Effect Of Digital Technologies On Structural Violence In Nigeria's Electoral Processes

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the potential of digital technologies to address structural violence in electoral processes. It examines the perspectives of scholars who argue for the effectiveness of digital technologies in resolving electoral concerns. Furthermore, the study explores the adoption of digital technologies in healthy democracies worldwide, highlighting their role in enhancing public participation, minimizing malpractices, and addressing procedural issues. However, focusing on Nigeria as a study, empirical evidence from the 2015 and 2023 elections reveals limitations in relying solely on digital technologies to curtail structural violence. The study used purposive, cluster, and simple random sampling techniques. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The study used Structural Equation Model to analyze its result. The findings revealed that digital technologies do not have effect on structural violence in Nigeria electoral processes as many electorates are being threatened to vote against their choice. Therefore, the paper recommends a comprehensive approach involving key stakeholders to safeguard political rights, ensure citizen participation, and promote fair elections in Nigeria by shunning electoral manipulation in order to prevent post electoral structural violence.

Keyword: Structural violence, digital technology, election, voting, inclusiveness.

1.0 Introduction

Every citizen of a state possesses the right to take part in the political life of the state through the elections process which allows them to either vote or be voted for. Election is therefore a core principle of democracy. In fact, a democratic system can only be meaningful and entrenched through an electoral process. This places on the government, the responsibility of establishing and promoting free and fair elections in which public's popular voice is heard and the newly recognized government is a representation of the collective will of the people (Ajagba, Gberevbie, & Osita, 2020). However, by purposefully influencing the processes and outcome of elections through the adoption of illegal and coercive measures, the choice of the citizens remains unacknowledged (Harish & Toha, 2019; Shelly, 2019). As observed by Ron (2001), the intensity and the high level of destruction that dominates the electoral sphere, for the purpose of infringing on the rights of individuals to exercise their political power and also control the outcome of elections, worth recognizing it as structural violence. The reason for this being that such actions are usually characterized by great loss of human lives and properties and if not addressed appropriately and on time, might devolve into a situation of civil war.

In Nigeria, elections have continued to be plagued and marred with insecurity, violence, destruction, and conflict (Oyeyemi, 2019). The electoral process in Nigeria has witnessed different dimensions of malpractices ranging from bribery, extortion, illegal practices, bureaucratic abuse, ballot snatching and stuffing, intimidation of voters, political thuggery among other (Sule, Sani & Mat, 2018). Over the years, electoral malpractice which encompasses illegal acts employed to manipulate the outcome of an election, continues to derail Nigeria's attempt at achieving credible elections (Davies, 2021). In an attempt to overcome the challenge of conducting free and fair election, the

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced the biometric card reader, Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Electronic Results Transmission to mention but a few. Despite this landmark development in the history, the denial of the political rights of citizens to participate in the political affairs of the state by either voting or being voted for continues to pervade Nigeria's electoral process. These has created an atmosphere of doubt on the ability of the country's electoral umpire - the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct free and fair election in the country (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2016; Tsuwa & Aliegba, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020). It is against this backdrop the study examines the effect of digital technologies on structural violence in the electoral processes of Nigeria.

1.1 Hypotheses

$H0_1$: Biometric Card Reader does not have a significant effect on structural violence in Nigeria electoral processes

$H0_{2:}$ Permanent Voter's Card does not have a significant effect on structural violence in Nigeria electoral processes

$H0_3$: Electronic Voting Machine does not have a significant effect on structural violence in Nigeria.

2.0 Review of the Literature

Some schools of thoughts have expressed suspicion that a technologically mediated election process may not be void of manipulation, procedural complexity, and breakdown thus escalating structural violence. Moreover, the concept of structural violence has been studied extensively by scholars (Dilts, winter, Biebricher, & Johnson, 2012; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016; Roller, 2018).

Manifestations of structural violence in the electoral process are evident in multiple dimensions, encompassing inequitable electoral laws and regulations, disenfranchisement and voter suppression, unequal distribution of electoral resources, coercion and intimidation tactics, and unequal political representation (Dilts, Winter, Biebricher, & Johnson, 2012; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016; Roller, 2018).

Lee (2019) explained structural violence to be political, economic, religious, or legal restrictions imposed on people which hinder them from attaining their basic human needs and living their lives to their full potential. Political constraints which hinder citizens of a country from being able to partake in the political affairs of their country, have been recognized as a major indicator of structural violence.

