MAKING VOTESCOUNT IN ELECTION TECHNOLOGY ERA: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR NIGERIA'S FUTURE ELECTIONS TO ENHANCE GLOBAL STANDING

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ABSTRACT
The electoral process, been a recurrent political ceremony, holds central significance within any democratic framework; however, the realization of honest vote counting during elections has presented persistent challenges within the context of Nigeria.Readings from extant literature stronglyrevealed there is consensus forutilization of technologies forvoters'accreditation, voting and results transmission with electoral institutions handling results collation and declaration but this has continue to cast doubt on theintegrity of the electoral processand have undermined the significance of votes as the political environment experienced in the Nigeria's 2023 elections showed that the issue of credibility remain unresolved,underliningthe gap between expectation and election outcome. This paper examines the 2023 election procedures cum the nature of the political climate experienced and frames an Automated Election Management System (AEMS) model credible for promoting conducive politico-climate tooptimise the significance of votes. The qualitative technique was adopted. This paper argues that except the entire election process in Nigeria is automated, votes would still not count in future elections. The fate of democracy, the country's global standing will remain in doubt and her foreign policy will continually glitch.This paper is significant as it contributes to existing literature on the imperative of automated election processin promoting democratic principles.It equally serves as policy guide for domestic, regional and international interventions on election matters.

Introduction

Elections represent a recurring political event pivotal to any democratic process, yet ensuring the significance of votes has proven challenging in some states in the international community due to the inadequacies experience with manual voting system.Nowadays, states across the international community aremovingawayfrom the traditional voting system andembracingthe utilization of election technology as a means of enhancing their democratic processdue to theadvantages it offers.The Nigerian statehassince 2011 embraced same. However, it appears that Nigeria is yet to holistically employan automated electionsystem that can translate intothe politico-climate conducive to optimise the significance of votes.Shettima (2023)claimed thatemploying technology in elections is indispensable because the potential to advancedemocratic principles including transparency, accountability, fairness of elections in Nigeria.Similarly, Salimonu, Rozaini, Kehinde &Jimoh(2013) claimed that adopting technology in voting can deliver credible, fraud free elections in Nigeria. With the same lens, Yusuf (2016) extoled that deployment of technology for voting can enhance speedy and accurate voters' accreditation; reduced the fraud of multiple registrations, multiple voting, ensure a considerablelevel of credibility, transparency, acceptability of counted votes, election outcome and the volume of post-election litigations.

However, Fatai (2022) confirmed that election outcomes in 2011, 2015, and 2019 in Nigeria revealed credibility issues,consequent upon malpractices and violence of different scales that characterized the processes of these elections despite the implementation of election technology. Accordingly, Premium Times Nigeria (PTN, 2022) lamented with reference to the 2023 elections in Nigeria that though the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairpersonissued a public assurance that the implementationof election technologiesfor voters' accreditation and results transmission would safeguard the integrity of voters' choices, ensure vote validity, and produce credible results but the election outcome apparently contradicted this promise as people's voteswere undermined.Unethicalpractices diminished the credibility of the election before the eye of community of internationalobservers.In this way, the politico-climate experience in 2023 elections in Nigeria stimulate global doubts about the integrity of the electoral institution and question the legitimacy of the elected leadership, underlining thegap between voters' expectations and the election outcome.

