999, pg 11).

The 2003 Presidential election suffered a similar fate of election irregularities just like that of 1999. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2003) reported that there were "several episodes of massive rigging" and that the election was marred by "serious irregularities and frauds of various nature: ballot box stuffing and ballot box snatching, forgery of results, falsification of results sheets" (pg 37). There were also several irregularities in the 2007 Presidential election. The presidential election was greatly flawed to the extent that the winner of the election, the Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party, had to admit that the election that brought him to power was tainted with massive irregularities (Zakariyau, 2023). Campbell (2011) gave a succinct record of the massive fraud of that election in the book he wrote on his steward in Nigeria. According to him, there was a consensus by all international observation bodies that the election was rigged in favor of Yar'Adua by INEC.He stated that many observers reported that no ballot paper was allocated to many poling boots and many polling booths opened late and closed late. He believed that the election was massively rigged to the extent that Yar'Adua won with 24 million votes and Buhari had 6.6 million votes, despite the fact that the

local observers estimated that only 14 million votes were cast.

The 2011 Presidential election that was won by Goodluck Jonathan was declared rigged by the second placed Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), even though the election was described by "International and local observers as Nigeria's most credible vote in decades" (Clottey, 2011, pg 1). What was indisputable in that election was the level of violence that followed it. More than 500 people were killed in the violence that followed the declaration of the result (Clottey, 2011, pg 1). The Presidential election that followed was not disputed by the defeated incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan. In that election, INEC introduced an electronic device known as a smart card reader for the accreditation of voters. This marks the beginning of the process that could lead to electronic voting in the future. The devices reduced the incidence of multiple accreditation and voting, but did not eradicate it because INEC still allowed accreditation through the 'incidence form'. An Incidence form is a one-page form that an electorate was mandated to complete instead of accreditation through the card reader device when their biometric accreditation failed on the card reader machine.

The incidence form was jettisoned by INEC for the 2019 general election, which was won by the incumbent Muhammadu Buhari. However, incidents of manipulation were recorded by the election observers. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in its 2019 election report detailed how its observers witnessed incidents of intimidation of INEC officials during the collation process in 20 States (EU EOM, 2019). INEC improved on the process leading to electronic voting in the general election of 2023. The body introduced the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV) for accreditation and displaying of election results. The BVAS, unlike a card reader, can accredit a voter either through biometrics or through the face. However, the European Union Election Observation Mission claimed in its 2023 Observation report that the process of collation of votes was disorganized, tense, and chaotic. The report also claimed that the collation process was not transparent and that INEC could not defend how it arrived at the final election results in both the presidential and National Assembly results. The group also claimed that there were cases where the original results sheet from the polling booths were different from documents that were uploaded on the INEC Results Viewing Portal (EU EOM, 2023).

What is striking about the historical record is not merely the persistence of election rigging but the adaptation of rigging methods to changing circumstances. As technology addressed accreditation fraud, rigging shifted to collation. This suggests that electoral integrity requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all stages of the electoral process simultaneously.The historical record demonstrates that technological interventions have consistently addressed one aspect of rigging while leaving others vulnerable. The introduction of BVAS and IReV in 2023 addressed accreditation and result viewing but did not prevent collation manipulation. This pattern of partial solutions suggests that a comprehensive approach, such as internet-based electronic voting with real-time transmission, is necessary to close all remaining vulnerabilities.

SECTION 6

INTERNET-BASED ELECTRONIC VOTING AS A SOLUTION

From the fallouts of the 2023 general election, it is important that Nigeria needs to fully adopt electronic voting from the accreditation process to the display and declaration of results. This paper proposes internet-based electronic voting as the solution to the perennial Nigerian election rigging quagmire. By internet-based electronic voting, this paper refers to the deployment of internet-based electronic voting machines into the polling booths, and voters will vote directly for their desired political party on the machine instead of thumbprinting ballot papers. The vote will be recorded on the machine and automatically transmitted in real time to a center server that will be monitored by the INEC officials and the agents of participating political parties in that election. Each voting machine should enable a print-out of the election results, and these print-outs will be stamped by INEC officials, given to the party agents in each polling booth, and submitted to the ward collation and subsequently forwarded to the Local Government Office and from there to the State office. At each of the locations, there will be no need for collation or tabulation of results; the results from each of the polling units will be digitally recorded and electronically summed together from the ward to the Local Government and to the State level in real time, thereby giving no room for manipulation at any level, as the votes have already been counted in real time.

Nigeria is actually not far from a full electronic voting technology. Electronic voting without internet was used twice by the Kaduna State government to conduct the state's local government election. The first was on 12th May 2018, and it was used again on 4th September 2021. Also, in the 2023 general election, accreditations of voters were done electronically through the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and results from each polling booth were displayed through the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV), even though Presidential results were posted very late due to what INEC termed as "a system glitch". However, the technology that this paper is proposing is such that each vote cast will be added on the result portal in real time.

For it to be implemented successfully, the extant Electoral Act needs to be amended to accommodate internet-based electronic voting with real-time transmission of votes to the INEC server, and there is a need for an extensive orientation in the old and new media in English and all the local languages on how to vote through it. The platform should be designed in a simple way, like the ballot paper format, for easy adaptation.