According to Ron (2001), the phenomenon of intense and highly destructive activities within the electoral sphere, which aim to undermine individuals' right to exercise political power and manipulate election outcomes, can be identified as a form of structural violence. Ron (2001) argues that the identification of these actions within the electoral sphere as structural violence is justified due to their often-catastrophic consequences, resulting in significant loss of human lives and property. Furthermore, if these actions are not effectively and promptly addressed, there is a risk that they may escalate into a state of civil war.

In healthy democracies around the world, technology has played a significant role in reducing instances of electoral misconduct over time (Yao & Murphy, 2007).

The recognition and safeguarding of the inherent right of each citizen to participate in the political sphere through elections, either as active voters or potential candidates, lie at the core of upholding the principles of democratic governance and citizen engagement (Ishiyama, 2011).

By ensuring equitable access to the electoral process and addressing the various manifestations of structural violence inherent within it, societies can strive towards the creation of a more equitable, just, and inclusive democratic system (Cushion & Thomas, 2018).

The denial of political rights by those in power, hinders the realization of government for, by, and of the people. Manipulating the election process and outcomes through illegal and coercive means undermines the acknowledgement of citizens' choices (Harish & Toha, 2019; Shelly, 2019). While some may recognize this phenomenon as electoral malpractice, it is, in fact, a manifestation of structural violence because these elements contribute to

the perpetuation of inequality, marginalization and violation of human right, undermining the fundamental principles of fairness, inclusivity, and integrity that are indispensable for the preservation of democratic systems.

Compromises within this body can further contribute to the exacerbation of existing conditions. Furthermore, the relentless pursuit of power by political elites often transforms the entire electoral process into a high-stakes competition, where violent and unethical means are employed to either retain or attain power (Kifrodu, 2011).

Tragically, innocent civilians frequently become victims of such political thuggery, caught in the crossfire of power struggles (Ziller & Schubel, 2015). As a result, there is a rise in voter apathy and a subsequent erosion of democratic values, as citizens lose faith in a system that fails to protect their rights and well-being.

Nations across the world are utilizing the advancement in technology to increase public participation in the electoral process and hence reduce the declining turnouts in elections (Oni, Oni, Ibietan, & Deinde-Adedeji, 2020; Krimmer, Duenas-Cid, & Krivonosova, 2021).

In Africa, the past two decades have witnessed the deployment of digital technologies to as solutions to malpractices and procedural problems which often characterise electoral process of many nations in the African continent (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2018).

The existence of inequitable electoral laws and regulations can be seen in the case of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria (Nnamchi & Nnamani, 2020).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced a last-minute guideline that required the use of card readers for voter accreditation. However, there were claims of problems at several polling places when card readers failed to work or were not used, resulting in voters being disenfranchised and candidates having an unfair advantage (The Guardian, 2019).

Manifestations of Structural Violence in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Inequality, marginalization, and power imbalances are all examples of structural violence, and they have real-world effects on the political process in Nigeria. These results illuminate the structural problems that compromise the democratic values of equality, inclusion, and honesty in the voting process. Inequitable election laws and regulations are a direct result of structural violence in Nigeria's electoral process. Because of the uneven playing field that is created by these laws and regulations, underrepresented groups are often unable to participate in the democratic process (Adepoju, Gberevbie, & Ibhawoh, 2021). Such unfairness undermines democratic principles of equal representation and fair competition by perpetuating existing social and political disparities (Olu-Owolabi, Gberevbie, & Abasilim, 2021).

Another form of structural violence in the Nigerian election process is the disenfranchisement and suppression of the vote. Problems with voter registration, intimidation, or a lack of convenient polling locations might prevent eligible voters, especially those from minority groups, from casting their ballots. These barriers have a disproportionate impact on some communities, resulting to their exclusion and diminishing their ability to participate in democracy. Disenfranchisement and voter suppression were clear problems in the general elections of 2015, 2019, and 2023. A number of accounts detailed instances of voter intimidation, violence, and irregularities that made it difficult for people to cast their ballots freely. There were attempts to silence dissenting voices through acts such as ballot box stealing, voter suppression in opposition strongholds, and politically motivated violence (Fatai 2020; Sungi 2022; Olayinka & Rotimi 2023).

Furthermore, the unequal distribution of electoral resources in Nigeria is a contributing cause to structural violence in the political process. Limited resources such as campaign funding, mass media access, and political infrastructure tend to be concentrated among powerful established political elites. This imbalance perpetuates advantages for incumbent candidates and parties, making it challenging for newcomers or marginalized groups to compete on an equal footing. The unequal distribution can

be observed especially in campaigns financing. Political candidates with access to significant financial resources often have an advantage over their competitors who lack the means to run effective campaigns. This creates an imbalance in the electoral process and undermines the principle of fair competition. Disparities in resource allocation were evident in the 2015 general elections, where reports of vote-buying and excessive campaign spending were widespread (Premium Times 2015).