To this end therefore, the problems with the adopted technologies in the 2023 elections in Nigeria waslimiting the applied election technology to voters' accreditation and transmission of results, without consideration for other aspects of the election processsuch as votes casting, votes counting, votes collation andresults declaration. This also revealed a gap in the election managementand this lack of holistic automation of the entire election process is assume to have created the room for undue human interference, corrupt practices and casteddoubts on the significance and integrity of votes. Besides, readings fromGermann (2023), Adewuyi (2020), Yusuf (2016), Okediran & Ganiyu (2015), Fatai (2022), Peter & Inokoba (2023) and Ogieva & Ajisebiyawo (2023) revealed that making votes to count remains challenging in Nigeria.Thus, thechallenge requires a systematic reassessment in order to frame an Automated Election Management System (AEMS)model that could promote the ethical politico-climate necessary to optimistion of votes in Nigeria. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to reassess the 2023 election procedures cumthe nature of politico-climate to frame an AEMS that promotes the best politico-climate conducive to guarantee significance of votes in Nigeria's future elections. To achieve this, the paper delves into the following themes: the concepts of votescount, election technologyand politico-climate; empirical relevance, theoretical framework, research methodology; 2023 election proceduresand the nature of politico-climate that reducedvotes to nothing in Nigeria, anAEMS model to ensure significance of votes, theconducive politico-climate that AEMS provides to make votes significance in forthcoming elections. This paper holds considerable relevance, as the AEMS climate would favour votes significance in future elections in Nigerian, promote democratic consolidation, and enhance the country's global standing. This research is germane as it has added a model to existing knowledge on the imperatives technology in promoting the democratic principles across the globe.

Conceptual Issues

The Concept of Votes-Count

This concept stems from the conventional belief that election results, once declared, should accurately reflect the original votes casted. It arises from the fundamental query: do votes truly count? Despite its crucial role in democracies, the concept of votes counting has received limited definition in literature. What is typically discussed is the process of vote counting, which involves tallying votes either manually or with electronic assistance. In the context of this study, the term "votes-count" implies that following the casting of ballots by voters, the election outcomes are determined based on the counted votes. It asserts that the declared results of any election are derived solely from the genuine votes casted at the polling stations. This means that the handling of votes is not unjustifiably manipulated in favor of any candidate, regardless of their expectations, influence, or affiliations. Instead, the actual votes casted or the original ballots are tallied to ascertain the winners in a competitive election. In this way, votes can indeed be said to count. To ensure that votes truly count in any election, electoral bodies bear the responsibility of guaranteeing that the voting process, vote counting, collation, and transmission adhere to transparency and comply with international standards or electoral regulations. As Cox (1997) acknowledges that electoral institutions play a pivotal role in translating votes into seats, underscoring the importance of conducting these processes transparently and in accordance with the principles outlined in the Electoral Act or the ethics of election technology.

The concept of election technology

Election technology refers to electronic machines or devices utilized for verifying voter eligibility, accreditation, voting, counting, collating, and transmitting results to the central election office. Commonly known as electronic or automated voting machines (Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, 2023)), these technologies have been continuously integrated into elections worldwide, influencing every stage of the electoral process from voter accreditation to result transmission and declaration (International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, 2023)). MIT (2023) elaboratelyexemplified election technologies used globally:

i. Mechanical lever machines: First employed in the 1890s, these machines allow voters to indicate their choice by depressing a lever next to the preferred candidate. Votes are tallied by opening the machine and reading the counters associated with each candidate at the end of Election Day.

ii. Punch-card voting devices: Developed in the 1960s, these devices involve voters marking a pre-scored card using a stylus to create a hole associated with the candidate's number. Ballots are counted using card readers in the central election office.

iii. Scanned paper ballots: Also introduced in the 1960s, this technology entails voters marking paper ballots in private booths and placing them in a box. Precinct totals are then transferred to the central election office, either manually or electronically.

iv. Direct-Recording Electronic (DRE) machines: First used in the 1970s, these portable computers display ballot choices and electronically record votes. DREs often feature touch screens for selecting candidates, and some include a Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) for auditing or recounting elections.

Mark (2023) claimed that Nigeria adopted an advanced technology called Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) during the 2023 elections. BVAS, authorized by Section 18 of the 2022 Regulation and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections and Section 47 of the 2022 Electoral Act, verifies voter registration by authenticating the Permanent Voter Card (PVC). The BVAS authentication process involves scanning the QR code on the PVC, conducting an online search using the last six digits of the card, and performing another search using the card bearer's surname. BVAS also aimed to upload verified results from each polling unit to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) in real-time during the election hours, enhancing transparency in the electoral process. However, the experience during Nigeria's 2023 elections

revealed inadequacies in creating the necessary politico-climate for election technologies to deliver credible outcomes.

