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Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jld> Email: [jppssuniuyo@gmail.com](mailto:jppssuniuyo@gmail.com)

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Article

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### BROKEN MANDATE: VOTER SUPPRESSION AND ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Ifeanyi Jonah Onuoha<sup>1</sup>, Chikwere Innocent Akaose<sup>2</sup>, Chisomaga Happiness Ihekoromadu<sup>3</sup>  
Obinna Augustine Ovaga<sup>4</sup> & Jonah Onuoha<sup>5</sup>

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka<sup>1, 2, 3, 4 & 5</sup>

Corresponding Email: [Ifeanyichukwu.onuoha@unn.edu.ng](mailto:Ifeanyichukwu.onuoha@unn.edu.ng)<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

The integrity of democratic elections in Nigeria has come under increasing scrutiny due to the pervasive and multidimensional nature of voter suppression and electoral crises. This study critically examines the phenomenon of voter suppression cataclysm defined as the systematic marginalization, intimidation, and exclusion of eligible voters and its correlation with recurring electoral crises in Nigeria. It explores how structural inefficiencies, electoral violence, political thuggery, technological failures (such as malfunctioning BVAS machines), insecurity, and administrative bottlenecks contribute to widespread disenfranchisement. The paper also highlights the instrumental roles of state and non-state actors in weaponizing voter suppression tactics for political gain, thus undermining the credibility of elections and deepening democratic regression. The study adopted the tout theory of politics (TTP) and the Logic of Machine Politics. Documentary method of data collection was utilized. The research assesses how these suppressive practices have triggered declining voter turnout, public distrust in democratic institutions, and post-election litigation, further destabilizing Nigeria's political landscape. The paper also interrogates the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, and the judiciary in either mitigating or exacerbating these challenges. It concludes by proposing a multi-stakeholder approach to electoral reform, emphasizing institutional accountability, robust voter protection mechanisms, and civic education to safeguard democratic participation. The findings offer critical insights into the urgent need for electoral justice as a cornerstone for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Election, Voters Suppression, INEC, Corrupt Practices, BVAS, Nigeria.

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## **Introduction**

Nigeria, often referred to as the “Giant of Africa,” is a highly heterogeneous political entity multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and deeply multicultural. With over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages spoken, integrating such a pluralistic society presents immense challenges. As Africa’s most populous nation, Nigeria had a population exceeding 215 million in 2022, with projections estimating a surge to around 400 million by 2050. Lagos stands as the largest urban center in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the capital, Abuja, ranked 15th among the country’s largest cities in 2021, with a population of about half a million. Electoral integrity in Nigeria has been repeatedly compromised by fraud, vote-rigging, violence, and a lack of transparency. These crises, as noted by Adimaocha (2020) and Okafor (2016), have become entrenched in the country's political culture. The use of threats and intimidation to deter voters particularly women and minority groups remains a systemic issue. Additionally, widespread disenfranchisement, especially in conflict-prone or marginalized areas, continues to skew electoral outcomes. Okoro (2019) highlights that many voters abstain due to fear of violence or intimidation. As Nwogu (2023) explains, opaque processes, biased media, and institutional weaknesses create fertile ground for manipulation. Failure to uphold the rule of law and disregard for judicial rulings further erode electoral legitimacy. When elections are viewed as unfair, the resulting government’s legitimacy is called into question, often leading to civil unrest and political instability. Moreover, voter suppression and electoral malpractice hinder national development. Lack of representation marginalizes vulnerable populations, breeding resentment and reducing accountability. As Orji (2020) and Okeke (2020) argued, the 2019 and 2023 elections intensified social divisions, discouraged investment, and stifled economic growth. The manipulation of elections fuels corruption, diverts public resources, and exacerbates ethnic and regional tensions. Nigeria’s democratic progress is threatened by persistent voter suppression and electoral crises. Reforms must prioritize electoral transparency, enforce strict penalties for malpractice, and protect citizens' right to vote. Only then can Nigeria realize the full promise of democracy and secure lasting peace, inclusive governance, and sustainable development.