Coercion and intimidation tactics employed during elections also constitute manifestations of structural violence. These tactics range from physical violence and threats to the manipulation of social and economic resources to influence voters' choices (Birch, Daxecker, & Höglund, 2020). Such coercive practices undermine the principles of free and fair elections, as they restrict individuals' ability to exercise their right to vote without fear or undue influence. Coercion and intimidation tactics have been employed in various elections in Nigeria. The prevailing culture of fear resulting from insecurity leads individuals to hesitate in exercising their voting rights due to concerns for their personal safety. The distressing number of lives lost during elections in Nigeria further discourages people from risking their lives to participate in an electoral process that may not accurately represent their choices (Aliyu, Mohammed & Bello, 2020). For example, during the 2019 general elections, there were reports of political thugs using violence and intimidation to disrupt the voting process in certain areas. These acts of violence create an environment of fear and restrict individuals' ability to freely exercise their right to vote (BBC News, 2019). Also, the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State witnessed allegations of deliberate voter suppression tactics deployed by certain political actors. There were reports of voter intimidation, harassment, and violence in some polling units (Premium Times, 2023). Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, the governorship candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in Lagos, took to twitter to voice his concerns about voter intimidation during the election. According to a tweet by Rhodes-Vivour, voters throughout the state are reportedly facing intimidation. He also accused the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the

police of being involved in these actions (Premium Times, 2023).

Moreover, Nigeria's electoral process reflects structural violence through unequal political representation. Certain groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities, often encounter obstacles in achieving meaningful political representation. This disparity in representation reinforces social inequalities and silences the voices of these groups in decision-making processes, further marginalizing their interests and concerns. The issue of unequal political representation is evident in the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Despite comprising a significant portion of Nigeria's population, women are frequently marginalized and have limited presence in political offices. This lack of representation perpetuates gender disparities and hampers women's participation in decision-making processes (Guardian Nigeria, 2021).

The Place of Digital Technologies in Electoral Process

Digital technologies encompass a wide range of tools, systems, and applications that utilize information and communication technologies (ICTs) to perform tasks, manipulate data, and facilitate communication and interaction (Maurer, 2020). These technologies rely on computers, software, networks, and digital devices to create, store, transmit, and manipulate data in various formats. In the context of elections, digital technologies have become increasingly adopted to enhance different aspects of the electoral process. The goals of these technologies include improving efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and security in elections with the aim of fostering a more inclusive and participatory democratic system (Russell & Zamfir 2018).

One important aspect of digital technologies in the electoral domain involves using computer systems and software to streamline administrative operations such as voter registration, candidate nomination, and ballot management (Chen & Smith 2010). Through digital tools, election officials can efficiently manage voter databases by authenticating and verifying voter information. They can also handle

candidate applications effectively while organizing and distributing ballots proficiently. Digital technologies also play a crucial role in facilitating communication during electoral campaigns by providing online platforms, social media channels,and other digital communication channels for candidates to engage with voters. These platforms enable them to communicate their policies and plans while addressing concerns effectively. These technologies enable real-time interactions between candidates and voters, thereby promoting more direct and immediate communication (Bor, 2018). Furthermore, digital technologies have the potential to substantially enhance voter accessibility and participation. Online voter registration systems enable individuals to conveniently register using their personal devices, thereby reducing barriers to entry. Electronic voting systems, such as internet voting or electronic voting machines, offer opportunities for remote voting and streamline the voting process, particularly for individuals with disabilities or those residing in remote areas (Simpson & Storer, 2018).

Transparency and accountability are fundamental pillars of democratic elections, and digital technologies can contribute significantly to these aspects as well. For instance, digital systems can facilitate the secure and efficient transmission of election results, thereby minimizing the potential for human error or manipulation. Additionally, blockchain technology has been explored as a means to enhance the integrity and auditability of election processes, ensuring the immutability and verifiability of data recorded during elections (Mamokhere, 2018). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the adoption of digital technologies in elections also gives rise to concerns and challenges. Security represents a critical aspect, as digital systems are susceptible to hacking, tampering, and other malicious activities. Safeguarding the integrity of digital election systems necessitates the implementation of robust cybersecurity measures, encryption protocols, and rigorous testing and auditing procedures. Privacy represents another pivotal consideration when employing digital technologies in elections. The collection and storage of extensive volumes of personal data require stringent measures for data

protection to uphold individuals' privacy rights. Ensuring public trust in digital election systems requires transparency in how data is collected, used, and stored (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017). Several electronic tools can be used to improve voting procedures. For instance, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are machines that allow for and record votes cast electronically. There are a variety of technological options available for improving the voting process. Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) is one such system, which uses fingerprints or iris scans to register voters. As a result, the electoral roll may be trusted and fewer duplicate registrations can be found (Jacobsen, 2020).