The concept of politico-climate

The term "politico-climate" derives from "political climate," initially used to elucidate prevailing political attitudes. Its roots trace back to ancient Greece and medieval-era France. Politico-climate often emerges as the principal determinant influencing election outcomes (Academic-Accelerator, 2023). Queen (2023) defines politico-climate as the emotional milieu shaped by public sentiment towards political issues and behaviors. It encompasses the general disposition or stance of the populace regarding politics at any given period. Various factors contribute to the politico-climate, including economic conditions, warfare, violence, and political corruption. From the perspectives of Academic-Accelerator (2023) and Queen (2023), politico-climate encapsulates the overall political mood, opinion, behavior, and attitude, serving as a pivotal factor in election outcomes. In our discussion, politico-climate signifies the attitudes, behaviors, and actions that characterized the political landscape during the 2023 elections, resulting in the depreciation of vote significance, fostering doubts about the election's credibility, and leading to rejections and legal challenges.

Empirical relevance

Election technologies and voting process have been scholarly researched.Karim, Khan, Zavin& Kund (2017)research titled a proposed framework for biometric electronic voting system revealed that the technology deployed byBangladeshElection Commission (BEC) waschallenged with votes counting malpractices and delay in declaration of election result because the entirely election process was not automated and designed an automated biometric voting system with a convenient user interface with an integrated database system containing all voters' information that via whichcasted votes are automatically countedand result can be generated centrally with less time. Karim, et.al (2017) argued that the automated voting system will improve the voting management of Bangladesh and eliminates unethical political climate such as fraudulent activities, corruptions, ensuring security, transparency, fairness, accuracy.It can be arguedtherefore, that though the research was conducted in a different political terrain apart from Nigeria, it provides an insight intothe significance an automated election system in improving the significance of votes anywhere.However, generating result centrally in Nigeria context has seems to be characterized with institutional undue alterations and manipulation of votes casted becausethe entire election process was not automated.

More interestingly, in research conducted outside Nigeria by Germann (2023) assessed the claim that electronic voting systems help voters to avoid common mistakes that lead to their votes remaining uncounted and provide more robust evidence based on a case study of extended internet voting trials in Geneva canton, Switzerland and foundthat only around 20% of votes were casted online where the opportunity existed, and online voting was most popular among voters with high levels of education. In addition to this, Germann (2023) argued that despite the small effect sizes, the results of Internet voting and electronic voting technology have the potentials to reduce avoidable voters' mistakes. It is arguable that Germann was concern about the system that reduce voters' mistakes and not concern framing a AEMS model that promotesthe politico-climate conducive to make votes as this is lacking in the context of Nigeria.

In context, Adewuyi (2020) examined the advantage of electronic voting technology in Nigeria over the conventional voting system and revealed that electronic voting makesvotes casting convenience, improves the convenience, efficiency and effectiveness of the election process; reduce the cost of organizing the election, increases participation and improves the integrity of election process in general. Issues associated with inaccuracy, insecurity, fraud and forgery inherent in the conventional manual method of voting arenot associated with electronic voting. Adewuyi (2020) advocated the need for a harmonized and enabling legislative framework, Nigeria's current electoral law, addressing technology concerns in electronic voting, costs, capacity and resources. However, failed to consider other aspects of the election process. The e-voting as proposed is not sufficient to ensure the significance of votes but an automated election technology that holistically incorporate the entire election processes to eliminate

human interference andperhaps promotean ethical politico-climateis required in Nigeria.