Protecting the integrity of elections is not a partisan endeavor but a shared democratic responsibility. It reflects a collective commitment to the principles of transparency, accountability, and the right of every citizen to be heard. As Adimaocha (2020) rightly notes, sustaining electoral integrity is about creating a future where every vote counts, every voice resonates, and the people remain the true custodians of political power. Unfortunately, Nigeria’s democratic experience has been undermined by persistent electoral malpractice. There is widespread evidence of fraud and deliberate manipulation of election outcomes, including ballot stuffing, vote buying, and the tampering of voting systems all aimed at distorting the electorate’s will. Okafor (2016) describes the 2015 general elections as being plagued by violence and intimidation, where threats and physical force were employed to prevent voter participation. These tactics were often aimed at specific groups, particularly those marginalized or perceived to oppose dominant political interests. Similarly, Okoro (2019) observed that many registered voters chose not to participate in the electoral process due to fear of violence and insecurity, indicating systemic disenfranchisement. Nwogu (2023) further highlights a fundamental lack of transparency and accountability in Nigeria’s electoral system. Opaque electoral processes, biased media coverage, and inadequate oversight mechanisms have opened the door to manipulation and eroded public confidence. The failure to uphold the rule of law marked by the disregard of legal procedures

and judicial rulings has cast serious doubt on the legitimacy of election outcomes and contributed to national instability.

When electoral outcomes are marred by irregularities and fraud, the legitimacy of the resulting government is significantly weakened. This not only provokes public dissatisfaction and protests but also fosters widespread disillusionment with democratic governance. Over the years, voter suppression has disproportionately affected marginalized groups, limiting their political voice and participation. As Orji (2020) points out, this lack of representation undermines accountability and good governance, breeding resentment and alienation among the electorate. Electoral malpractice also deepens existing social divisions and ethnic tensions, creating fertile ground for violence and conflict. The 2019 elections, according to Okeke (2020), were characterized by widespread reports of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, and manipulation of results. These irregularities triggered legal disputes, street protests, and further eroded citizens' trust in the electoral process. In sum, electoral integrity in Nigeria remains fragile. Without substantial reforms to eliminate voter suppression, enforce legal accountability, and ensure transparent and credible elections, Nigeria risks deepening its democratic crisis. Restoring public trust in the electoral system is not only necessary for good governance it is essential for national cohesion, sustainable development, and long-term stability.

### **The Tout Theory of Politics and the Logic of Machine Politics: A Theoretical Endeavor**

The *Tout Theory of Politics* as its theoretical framework. Developed by Nigerian scholar Onuoha Isaac in his 2020 book *Motor Park Democracy*, the theory offers a unique lens for analyzing political behavior in developing democracies. Onuoha draws a provocative comparison between political actors and "touts" individuals often found in motor parks or marketplaces who aggressively solicit customers, frequently employing manipulation and coercion for personal gain. The central tenet of the theory is that many politicians in developing nations, much like touts, prioritize self-interest over the collective good. These political actors often exploit the system for personal enrichment and the benefit of their inner circles, rather than serving the public. The theory argues that such behaviors undermine democratic institutions and public trust, contributing to systemic corruption and governance failure. The Tout Theory serves this purpose by offering an empirical and pragmatic tool to explore voter suppression and electoral integrity crises in Nigeria. Specifically, this study applies the Tout Theory to explain key irregularities during Nigeria's 2023 general elections particularly the manipulation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which hindered the proper electronic transmission of results. The theory helps to illuminate how such technological and procedural failures were not accidental but facilitated by a broader culture of impunity, informal power networks, and weak institutional enforcement.

Machine politics emerged as a concept in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to describe a distinctive pattern of political organization that dominated urban centers in the United States, particularly New York, Chicago, and Boston. The term was first used by political observers and reformers to describe political machines highly organized party structures that maintained power through patronage, loyalty, and control over votes rather than ideology or policy. The theory gained academic recognition through the works of scholars such as: William L. Riordon (1905), Robert Merton (1940s) and Edward C. Banfield (1958), who analyzed the sociological and political functions of machines as systems of patronage and social mobility. Machine politics and the tout theory of politics provide