Voter Verification Systems are another form of voting technology worth mentioning; these systems use digital tools like smart cards and mobile apps to confirm the identity of voters. To ensure that only qualified voters cast ballots in an election, these systems are vital (Jard-Cedó et al., 2012).

Digital technology can be used for electronic transmission of election results as an alternative to depending entirely on manual procedures. To improve speed and accuracy and reduce the danger of manipulation, results can be transmitted in real time from polling places to central databases (Berkhout & Hertin, 2004).

Additionally, data analysis and predictive modeling utilizing cutting-edge data analytics methods can be used in electoral processes. To do so, we must analyze voting trends, voter profiles, and other election data. Election management bodies and political parties can use the insights gained from this kind of analysis to develop more effective plans and programs (Sun & Braatz, 2021).

The Utilization of Digital Technologies in Electoral Process: Evidence from Developed Democracies

Over time, the prevalence of electoral fraud has decreased as more and more democracies adopt and implement digital infrastructures (Krimmer et al., 2018). Electronic voting was first implemented in Estonia, a country noted for its forward-thinking approach to technology. Voters in Estonia have had the option to cast their ballots electronically with

the use of a photo ID and a PIN since 2005 (Krimmer et al., 2018). Through the use of various layers of authentication and encryption, the EVS ensures security, transparency, and auditability (Krimmer et al., 2018). The Estonian Electronic Voting System (EVS) has the distinct benefit of making it possible for citizens to cast their ballots from any location with an internet connection. Especially among young people who are comfortable with technology, this has led to higher rates of voter participation (Lagerspetz, 2016). Online voting has its advantages, but some people are wary because of security and privacy issues. The government of Estonia has taken steps to address these issues, including the use of strong encryption, multi-factor authentication, and routine security audits (Ehin et al., 2022).

Since 1996 (Kumar & Walia, 2011), Brazil has used EVMs in its elections, which has attracted a lot of attention. Using electronic voting machines (EVMs) in Brazil has been linked to higher voter turnout, lower error rates, and more voter trust, according to research (Neggers, 2018; Larreguy et al., 2016). Electronic voting machines in Brazil record votes using touch screens, microprocessors, and memory. They use encryption technology for further safety and are built to last (Kumar & Walia, 2011). But worries about tampering or manipulation of election results were sparked by the 2012 revelation of flaws in the electronic voting equipment. Evidence like these shows why it's crucial to keep working to improve cyber security (Kumar & Walia, 2011).

In the United States, the use of electronic voting systems varies from state to state and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The accessibility and efficiency of voter registration have both been greatly enhanced by online technologies. Electronic voting devices, which use a digital interface, have also been made available. However, there have been challenges related to the security of digital election infrastructure, transparency, accessibility, and technical issues (Kumar & Walia ,2011). The incidents of attempted hacking and interference during the 2016 presidential election raised concerns about the vulnerability of digital election systems. Transparency and public trust have been undermined by closed-source software, technical difficulties, and limited opportunities for independent

audits (Kumar & Walia ,2011). Ongoing efforts are being made in the United States to ensure equal access, address technical shortcomings, and protect voter data (Kumar & Walia, 2011).

Belgium has a long history of using electronic voting machines which provide advantages such as speed and accuracy in vote counting along with accessibility for all voters (Kumar & Walia, 2011). These machines undergo rigorous testing and certification processes while employing security features. Additionally, they include a paper trail for auditing and verification purposes (Stein & Wenda, 2014). However concerns have been raised regarding their reliability, security, transparency, and auditability(Kumar &Walia , 2011). Vulnerabilities discovered in both 2006and 2019have highlighted the need for robust cybersecurity measures as well as improvements in transparency(Kumar&Walia ,2011).

Utilization of Digital Technologies in Nigeria's Electoral Process - Insights from the 2015 and 2023 General Elections

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced card readers as a remarkable technological advancement to enhance the integrity and trustworthiness of the electoral process. These card readers were utilized to verify voters' identities and ensure that they voted in the correct registration area and polling unit (Alebiosu, 2016).