When the utilization of election technology was yet to be incorporated into the electoral act in Nigeria, Yusuf (2016) examined the impact of technology in the 2015 general election in Nigeria: A case for the review of relevant electoral laws and found that there was post-election litigation against the use of technology because the electoral act did not make provisions for deployment of technology at the time.Yusuf (2016) then observed that the supreme court of Nigeria ruled against the deployment of technology in electoral processes in Nigeria and advocated for urgent review of the relevant electoral laws due to the positive significance impact technological devicescan have on electoral processes. However, he did not also consider framing automated election model that will promotes the politico-climate favorable to make votes count or optimise the significance of votes in future election in Nigeria.

Similarly, Okediran & Ganiyu (2015) in their research on electronic voting in Nigeria argued that Nigerian 2015 general elections witnessed the use of electronic voters' register, permanent voters' card and smart card readers for authentication of voters but actual ballot casting was still by manual means and proposed a framework capable of handling electronic ballots. As Okediran & Ganiyu (2015) prescribed, the proposed framework required well-secured identification and authentication processes for voters through the use of biometrics; ballot casting should be through Direct Recording Electronics (DRE) voting machines connected to a central server over a private network. Arguably, adopting election technologies with the capacity to promote votes casting through DRE voting machines connected to a server over a private network can be helpful but such system that stillallowed electoral body to handle collation, transmission and declaration of election result will raise the credibility issue. A private network under the control of an electoral body may be subjected to election fraudand other unethical political climate because is likely to open the electoral body to undue influence of political-capitalists.

Nevertheless, Fatai(2022)research titled digital technology in Nigeria's elections drew lessons from 2019 and revealed that digital innovations enhanced elections in Nigeria because they reduced the instances of electoral fraud and irregularities but there was some drawbacks affecting their efficiency. In this sense, concluded that the problems were not operational issues relating to malfunctioning of the machines but the electoral management and suggested that digitisation will proceed better if there isreformation of electoral bodyand review of the Electoral Act to enhanced sanctity of elections in Nigeria.Arguably, the 2023 election experience faulted this position. Even though the electoral body had already experienced some reformsin terms of structure and new legal procedures was provided, digital technologies such as smart card reader was provided for accreditation, the electoral body were yet open to undue influence and post-election litigation proliferates.

More so, Peter& Inokoba (2023) examined the factors affecting the use of electoral technology in Africa with reference to 2023 presidential election in Nigeria and argued that while election technology offers the country avenues to block the loopholes that negate credible elections in the country, the culture of impunity, trust deficient in country's electoral system are drawbacks to the effectiveness of technology on elections in Nigeria. In this way, Peter & Inokoba (2023) was only interested in factors that hinders the successful adoption of technology in this election, but did not equally frame sufficient automated election system that will create the climate conducive to eliminate the election drawbacks.

Nonetheless, an assessment conducted by Ogieva& Ajisebiyawo (2023) on the dynamics of the innovation of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) as it affects 2023 elections in Nigeria and how INEC can use BVAS to strengthen the electoral process and minimise post-election crisis concluded that BVAS was a good innovation and the usage must be sustained and improved upon by INEC as manually conducted voting are mostly prone to corrupt practices and manipulations, which in most cases lead to post election violence, crisis and prolong cases at the tribunals and courts.Even if one may agree to Ogieva & Ajisebiyawo (2023) conclusion that the electronic voting was and improvement of the manual voting in Nigeria. The electronic voting was not sufficient as it was characterized with corrupt practices, post-election litigationsrejecting the election outcomes and this challenge require a holistic automated election system that promotes political climate

advantageousto nib election related corrupt practices from the stem.

It glaring from the foregoing empirical discourse that Karim, et.al (2017), Germann (2023), Adewuyi (2020), Yusuf (2016), Okediran & Ganiyu (2015), Fatai (2022), Peter & Inokoba (2023) and Ogieva & Ajisebiyawo (2023) providedfundamental insight as to the improvement recorded by the introduction of the electronic voting systemover the manual voting experience especially in the Nigeria context and also that there is consensus as to the corrupt practices associated with the aftermath of implementation of voting- or verification-centered technologies such as BVAS in the 2023 elections. However, thistechnologywas not sufficient enough to eliminate corrupt practices in the election process in Nigeria context. In other words, it did not adequately promote the political environment favorable to ensure the importance of votes and credible electoral process that translate to popular or legitimate government. To fill this gap therefore, this paper reassesses2023 election procedures, nature of politico-climate and to frame an AEMS model that promotes the best politico-climate favorable to ensurethe significance of votes in future elections in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning

The trust and confidence theories in respect to election technology is not credited to any one single scholar but to various scholars who haveat different times advanced arguments for utilization of election technology. Some of the scholars and their election technological-related works are Smith (2009) 'trust in technology', Alvarez & Hall (2009), 'electronic elections', Trechsel (2010) 'Internet voting...' and Lim (2017) 'elections in cyberspace.' Thetrust and confidence theories asthese scholars wrote, assumes thattrust in electoral institutions is crucial for the legitimacy of the electoral process. That adopting transparent and accountable election technologycan be instrumental to building and maintaining trust in the electoral system. In support of the trust and confidence theories, DeGregorio & Ambrogi (2016) stressed that democratic institutions should adhere to the principles of integrity, independence, transparency, integrity, competence, and fairness in political decisions to build public trust and confidence.

It follows therefore that, trust and confidence theoretical hypotheses applies to this research as the theories extol that utilizing election technology can promote transparency, accountability, build and maintain trust not only in the electoral institution but in the entire electoral system. This further implies that the trust and confidence theories supports democratic principles and perhaps ethical political environment conducive for votes casted to count. The AEMS model frame in this study is situatedwithin the hypothetical assumptions ofthe trust and confidencetheoriesbecause the model, if adopted is promising to influence transparency in the election process and ultimately optimize the significance of votes in future elections in Nigeria. The very political virtue apparently missing in the 2023 elections in Nigeria was the trust and confidence in electoral institution and the restriction of election technology to voters' verification and result transmission with largely human interference. In this way, it can be argued that the litigations filed by the People Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) as a rejection of the 2023 election outcomes in Nigeria was the consequences of lack of trust and confidence in the electoral institution and consequences of restricting the implemented of voting technology to only voters' verification and result transmission without consideration for automating the entire process of elections. Thedrawbacks of allegations of vote rigging, incompetence among election management officials, and severe logistical failure, all contributing to an unethical politico-climate that made Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), The Punch (2023), The Vanguard Nigeria (2023), Election Watch (2023), international representatives and community of observers described the 2023 elections in Nigeria as unsuccessful. And the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUOM, 2023) lamented that the widespread disappointment with the election management and alleged irregularities in the post-election environment made the PDP and LP todemonstratetheir dissatisfaction by walking out of the National Collation Centre further underscorethe fact that, the electoral institution apparently failed to display trust.

Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, relying on secondary sources pertinent to vote-count, election technology, and the politico-climate observed during Nigeria's 2023 elections. The sources

encompassed websites, articles, and newspaper content known for their credibility. The content analysis method was largely adopted, wherein the researcher identified relevant materials, compared their contents, extracted key information, presented and discussed thematic issues, elucidating relationships between variables pertinent to the subject matter under examination.

2023 election procedures and nature of politico-climate that made votes not count

The 2022 Electoral Act outlines the procedures for conducting the 2023 elections to ensure the significance of votes. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), the law delineates a process that comprises two primary procedures. The first procedure involves a 4-step manual process at Polling Units (PUs), which includes: (i) Counting of ballot papers, (ii) Recording of results on a specific form (EC8A), (iii) Endorsement of EC8A by candidate/polling agent, and (iv) Physically delivering the results to collation centers. The second procedure entails a 2-step electronic process from PUs, involving: (1) Recording of accreditation data and (2) Direct transmission of results. In cases where disputes arise over manual/physical PU results at the collation level, the electronically-transmitted result shall be utilized to resolve such disputes. The implementation procedure stipulates that: (i) After an election and the completion of results management procedure at the PU, the Presiding Officer should transmit a clear image of EC8A for collation purposes, while also delivering the hard copy of EC8A and the BVAS to the Registration Area (RA) Collation Officer. (ii) The Collation Officer, assisted by RATECH, should access IReV and compare the result held temporarily with the number of accredited voters in the BVAS to effect collation. (iii) The IReV result or the scanned image of the EC8A from the BVAS should be utilized in resolving disputes regarding results during collation. (iv) This process is replicated from one level of collation to a higher one until the result is declared and a return is made, integrating IReV images into the collation process to facilitate electronic transmission of results (INEC, 2023).