complementary lenses for understanding the persistent patterns of voter suppression and electoral malpractices that characterize Nigeria's democratic process. Machine politics, rooted in patron-client networks, emphasizes the role of political elites and party structures in mobilizing electoral support through patronage, inducements, and institutional manipulation. The tout theory, by contrast, highlights the agency of informal actors street-level enforcers, thugs, and area boys who operate as instruments of coercion and intimidation in the political arena. When these two frameworks are integrated, they reveal how elite control and street-level violence interact to undermine electoral integrity in contemporary Nigeria. The fusion of machine and tout politics thus produces a dual mechanism of voter suppression and malpractice. On one hand, the machine manipulates institutional processes such as voter registration, result collation, and electoral adjudication through bureaucratic capture and patronage. On the other, tout networks physically enforce political dominance, obstructing voters, disrupting polling, and instilling fear among the electorate. The resulting environment perpetuates low voter turnout, widespread apathy, and the normalization of electoral fraud as a strategic tool of governance. Consequently, the intersection of machine politics and tout theory illustrates how Nigeria's democracy is trapped in a cycle of elite domination and informal coercion. It exposes a political economy in which violence and patronage are not peripheral, but structural instruments of electoral control. Understanding voter suppression and electoral malpractice through this blended framework underscores that reform efforts must go beyond institutional redesign to address the embedded networks of power and informal violence that sustain Nigeria's electoral system.

### **Voter Suppression and the Electronic Transmission of Results in the 2023 Nigerian Elections**

Following the conclusion of Nigeria's 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections, serious concerns have been raised about the functionality and credibility of the technological innovations deployed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) notably, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Election Result Viewing Portal (IREV). These tools, which were introduced to enhance electoral integrity and reduce fraud, failed to meet expectations during their first full-scale national deployment, raising doubts about the transparency of the electoral process. BVAS was designed as a biometric technology aimed at authenticating voters' identities through fingerprint and facial recognition. Its core objective was to eliminate electoral malpractice such as multiple voting, underage voting, and voter impersonation by ensuring that only validly registered and accredited individuals can vote. In parallel, the IREV portal was intended to promote transparency by enabling real-time upload of polling unit-level results, which citizens could access remotely. This digital approach was expected to significantly improve public trust and eliminate the opacity often associated with the collation and transmission of results. Despite the promises, both BVAS and IREV fell short during the 2023 elections. Observations and reports from across the country indicate that these platforms experienced widespread malfunctions. BVAS devices failed to authenticate voters in several locations, causing delays, confusion, and, in some instances, the disenfranchisement of eligible voters. IREV, on the other hand, failed to transmit results promptly and reliably. Many polling units were unable to upload Form EC8A (polling unit results) as required, leading to discrepancies between results announced at the polling units and those viewed later online.

These failures significantly undermined the integrity of the electoral process and cast a shadow over the credibility of the final outcomes. The malfunction of these systems has been cited as a basis for legal challenges by aggrieved political parties and candidates, some of whom took their grievances to the courts. Given that BVAS and IReV were widely promoted as technological safeguards designed to restore public confidence in Nigeria's elections, their underperformance during this high-stakes electoral cycle is particularly troubling. BVAS was first piloted in 2021, replacing the previously used Smart Card Readers which had faced significant criticism for their inability to accurately read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). It was seen as a groundbreaking innovation intended to overcome the challenge of over-voting by using biometrics (fingerprints, iris, and facial recognition) to verify and accredit voters at the point of voting. Meanwhile, IReV was first introduced in the Nasarawa Central State Constituency by-election in 2020 and had been deployed in over 105 subsequent elections, covering approximately 16.6 million registered voters. Over 32,935 result sheets had reportedly been uploaded from polling units across both rural and urban areas prior to the 2023 general elections, giving the public hope in its viability. Despite this record, the national deployment in 2023 exposed systemic gaps in infrastructure, implementation, and network reliability. While INEC assured the public that the BVAS would work seamlessly and that results would be transmitted electronically in real time, the actual experience on election day revealed otherwise. In many polling units, ad hoc staff struggled to operate the devices, internet connectivity was inconsistent, and the upload process was either delayed or aborted altogether. Critically, the defense that Nigeria lacks sufficient network coverage for electronic transmission of results was dismissed by industry experts. Ajibola Olude, the Chief Operating Officer of the Association of Telecommunications Companies of Nigeria, in an interview with *The PUNCH*, emphasized that Nigeria's digital infrastructure was mature enough to support the electronic transmission of election results. His comments suggested that the problem lay not in the technological ecosystem but in planning, execution, and perhaps political will. While the BVAS and IReV were conceptualized as bold innovations aimed at advancing Nigeria's electoral process, their performance during the 2023 elections has highlighted significant gaps between policy intentions and practical implementation. Their failure has renewed public skepticism, sparked legal contests, and placed INEC under intense scrutiny. Going forward, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive audit of the deployment process, investment in electoral personnel training, improved digital infrastructure, and most importantly, a renewed commitment to electoral transparency. Without these, the promise of technology as a tool for democratic consolidation in Nigeria will remain unfulfilled.