In anticipation of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, INEC conducted a trial of the biometric technology used in the card readers. This trial was carried out in only 225 out of a staggering total of 120,000 polling units and 358 out of an impressive 155,000 voting points designated for the elections (Idowu, 2015). The trial encompassed 12 states: Delta, Rivers, Kano, Kebbi, Anambra, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Lagos, Bauchi, Taraba Nasarawa, and Niger. While the Commission acknowledged challenges in confirming fingerprints, it expressed satisfaction that the primary purpose of the card reader, which was to authenticate the genuineness of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), was mostly achieved. However, the utilization of biometric machines during the elections encountered various challenges. These included limited or unsuccessful verification of voters' fingerprints

even after authenticating their PVCs, delays in accreditation due to poor internet server operations in certain areas, and insufficient knowledge of card reader usage among INEC officials (The Guardian, 2015). In such instances, there was a lack of standardized understanding among polling officials regarding contingency plans, including manual verification of voters' identities through cross-referencing with the printed voter registry and the issuance of Incident Forms (NDI, 2015). Consequently, thousands of eligible voters were disenfranchised.

The 2023 electoral technology on the other hand, introduced two complementary innovations: the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) (Acheampong, 2023). The BVAS is a portable device that incorporates biometric features, such as fingerprint scanning and facial recognition, to authenticate and accredit voters at polling units. It utilizes fingerprint reading to verify the identity of voters by comparing their biometric data with the stored information in the INEC database. Additionally, the device is equipped with a camera function to capture the raw result sheets from the polling units, which are then transmitted to the INEC's collation center (Bot, 2022). The captured raw images of the result sheets are subsequently uploaded to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). This online platform provides real-time access to the public, allowing them to view and monitor the results captured and transmitted from the polling units (Udemezue, 2023). Before accessing the uploaded results in PDF format from various polling units across the country, users are required to create an account on the portal.

Soon after the opening of polls during the Election Day, observers quickly noticed challenges with the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS). Polling unit officers encountered difficulties in the voter-accreditation process using the BVAS, resulting in significant delays that ultimately led to the disenfranchisement of many individuals (Hoffmann, 2023; Oladeji, 2023). The failure of the BVAS was unexpected both for voters and election observers, as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had conducted mock voter-accreditation exercises and

presented optimistic assessments of the technology's performance in press conferences leading up to the elections. However, deploying the BVAS on a larger scale on Election Day revealed unforeseen technical challenges that neither the INEC nor voters were prepared for. The mock trials conducted at only 12 polling units per state, which were deemed satisfactory by the Election Management Body (EMB), turned out to be premature celebrations and could not withstand the pressures of a real election day. These delays in voter accreditation were closely intertwined with the widespread malfunctioning of the BVAS itself. Reports from various polling units across the country indicated instances where the BVAS either failed to function entirely (e.g., in Borno State) or experienced intermittent glitches (e.g., in Lagos State). In River State, for example, the BVAS failed to capture the biometric details of several individuals, including the governor, and even resulted in the inability to validate identical twins as voters (Akeaya-inne, 2023). Similar occurrences were reported in other parts of the country as well (Akinlotan, 2022). The Punch newspaper reported cases where INEC officials brought incorrect BVAS devices to certain polling units, leading to the disenfranchisement of many potential voters.

The IReV, intended to be activated immediately after the conclusion of voting, operates through a series of steps. Firstly, the ballots from the polling units are sorted, counted, and endorsed by an INEC officer. Subsequently, the BVAS device's camera feature is activated to capture the raw result sheets, which are then transmitted to a real-time result-viewing portal. However, this supposedly seamless process encountered controversies that undermined the transmission phase.

At the end of voting, numerous INEC officials claimed to have forgotten their passwords for the IReV portal (Akeaya-inne, 2023). Those who remembered their passwords encountered issues where their passwords were deemed incorrect, preventing them from uploading the polling unit results in real time (Unini, 2023). While these cases may have been a result of inadequate training for the ad hoc staff responsible for operating the BVAS, the possibility of

deliberate sabotage by INEC officials cannot be ruled out (Akeaya-inne, 2023).

Furthermore, the delayed transmission of results to the INEC portal became a prominent issue. According to a report by the Premium Times newspaper, even 24 hours after voting had concluded, results from several polling units had not been uploaded (Suleiman, 2022). Although the INEC attributed this delay to routine technical glitches associated with platforms like the IReV, election monitoring groups like the European Union Observer Mission (EOM) reported that the option to use the BVAS offline, allowing results sheets to be uploaded in areas with weak internet connectivity, either failed to function or remained largely unused by those responsible (Akeaya-inne, 2023). Moreover, according to the EOM, there were issues with uploading scans of the presidential results from various regions of the country to the portal (Election Monitor, 2023). As a result, the INEC portal failed to provide the expected disclosure of results from all 176,000 polling units across the country at the close of polls. In reality, only a limited number of scanned election results were accessible for online viewing. This failure significantly undermined the transparency assurance that the INEC had consistently promoted prior to Election Day.