The procedure for the 2023 elections largely allowed human intervention at various stages, presenting opportunities for corrupt practices due to the manually aided election technology process. This contributed to the unethical politico-climate observed during Nigeria's 2023 elections. Information provided in Table 1 illustrates the politico-climate experienced in some Nigerian states.

Table 1. Evidence of unethical politico-climate that makes vote to not count in 2023 elections

State	Unethical Politico-climate
Katsina	Polling units were attacked by thugs and six Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation Machine System (BVAS)were snatched.
Delta	Polling units were attacked and two BVAS machines were snatched.
Niger	Bandits launched an attack, not necessarily on INEC offices or facilities, but in the area.
Rivers	House were burnt, people were killed at a polling unit.
Lagos	Thugs chased away electoral officers and carted away ballot boxes; voters were denied access to polling units.

Taraba	Killing, restriction of movement.
Akwa Ibom	Voters were machete and BVAS carted away.
Edo	Armed Thugs snatched ballot boxes and voting materials.
Kogi	Harassment of voters, voters dispersed and ballot boxes were snatched.
Bayelsa	Voting process was disrupted.
Abuja	Stick and stones-wielding political thugs destroyed ballot boxes in eight polling units, snatched BVAS.
Gombe	Attack on INEC ad-hoc workers.
Enugu State	Hoodlums were said to have engaged security agents in a fierce battle as they attempted to hijack election result sheets in polling units.
Osun State	Political thugs attacked, shot into the air to scare the electorate as officials of INEC narrowly escaped death and electoral materials were carted away.
Ogun	Ballot boxes were snatched and destroyed.
Sources:*The Punch (2023); The Vanguard Nigeria (2023);Election Watch (2023).*	

The unfavourable politico-climate during the 2023 elections, as outlined in Table 1 above revealed disruptions in the voting process, instances of election material snatching, harassment of voters, denial of access to polling units, and the killing of voters by armed and unarmed individuals affiliated with political parties. Additionally, there were failures to upload certain results, deliberate manipulation leading to the failure of the election portal, and delays in the collation and declaration of results. It is no wonder, PLAC (2023) succinctly described the 2023 election processes as marked by poor organization.

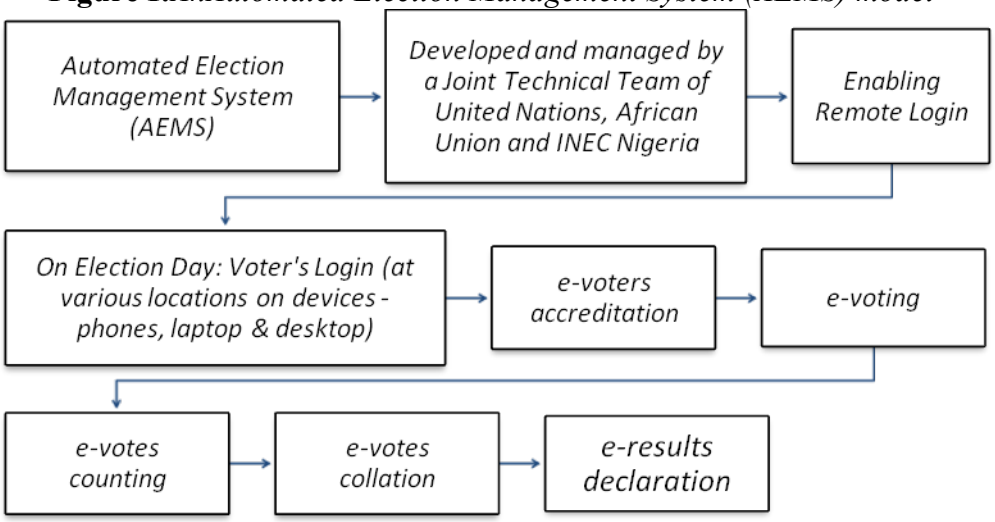
Both Nigerian and international observer groups, and joint delegates have echoed similar sentiments, indicating that despite reforms to the electoral legal framework, the election fell short of Nigerian citizens' expectations. Logistical challenges and multiple incidents of political violence overshadowed the 2023 electoral process, impeding a significant number of voters from participating. The lack of efficient planning and transparency by INEC during critical stages of the electoral process further eroded trust in the Commission, particularly due to delayed polling processes and gaps in information regarding access to INEC's Results Viewing Portal (IReV).