### **BVAS Breakdown and the Failure of Electronic Result Transmission in the 2023 General Elections**

During the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) was marked by significant technical and operational challenges that disrupted the electoral process across various regions. In Enugu, respondents reported that the BVAS malfunctioned on election day, leading to widespread delays at polling stations. Voters experienced difficulties in verifying their identities, which resulted in long queues, frustration, and heightened tensions. Specifically, elderly voters struggled with biometric verification due to changes in their skin texture, and individuals with older voter cards found it difficult to vote, as the BVAS machines failed to recognize their fingerprints. These technical failures often sparked conflict at polling units and impeded the smooth

conduct of the election. In Awka South, similar reports emerged. The malfunctioning of the BVAS not only hindered the voting process but also eroded public confidence in the electoral system. Voters perceived the inability to authenticate identities as indicative of incompetence or possible manipulation, raising serious concerns about the integrity of the elections. It was observed that in some cases, individuals whose fingerprints could not be captured by the BVAS were still permitted to vote, further reinforcing the perception of irregularities and diminishing trust in the process. In Ezzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, a correspondent from Channels Television documented widespread voter disenfranchisement due to BVAS failures. Numerous voters were unable to cast their ballots because the devices failed to verify their identities. This disproportionately affected communities in areas with poor infrastructure and limited access to technological support, underscoring the uneven impact of digital deployment in the country's electoral process.

The transmission of election results also faced significant challenges. The BVAS was central not only to voter accreditation but also to the electronic transmission of results via the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). However, the system malfunctioned in many instances, leading to delays in uploading polling unit results and, consequently, in the announcement of official outcomes. These delays created an atmosphere of uncertainty and provided fertile ground for allegations of result tampering and electoral fraud. The malfunctioning systems thus contributed to post-election tension and public skepticism regarding the credibility of the electoral outcomes. Furthermore, these technological shortcomings triggered legal and political controversies. Political parties and candidates questioned the validity of the election results, citing systemic failures in the accreditation and transmission processes. This is particularly evident in the dispute between candidates of the Labour Party and the All Progressives Congress (APC), where legal challenges were launched to contest the declared outcomes. Such disputes threaten to prolong the post-election period with court battles, increasing political instability and undermining the legitimacy of elected officials. The broader implications of these technological failures are deeply concerning for Nigeria's democratic development. Any significant malfunction in BVAS and electronic result transmission can erode public trust in the democratic process and institutions. When voters perceive the system as unreliable or manipulated, it reinforces narratives of electoral fraud and weakens the social contract between the state and its citizens. The repeated failures also compromise the legitimacy of governance, as elected officials may be viewed as products of flawed or manipulated systems, thereby undermining the foundations of democratic accountability. These experiences have prompted widespread calls for urgent electoral reforms. Many stakeholders, including civil society groups and electoral observers, have advocated for a comprehensive review of Nigeria's electoral technology framework. There is growing consensus on the need to improve the reliability and security of election technologies, enhance voter education regarding their use, and ensure greater accountability among electoral personnel and institutions. These reforms are critical to restoring public confidence and ensuring future elections reflect the genuine will of the people.

The establishment of BVAS in Nigeria was originally conceived as a progressive step toward achieving greater transparency, credibility, and efficiency in the electoral process. The system was designed to authenticate voters using biometric data such as fingerprints and facial recognition, aiming to prevent multiple voting, impersonation, and other forms of electoral malpractice. One of the primary intentions behind BVAS was to safeguard electoral integrity by ensuring that only eligible voters could participate in the process, thereby