3.0 Methodology

A survey method is adopted which consists of the administration of questionnaire and interview methods. The adoption of survey research is justified on the ground that it enables the researcher to generalize from a sample to a population so that inference and conclusion can be arrived at. This research covers Nigeria because of its status as a mouthpiece of Africa. The total population of this study includes the total population of the Nigerians which is estimated to be 224,166,609 people (United Nations, 2023). We draw our sample population using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method of determining sample size for this research activity. According to Krejcies and Morgan (1970) population size that is 224,166,606 and above is pegged at 384. To make provision for the error that may occur during the administration of questionnaires, Israel (2013) asserts that 30% of the questionnaires should be added to the

sample size. The study used purposive, cluster, and simple random sampling techniques. The choice of this technique is basically to avoid bias or the absence of systematic variance. In these samplings, every subject in the population is given an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample. This research work strictly uses the data generated during the research to test the hypotheses. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. A total of 493 questionnaires were administered to Nigerians that are above 18 years of age, but only four hundred and seventeen (417) questionnaires were returned. However, a total of eleven (11) informants making 19 interviewees were interviewed across the three Six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria. The interviewees were purposively selected and the study adopted a Partial Least Square to analyze its data.

4.0 Analysis of Findings and Discussion

Table 4.1 shows the analysis of interview responses using Thematic Analysis

	Position	Zone	Sex	City	Code
Informant 1	INEC Personnel	Southwest	Male	Lagos	In1
Informant 2	INEC Personnel	Southeast	Male	Enugu	In2
Informant 3	INEC Personnel	South-South	Male	Port-Harcourt	In3
Informant 4	INEC Personnel	Northwest	Male	Kaduna	In4
Informant 5	INEC Personnel	North-Central	Male	Ilorin	In5
Informant 6	INEC Personnel	Northeast	Male	Maiduguri	In6
Informant 7	Block Extension Supervisor	Southwest	Male	Ibadan	In7
Informant 8	Opinion Leaders (4)	Southeast	Male	Owerri	In8
Informant 9	Opinion Leaders (4)	South-South	Male	Asaba	ln9
Informant 10	Opinion Leaders (4)	North Central	Male	Lafia	ln10

Informant 11	Opinion Leaders (4)	Northwest	Male	Kano	In11

Source: - Researcher Survey, 2023

Theme I: Biometric Card Reader

Sub-Theme i: How does the biometric card reader affect electoral processes?

The first theme developed is on how the biometric card reader affects the electoral process: -

"The biometric card reader proved effective since it was introduced in 2015. As a matter of fact, it reduced cases of card fraud and multiple voting which used to be a common practice in Nigeria" (In1, In2, In3, In4).

In addition to the above explanation provided, In5 and In6 stated that: -

"…the biometric card reader helps to ensure a semi hitch free electoral process but as you know, everything is still a work in progress. The thing about technology is that it takes time to get acquainted with it. It is not possible to get it right the first couple of times without minor setbacks"

On the other hand, In8 and In9 held a contrary view concerning the effect of the biometric card reader on the electoral process. According to them: - "…even though everyone wanted to believe that the introduction of the biometric card reader would positively influence the electoral process and champion the course of democracy, the card reader has not had any meaningful impact on Nigeria's electoral process. Even with the so-called card reader, there were still many instances of electoral fraud and the worst part is that the card readers themselves have been extremely faulty since they were introduced and even failed to read the voting cards of many people who came out to vote. Does that even make sense?"

In10 and In11 held similar views as In8 and In9.

Theme II: Permanent Voter's Card

Sub-Theme ii: does INEC Personnel verify in their system, the authenticity of permanent voters' card carried about by the electorate and does it work?

The second theme developed is the verification of the authenticity of the permanent voters' card and its effectiveness. According to the INEC personnel interviewed: -

INEC personnels always attempt to verify the authenticity of the permanent voters' card on the card reader but sometimes there are some setbacks (In2, In3). In addition to the above explanation provided, In4 and In5 stated that: -

"The truth is that not all INEC personnel know how the verification process of the permanent voters' card works. I dare to say that many of them do not know how to operate the machine and work the system. It is unfortunate, really."

For In7:-

"Of course, INEC personnels verify the authenticity of the permanent voters' card. I mean, that's given! But they cannot take the blame for situations where the card readers fail to read voters' cards. I think it is necessary to reiterate that they do their part but you know how these things are, if you try to do your duty but the machine that is suppose to aid you is malfunctioning, then there is only so little you can do."