Developing an AEMS model to ensure significance of votes inNigeria's upcoming elections

The previous discussions highlight a noticeable disparity between the anticipated outcomes and the actual occurrences during Nigeria's 2023 elections. This gap became evident with the ease both manual and electronic procedures were disrupted. The

BVAS and INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) election technologies proved insufficient in safeguarding against election-relatedcorrupt practicesduring the voting process and in ensuring the accuracy of results generated from polling units. Therefore, the formulated AEMS presents an improved politico-climate that can ensure the significance of votes in this era of election technology, especially in Nigeria's future elections.

Figure I:*AnAutomated Election Management System (AEMS) model*

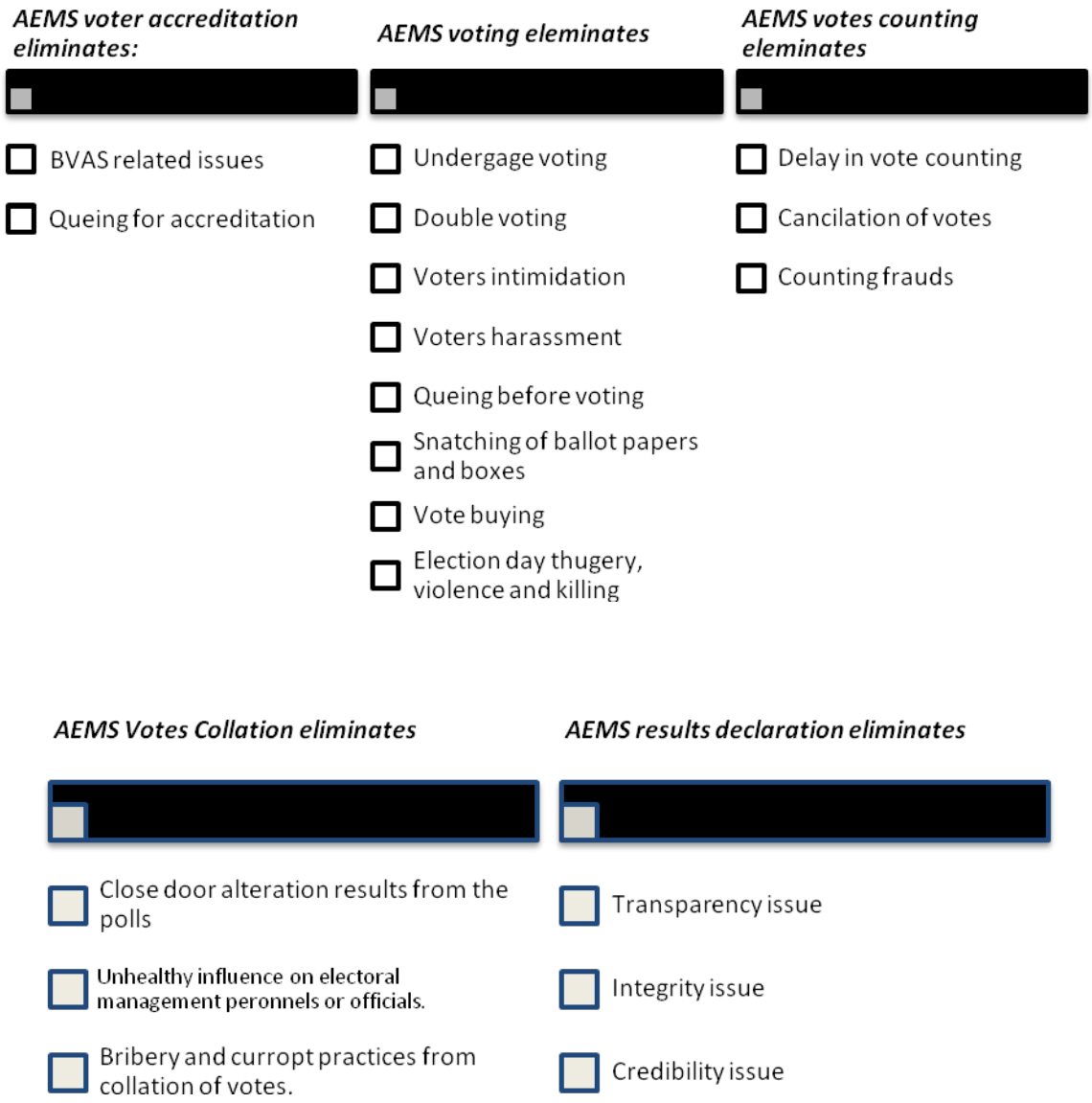


Source: *Designed by the Authors using Microsoft SmartArt tools*

The AEMS model is to be developed and managed by a Joint Technical Team comprising representatives from the United Nations, African Union, and INEC Nigeria to facilitate remote login by voters. The AEMS should be programmed to enable voters to log in from various locations using devices such as smartphones, laptops, and desktop computers to conduct accreditation and voting independently. Additionally, the AEMS should demonstrate intelligence in vote counting, vote collation, and results declaration.

The implication of the AEMS model lies in its ability to allow voters to cast their votes from their homes after installing the AEMS software on theirdevices before the election. This measure aims to minimize or eliminate human interference and unjustifiable manipulation of the election process from accreditation to the declaration of results. It is expected that the Joint Technical Team of the United Nations, African Union, and INEC Nigeria will ensure that the AEMS is equipped with necessary procedures to guide voters through the exercise and impose restrictions to prevent any forms of election fraud. Notably, the politico-climate facilitated by this model is implicitly illustrated in Figure II and is self-explanatory.