upholding the sanctity of the vote. Beyond curbing voter fraud, BVAS also sought to address the recurring issues of electoral irregularities that have historically plagued Nigerian elections. By replacing manual voter identification with biometric authentication, the system was expected to reduce opportunities for vote rigging and eliminate the use of fraudulent identities. A reliable and accurate voter registry was also among the intended outcomes, as the collection of biometric data during registration was meant to facilitate the identification and removal of duplicate or ineligible entries. BVAS, for instance, was envisioned as a tool for promoting public transparency and trust. Its biometric capabilities were intended to serve as an auditable and objective means of verifying voter identities, thereby increasing confidence among voters, political parties, and election observers. The broader goal was to strengthen democratic governance through enhanced electoral legitimacy. Efficiency was another anticipated benefit. By automating voter accreditation, BVAS promised to streamline operations at polling stations, reduce human error, and facilitate quicker and more accurate result collation. This, in turn, was expected to ensure more timely reporting of election results and mitigate the delays that often fuel electoral suspicion and unrest. In practice, however, the malfunction of BVAS and IReV during the 2023 elections reveals that the gap between technological ambition and actual implementation remains significant. To fulfill the original vision of a credible, transparent, and efficient electoral system, Nigeria must not only invest in robust electoral technologies but also build the institutional capacity and infrastructure necessary for their effective deployment. Only then can the promise of free and fair elections be truly realized.

### **The 2022 Electoral Act Amendment and its Influence on Electoral Malfeasance**

On February 25, 2022, President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Electoral Act Amendment Bill into law after several months of withholding assent. The Act, repeals the Electoral Act No. 6 of 2010, with the intention of reforming and modernizing the conduct of federal, state, and area council elections in Nigeria. Its enactment, ahead of the 2023 general elections, was widely viewed as timely, offering the potential to address many longstanding challenges in the country's electoral system. This legislation introduced numerous substantive changes, each carrying implications for the transparency, credibility, and efficiency of Nigeria's electoral processes. A significant feature of the new law is the granting of financial autonomy to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Act established an INEC Fund into which allocations from the federal government, grants, and donations are to be paid. This fund is meant to be directly accessible to the Commission, ensuring it has the resources needed to plan and execute elections independently. Moreover, the Act mandates that funds for general elections must be released no later than one year before the election date. This provision sought to eliminate the bureaucratic delays associated with the Ministry of Finance's vetting process under the old Act, thereby giving INEC greater control over its electoral preparations.

The new Act also extended several electoral timelines, one of which is the period for publishing the notice of elections. It now requires that INEC publish this notice not later than 360 days before an election, compared to the 90-day notice required under the previous Act. This extension is intended to give all stakeholders, including political parties, adequate time to prepare for the electoral process, and to reduce the last-minute rush and confusion that often marred previous elections. However, for by-elections, the timeframe remains unchanged at 14 days. In a related development, political parties are now required to submit the names of their candidates not less than 180 days before the general election an increase

from the previous 60-day requirement. This move is aimed at encouraging early party primaries and reducing intra-party conflicts and legal disputes over candidate nominations. Another amendment expanded the campaign period for political parties. Campaigns can now begin 150 days before polling day and must end 24 hours prior to voting, an increase from the previous 90-day window. This longer campaign period allows parties to better communicate their manifestos and gives voters more time to evaluate their choices, potentially improving voter education and participation. The Act also introduced technological innovations aimed at improving voter registration and authentication. INEC is now required to maintain the voter register in both manual and electronic formats, with the electronic version stored in a central database. The shift enhances transparency and administrative efficiency while reducing the likelihood of multiple registrations and illegal voting. Complementing this is the revised definition of overvoting. Under the new law, overvoting occurs when the number of votes cast exceeds the number of accredited voters, rather than the number of registered voters as stipulated in the previous Act. This change aligns more closely with biometric verification processes and helps ensure greater accuracy in determining electoral anomalies. INEC was also empowered under the new law to review the decisions of returning officers regarding the validity of ballots and declarations of results. The review must be conducted within seven days and applies in cases where the officer's decision was not made voluntarily or was contrary to legal provisions. While the Act is somewhat ambiguous about whether such reviews preclude court intervention, the general view is that judicial review can still occur after INEC has conducted its internal review. This represents a shift toward greater administrative oversight in the immediate post-election period. Additionally, the Act excludes political appointees from serving as delegates or aspirants at party conventions or congresses unless they resign their appointments beforehand. The provision, found in Section 84(12), aims to prevent the undue influence of incumbency and to create a level playing field for political aspirants. While many have hailed this as a progressive measure to open up the political space, it has also generated considerable controversy. A Federal High Court has declared the provision unconstitutional, and the Attorney General was ordered to delete it. The National Assembly, however, has expressed its intention to appeal the decision, keeping the debate alive.