"…ehn, I can say that they try to verify the authenticity of the voters' card but then again, I can't tell you confidently that it works. There have been cases where the card readers failed to verify authentic voters' cards, and there have also been cases where the card readers successful verified the voters' cards. It's a dicey situation. Its effectiveness is 50-50" (In10, In11)

In8 and In9 held similar views as In10 and In11. Data was deemed to have reached its saturation point.

Theme III: Electronic Voting Machine

Sub-Theme iii: does the INEC adopt electronic machines to conduct the election?

The third theme developed is on the adopt electronic machines to conduct the election. According to some INEC personnels: -

The highest INEC has gone in adopting electronic machines to conduct election, asides the card reader, is the introduction of BVAS during the 2023 general elections, for the purpose of transmitting the electoral results electronically (In1, In2, In3, In4, In5, In 6).

According to In8, In9, In10:-

The introduction of BVAS was a major adoption of electronic machines in Nigeria's elections. Anyone who follows Nigeria's elections as far back as her independence, will be able to understand.

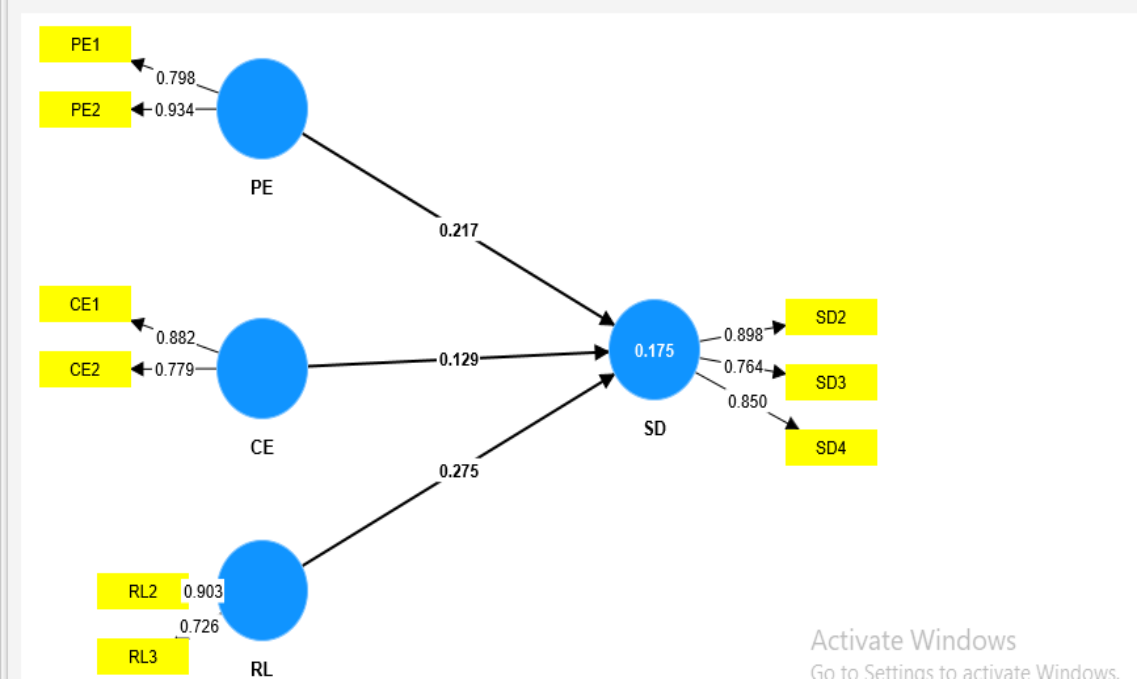

Table 4.2: Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity (n=417)

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Permanent Voter's Card	**PE 1** **PE 2**	**0.798** **0.934**	**0.754**	**0.859**

Biometric Card Reader	**CE 1** **CE 2**	**0.882** **0.779**	**0.692**	**0.817**
Electronic Voting Machine	**RL2** **RL3**	**0.903** **0.726**	**0.671**	**0.801**
Structural Violence in Electoral Processes	**SD 2** **SD3** **SD4**	**0.898** **0.764** **0.850**	**0.704**	**0.877**

Note: 4 constructs were deleted due to insufficient loading. AVE represents Average Variance Extracted; CR represents Composite Reliability.

In Table 4. 2, In Table 4. 2, all constructs have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.7 except that a construct each was deleted from all the variables to make the work better. According to Garson (2016), Cronbach's Alpha may be biased against short scales of two items, just as it is in the case of PE, CE, RL and SD. Also according to Hair et al., (2014), a construct having a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of less than 0.7 can be ignored, provided other constructs in the model have a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.7 (Hair et al. 2014). All constructs are within the threshold for both composite reliability and AVE which are 0.7 and 0.5 respectively.