Figure II. *Apolitico-climate,an AEMS offers future elections in Nigeria*



Source: *Designed by the Authors using Microsoft SmartArt tools*

Conclusion

Elections represent a recurring political event pivotal to any democratic process, yet ensuring the significance of votes has proven challenging in Nigeria. This paperhas introduced an AEMS model to establish the necessary politico-climate to ensure the counting of votes in future Nigerian elections. To provide semantic, empirical and theoretical context, the discussion covered key concepts such as votes-count, election technology, politico-climate, and the underlying theory of the study. Central in this paper is the exploration of the procedures and characteristics of the politico-climate observed during Nigeria's 2023 elections, which hindered the significance of votes. This exploration forms the basis for the developed AEMS model and the associated politico-climate aimed at enhancing the credibility of votes in Nigeria's future elections, with the potential to significantly reduce election fraud. Therefore, this paper argued that unless Nigeria adopts the AEMS model, the significance of votes will continue to be undermined in future elections.

The fate of democracy, along with the country's global reputation, will remain uncertain. This paper serves as a significant policy guide for regional and international interventions in electoral matters. Furthermore, it contributes a novel model to existing literature, promoting free and fair elections through automated technology capable of minimizing human unjustifiable manipulation in the electoral process to a significant extent, thereby help to restore the lose reputation of electoral institutions in Nigeria.

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