On the issue of candidate death during elections, the new Act outlines clear protocols. If a candidate dies before polling, the election is postponed and rescheduled within 14 days. If death occurs after voting but before results are announced, the election is suspended for no more than 21 days. For legislative elections, the political party whose candidate has died may conduct a new primary to replace the candidate. In gubernatorial, presidential, or area council elections, the running mate assumes the role of candidate and nominates a new running mate. Technological advances are further incorporated into the electoral process through the authorization of electronic devices for accreditation and result transmission. These include smart card readers and electronic voting machines, marking a shift toward a more digitized and transparent electoral system. The law specifically permits INEC to transmit results electronically according to its guidelines, a critical step in curbing result manipulation and enhancing the credibility of vote counts. Despite the promise of these reforms, the actual implementation of the Act during the 2023 general elections revealed both progress and shortcomings. While many provisions were welcomed in principle, operational failures particularly those related to the BVAS and electronic transmission of results undermined public confidence in the reforms. Consequently, discussions around further amendments to the Electoral Act 2022 have resurfaced. The House of

Representatives recently passed a bill to amend aspects of the Act, particularly to reinforce the electronic transmission of election results. Sponsored by Hon. Francis Waive, the bill has already passed its second reading, with proponents arguing that it would enhance electoral transparency and minimize fraud. The 2022 Electoral Act represents a landmark legislative intervention aimed at modernizing Nigeria's electoral process. However, the success of these reforms depends largely on their practical implementation, institutional preparedness, and political will. As Nigeria continues to grapple with electoral challenges, the effectiveness of this legislation will ultimately be judged not by its provisions alone but by the extent to which it strengthens democratic institutions and restores public trust in the electoral process.

### **Tackling Corrupt Electoral Practices: Institutional and Policy Efforts**

On 25 February 2023, Nigerians once again exercised their democratic franchise by participating in the presidential election, an event that had been widely anticipated as a critical juncture in the nation's democratic trajectory. However, the elections were clouded by a series of allegations surrounding irregularities, electoral malpractice, and procedural inconsistencies. Despite high expectations for transparency, accountability, and progress in the conduct of Nigeria's electoral process, the 2023 general elections were marred by widespread reports of corruption. These included incidents of voter suppression, vote-buying, manipulation of voter registers, collusion among electoral officials, and a general lack of accountability throughout various phases of the electoral cycle. Technical failures, particularly related to the newly deployed technologies such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), contributed to procedural bottlenecks and delays. These malfunctions, coupled with allegations of biased practices, have not only cast a shadow over the credibility of the electoral outcomes but have also triggered numerous legal disputes and petitions before election tribunals. Over the past 24 years of uninterrupted democratic governance, Nigeria's electoral system has faced persistent structural weaknesses that threaten to undermine democratic consolidation. As reported by *Foreign Policy*, the nation continues to grapple with an electoral process that often contradicts the democratic principle of unfettered political participation, thereby denying citizens their fundamental right to freely choose their leaders. In response to these systemic flaws, various stakeholders have initiated dialogues aimed at re-evaluating Nigeria's democratic progress. One such intervention was organized by *The Conversation Africa*, which convened a webinar involving policymakers, academics, and civil society actors to reflect on the successes and challenges of Nigeria's democratic journey, with a particular focus on electoral corruption. A key observation from the webinar was the dismal voter turnout: although approximately 93 million Nigerians were registered to vote, only about 25 million actually participated in the elections. This steep decline in voter engagement is seen as symptomatic of deepening public disenchantment with the electoral process.

In an attempt to rebuild the broken trust, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced the BVAS to enhance transparency and improve the integrity of voter accreditation gained notable attention and engagement on social media platforms during the election. To combat electoral corruption, the Nigerian government, through its anti-graft agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), implemented a multi-pronged strategy before, during, and after the elections. The EFCC maintained a visible presence at the primaries of major political parties an arena historically dominated by monetary influence to discourage illicit financial transactions. On election day, EFCC personnel were strategically deployed across various polling units nationwide to monitor

and deter vote-buying and other forms of electoral fraud. Wilson Uwujaren, spokesperson for the EFCC, affirmed that the Commission was actively involved in investigating and preventing financial misconduct during the elections. He emphasized the EFCC's constitutional mandate to enforce Nigeria's economic and financial laws and its commitment to preserving the sanctity of the electoral process. As part of a collaborative framework with INEC and security agencies, the EFCC also conducted public enlightenment campaigns to raise awareness among electoral stakeholders about the legal consequences of engaging in vote-buying and other corrupt practices. Beyond awareness campaigns, the EFCC engaged financial institutions including commercial banks and Bureau de Change operators sensitizing them on their legal obligations under the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act. These stakeholders were educated on transaction thresholds, suspicious transaction reporting, and the implications of enabling financial crimes during electoral periods. Town hall meetings were also convened to caution against institutional complicity in undermining electoral integrity.