Loadings should not be below 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). In Table 4. 2, all items measuring all the variables loaded above 0.7. The data were also tested for discriminant validity

Table 4.3 Discriminant Validity using Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (n=417)

Construct	CE	PE	RL	SD
CE				
PE	**0.382**			
RL	0.293	**0.321**		
SD	0.298	0.336	**0.485**	

Note: The bolded diagonal numbers represent the square root of the AVE of each latent construct

Table 4.3 shows the output of discriminant validity. The numbers bolded represent the square root of the AVE of each latent variable. The square roots of all the AVE are

higher than their correlation with other latent variables. Judging by the Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio, the data shows discriminant validity (Garson, 2016). Up to this point, the data have undergone testing for factor loadings, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, and have met all criteria.

Table 4.4 Path Coefficient

	Original Sample(0)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
CE>SD	0.128	0.129	0.107	1.189	0.235
PE>SD	0.217	0.245	0.116	1.866	0.062
RL<SD	0.282	0.302	0.126	2.230	0.026

**p< 0.05;

As presented in Table 4.4, Biometric Card Reader does not have a significant effect on socio-economic development in Nigeria, (t-value = 1.189, p-value > 0.05). Therefore, H_{01} which states that Biometric Card Reader does not have significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria is failed to reject. Also, Permanent Voter's Card does not have a significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria (t-value = 1.866, p-value > 0.05). Thus, H_{02} which states that Permanent Voter's Card does not have a significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria is failed to reject. Lastly, Rule of Law does not have a significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria (t-value = 2.230 p-value <0.05). Therefore, H_{03} which states that Rule of Law does not have a significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria is rejected. Adjusted R for this study is 17 percent.

Discussion

From the above analysis, it shows that Biometric Card Reader does not have a significant effect on structural violence in electoral processes in Nigeria. This is due to the corrupt nature of Nigeria electoral umpire. In order to reduce structural electoral violence that is always occasioned by electoral malpractice, biometric card reader was deployed since 2015 till date in Nigeria. Despite this

innovation in the electoral process, electoral malpractices of various forms are often experienced during the election in Nigeria. According to Akeaya-inne, (2023) the 2023 election period experienced significant discrepancies in the use of the BVAS and Irev technologies. Furthermore, INEC's delay in uploading the election's result and the discrepancies in the number of votes recorded for competing candidates raised allegations of manipulation, as these figures were contrary to the figures recorded in each polling unit. As highlighted earlier, in 2015, Nigeria introduced a technological device called the Smartcard reader to verify the authenticity of permanent voter's cards. However, unexpected incidents during the election period gave rise to concerns (Alebiosu, 2016). These happenings undermined the prospects and belief put forth by scholars that the incorporation of digital technologies in Nigeria's electoral process would secure, promote the political rights of its citizens and reduce electoral structural violence.

Also, Permanent Voter's Card does not have significant effect on electoral structural violence in Nigeria. Permanent voter's card was introduced in 2015 in order to reduce glitch in the electoral processes which might have caused by multiple registration. Despite this feat authenticity of permanent card became very difficult to verify. This caused suspicion as many electorates were denied from exercising their franchise.

Scholars such as Uzedhe & Okhaifoh (2016) and Obiefuna-Oguejiofor (2018) argue that the implementation of digital technologies, particularly the EMV system, has significant potential to effectively tackle major electoral concerns. However, an examination of the 2015 and 2023 elections raises doubts about whether the adoption of digital technologies is indeed the only way forward. This is because the 2023 general election witnessed the deployment of two advanced technological devices. According to a report from This Day (2023), the 2023 election marked the first instance in the country's history where live data was to be utilized to determine the next president. There was considerable optimism among Nigerians that the 2023 elections would bring about positive changes in the electoral process. As a matter of fact, INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu and

National Commissioner for Voter Education Festus Okoye exhibited confidence in the technology, generating widespread excitement about Nigeria potentially getting it right for the first time (Ewuzie, 2023). However, like every other election held in Nigeria, the 2023 general election followed the same pattern of electoral misconduct, deliberate disenfranchisement, manipulation of electoral results, amongst others.

Conclusion

While the adoption of digital technologies in Nigerian elections holds promise for reducing marginalization and inequality, the evidence from past elections raises concerns about its effectiveness. Curtailing structural violence in the electoral process requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond technology alone. Transparency, accountability, stakeholder involvement, robust security measures, and adherence to the rule of law are crucial for safeguarding political rights and promoting fair elections. By addressing these broader challenges, Nigeria can make significant progress towards creating a more inclusive and democratic electoral system.

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