The following table shows the current and the proposed systems for the internet-based electronic voting:

ASPECT	CURRENT SYSTEM	PROPOSED SYSTEM
Voter Accreditation	BVAS (biometric/face)	BVAS (biometric/face)
Voting Method	Manual thumbprinting on ballot paper	Electronic voting machine
Results Recording	Manual counting at polling unit	Automatic digital recording
Results Transmission	Scanning and uploading to	Real-time transmission

	IReV	
Results Collation	Manual at ward, LGA, and state levels	Automatic digital aggregation
Manipulation Opportunities	High at collation stages	Minimal (eliminates manual

The merits of internet-based electronic voting are numerous. Firstly, it will eliminate the need for tabulation of results at the collation centers, thereby eliminating rigging that is usually perpetrated in collation centers. Secondly, it will also substantially reduce the election turnaround time on election day. The time that is usually wasted in layers of collation centers for collation and summing-up of result will be eliminated, as the results would have been digitally generated. Thirdly, Internet-based electronic voting will also accommodate independent candidacy. One of the reasons why independent candidacy is difficult to implement is the complication of having long ballot papers, but voting through electronic voting machines will aid its implementation. Fourthly, it will also reduce the incidence of voter apathy in Nigeria, as it will invoke confidence in the citizens that their votes will count. Fifthly, it will also eliminate the incidence of invalid votes. Voting with a ballot paper usually generates many invalid votes. In the 2023 Presidential election, 939,278 invalid votes were generated (Ajayi, 2023). Invalid votes arise when voters inadvertently thumbprint on a ballot paper multiple boxes of political parties or outside the designated area. But with an electronic voting machine, invalid voting will not exist, because voting can only be recorded when the right box is touched.

SECTION 7

ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED REMEDIES

It should be acknowledged that conducting an election with internet-based electronic voting machines will not eliminate all forms of rigging methods. However, it may eliminate issues such as over-voting, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, and results manipulation at the collation centers. The concern again is that it may not eliminate malfeasances such as transactional voting (vote buying and vote selling) and vote suppression through the use of violence.

Other challenges include the fear of system hackers compromising the election result server or even an incident of a system glitch during the election. While the fear of hacking is legitimate, it is important to note that Nigerian banks, telecommunications companies, and other critical infrastructure are already operating online real-time systems. The electoral system can adopt similar security measures, including end-to-end encryption, multi-factor authentication, regular security audits, and penetration testing. Additionally, a paper backup (voter-verified paper audit trail) would provide a physical record that can be used for verification and recounts. A backup server can also be deployed in case of glitches. Also, to the incessant internet connectivity issue in Nigeria, the proposed system can be designed with offline capability, allowing votes to be recorded

locally and transmitted when connectivity is restored. Alternatively, dedicated 4G/5G networks could be deployed for election purposes

Another concern is on the illiteracy level in Nigeria. According to the World Bank (2024) 30 percent of Nigeria age 15 and above are illiterate. There is a concern that conducting elections through internet-based electronic voting may be problematic because it is assumed that illiterate electorates may not be able to vote through an electronic voting machine because they are used to voting through the ballot paper. This may not be an issue if the platform is designed in a simple way in the format of a ballot paper. It will just be a soft copy equivalent of the ballot paper, and all a voter needs to do is to press the logo of the party he wants to vote for on the platform of the electronic voting machine.

In terms of costing, while the initial investment in electronic voting machines would be significant, the long-term benefits in terms of reduced administrative costs, elimination of ballot paper printing, and reduced need for post-election tribunals would justify the expenditure. The cost can also be spread across multiple election cycles.

Also, the current legal framework does not support electronic voting. Its implementation would require amending the Electoral Act to permit electronic voting and to provide legal recognition for electronically transmitted results. Constitutional provisions regarding the declaration of election results would need to be interpreted to accommodate electronic voting. All this can be done when there is political will by all the arms of the government.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the following specific recommendations are offered: (i) INEC should initiate a pilot programme for internet-based electronic voting in selected local government areas in the next off-cycle election; (ii) the National Assembly should amend the Electoral Act to provide legal framework for electronic voting; (iii) INEC should develop a comprehensive public education programme using traditional media, social media, and community engagement; (iv) the federal government should allocate special funding for election technology infrastructure; and (v) political parties should be included in the development and testing of the new system.

The political feasibility of this proposal is a legitimate concern, as politicians who benefit from the current system may resist reform. However, the increasing public demand for electoral integrity, the advocacy of civil society organisations, and the support of international partners create momentum for reform. The demonstrated willingness of INEC to adopt technology in 2015, 2019, and 2023 suggests that further technological reform is possible

Despite the concerns, internet-based electronic voting can be implemented in Nigeria's general election, and it should be implemented. It will substantially solve the issue of election rigging in Nigeria. India, the biggest democracy in the world, is using electronic voting despite its challenges. Election rigging is difficult to prove under Nigerian law. As a matter of fact, no Nigerian President has ever lost an election case in any Nigerian court. In some cases, the cases are won based on technicalities. To be fair to the election tribunals, it will be practically impossible to look at thousands of ballot papers that were submitted by the petitioners within the period allocated for the exercise under the Electoral Act. With the use of an internet-based voting machine, there may not be any need for an election tribunal for issue relating to voting as the results will be

recorded on the INEC portal as they are being cast in the polling booths. This paper believes that in order to substantially reduce election rigging in Nigeria, especially through results collation, the use of technology must be extended beyond accreditation and scanning of result sheets to the use of real-time internet-based electronic voting machines that will ensure that each vote that is cast is automatically counted and recorded in real time.

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