On election day, several arrests were made, and items such as cash, clothing, and food which were allegedly intended to influence voter behavior were confiscated at polling units. The combined effect of these enforcement activities, alongside the government's monetary policy decision that restricted cash availability, significantly curtailed the resources available to political actors seeking to buy votes. In sum, while Nigeria's 2023 elections were far from flawless, they highlighted the enduring struggle between democratic aspirations and entrenched political corruption. The proactive involvement of institutions like the EFCC marked a notable effort to deter financial impropriety and restore public trust in the democratic process. However, sustained institutional reforms, political will, and civic engagement remain vital to ensuring electoral integrity and deepening democratic governance in Nigeria.

### **Instances of Electoral Personnel involving in Corrupt Practices**

<b>States</b>	<b>Instances of Electoral Personnel involving in Corrupt Practices</b>	<b>Year</b>
Enugu	The electoral personnel were shared money by agents of PDP to end the election before the scheduled time in other to disenfranchise other voters from other political party	2023
Bayelsa	The corps members who were working as presiding officers were offered money to allow voters without there voters card to vote in other to give advantage to PDP	
Yobe	In general elections, there were accusations of electoral personnel colluding with political actors to manipulate the electoral process. This collusion involved the selective enforcement of electoral laws or regulations to benefit certain candidates or parties, as well as coordination between electoral officials and political agents to influence voter behavior and election outcomes.	2019
Katsina	Electoral personnel were accused of altering tally sheets, manipulating vote counts, and misreporting election data to favor certain candidates or parties.	2023
Logos state	Ahead of the general elections, there were allegations of electoral personnel misusing government resources for partisan purposes. This included the use of government vehicles, facilities, and personnel to support the campaigns of certain candidates or parties. Such misuse of resources undermined the principle of equal opportunity and fairness in the electoral competition.	2023
Enugu	There was evidence of over voting which was engineered to favor a particular political party of lead to the cancellation of the entire election results	2023
Rivers	There were reports of irregularities in the voter registration process, with allegations of electoral personnel manipulating voter registration lists to include ineligible voters or exclude eligible ones. This raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral roll and the fairness of the electoral process.	
Lagos	The electoral officials were offered money not to upload the official result using the	2023

	bvas so that they can manipulate the election results	
Imo	Reports of vote buying, where electoral personnel, as well as political agents, were involved in offering money or other inducements to voters in exchange for their votes.	2023

**Sources:** compiled by the researcher

### **Electoral Integrity and the Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy in Nigeria’s 2023 General Elections**

The concept of electoral integrity encompasses the norms, institutions, and practices that ensure elections are conducted freely, fairly, and transparently. It serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance and legitimizes the authority of elected leaders. However, when the integrity of an election is undermined, it often precipitates a crisis of democratic legitimacy, as seen in the aftermath of Nigeria’s 2023 general elections. The 2023 elections in Nigeria were anticipated as a transformative moment, given the legal and technological reforms introduced to address previous irregularities. These reforms included the 2022 Electoral Act Amendment, which authorized the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for biometric verification and the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal for real-time result uploads. These innovations were designed to curb vote rigging, multiple voting, and ballot manipulation, and to enhance transparency (INEC, 2022). Despite these reforms, the elections were marred by serious operational failures and allegations of malpractice. Numerous reports detailed the malfunctioning of BVAS devices, the inconsistent uploading of results to the IREV portal, voter suppression, intimidation, and logistical setbacks across several states (YIAGA Africa, 2023). In Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, and parts of the North-Central, incidents of technical failures, late arrival of electoral materials, and voter intimidation were widespread (Premium Times, 2023). These issues not only disrupted voting but also created perceptions of deliberate manipulation.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) acknowledged challenges in the technological deployment, but many stakeholders viewed the inconsistencies as undermining the transparency of the electoral process. As argued by Omotola (2023), the electoral commission’s inability to ensure real-time transmission of results raised legitimate doubts about the credibility of the final outcomes. Furthermore, the discrepancies between manually collated results and electronically uploaded data triggered legal challenges from opposition parties, including the Labour Party and the People’s Democratic Party, who questioned the legitimacy of the declared winner. This situation has led to a broader crisis of democratic legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy is rooted in the belief that electoral outcomes reflect the genuine will of the people. When this belief is eroded, so too is the trust in political institutions. According to Ayoade (2023), when voters perceive that elections are rigged or predetermined, apathy sets in, leading to lower voter turnout and civic disengagement. This was evident in 2023, where only about 27.1% of registered voters participated in the presidential elections, one of the lowest turnouts in Nigeria’s recent history (INEC, 2023). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and civil society groups also noted rampant vote-buying and bribery, further undermining the integrity of the process (Uwujaren, 2023). These malpractices demonstrate that electoral reforms must go beyond technology and law they must address entrenched political culture, impunity, and weak enforcement mechanisms. While Nigeria’s 2023 general elections were presented as a watershed moment for democratic consolidation, they instead exposed systemic weaknesses in electoral governance. The failure to uphold electoral integrity has intensified the crisis of legitimacy facing elected officials and weakened public confidence in democratic

institutions. Moving forward, Nigeria must invest in institutional reforms, ensure judicial independence, enforce electoral laws impartially, and deepen civic education to reclaim trust in its democratic process.

### **Conclusion**

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria laid bare the persistent challenges undermining the country's electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy. Central to these challenges were the widespread malfunctions of the Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the inconsistencies in the electronic transmission of election results. Despite being introduced as innovations intended to enhance transparency, efficiency, and credibility in the electoral process, these technologies failed to perform optimally during their first major nationwide deployment, with far-reaching consequences for voter confidence and democratic trust. The BVAS, a crucial tool designed to verify voter identities and curb multiple voting, suffered technical failures across numerous polling units. These breakdowns resulted in the disenfranchisement of eligible voters, especially among the elderly and those with older voter cards whose biometric data could not be accurately captured. Such systemic flaws undermined the principles of free and fair elections and fostered widespread suspicion of electoral manipulation and institutional incompetence. In turn, the credibility of the elected government and its legitimacy in the eyes of the public came under scrutiny. Similarly, the electronic transmission of results via the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal, though intended to promote real-time transparency and citizen oversight, was marred by irregularities, delays, and technical lapses. These vulnerabilities exposed the electoral process to risks of data manipulation and cyber interference, further eroding public trust in the electoral outcome. Without robust digital infrastructure, cyber-security safeguards, and transparent auditing mechanisms, the reliance on electronic systems remains a double-edged sword. These technical and procedural failures call for urgent and deliberate institutional reforms. To restore confidence in Nigeria's electoral system, authorities must invest in the upgrading and consistent testing of BVAS and related digital infrastructure well ahead of future elections. Moreover, the legal and procedural framework governing electronic result transmission must be refined and clearly codified to eliminate ambiguity and prevent misuse. Beyond technological flaws, the implementation of the 2022 Electoral Act Amendment, though well-intentioned, inadvertently contributed to an uptick in corrupt practices among electoral personnel. The complex and often ambiguous legislative provisions created loopholes that were exploited by political actors and election officials alike. Poor enforcement mechanisms, insufficient training, inadequate remuneration, and lack of institutional oversight left electoral staff susceptible to coercion, inducement, and other forms of electoral misconduct. These systemic weaknesses were exacerbated by the intensely competitive nature of Nigerian politics, where elections are seen as zero-sum contests for power and resources. In such a context, vote buying, ballot box snatching, and result tampering continue to thrive despite new regulations. The unintended consequences of the electoral reforms highlight the critical need for a more coherent, enforceable, and ethically grounded legal framework. Addressing these issues requires a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach. It demands not only the revision of electoral laws and the strengthening of electoral institutions but also sustained efforts in civic education, anti-corruption enforcement, and political accountability. Civil society organizations, the judiciary, the media, and international partners must work collaboratively with INEC and government institutions to safeguard electoral integrity. Ultimately, the credibility of Nigeria's democracy rests on its ability to conduct elections that

are transparent, inclusive, and trustworthy. Without meaningful reform, Nigeria risks further disillusionment among its citizens, diminished voter turnout, and increasing political instability. To secure democratic legitimacy, Nigeria must prioritize the institutional, technological, and legal reforms necessary to ensure that future elections truly reflect the will of the people.

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