

ELECTORAL REFORM IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN EDO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the implementation of electoral reforms during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, Nigeria. Electoral reform is central to strengthening democratic governance by promoting transparent, credible, and inclusive elections. Despite significant electoral reforms introduced before Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, concerns remained regarding their effective implementation, particularly at the sub-national level. This study examines the implementation of these reforms in Edo State to provide context-specific evidence on the challenges affecting electoral administration. The study sought to identify the key electoral reforms introduced before the 2023 presidential election, examine the major implementation challenges encountered during the electoral process in Edo State, and analyse the institutional, technological, logistical, and political factors responsible for these challenges. A qualitative research approach was adopted using documentary analysis of secondary data obtained from official reports, election observation mission reports, policy documents, and relevant scholarly literature. The study found that although the reforms strengthened Nigeria's electoral framework, their implementation was constrained by institutional capacity deficiencies, technological failures involving BVAS and IReV, logistical inefficiencies, electoral violence, and political interference, all of which undermined transparency, public confidence, and the effective administration of the election. The study recommends strengthening INEC's institutional and technological capacity, improving electoral logistics and contingency planning, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, enforcing electoral laws, and promoting continuous review of electoral reforms to improve the credibility and effectiveness of future elections in Nigeria.

keywords: Democratic Governance, Edo State, Electoral Acts, Electoral Reform, Presidential Elections.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral reform remains a critical component of democratic governance, particularly in emerging democracies where elections are frequently challenged by allegations of electoral malpractice, institutional weaknesses, administrative inefficiencies, and declining public trust. Electoral reforms are generally designed to strengthen electoral integrity, improve public confidence in electoral processes, and enhance the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Schedler, 2002; Lindberg, 2006). Elections serve as the principal mechanism through which citizens participate in governance by choosing political representatives and influencing public policy. Accordingly, the credibility of democratic governance depends largely on the ability of electoral institutions to conduct elections that are transparent, inclusive, free, and fair (Dahl, 1998). Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, the country has conducted several general elections that have revealed both progress and persistent shortcomings in its electoral system, thereby necessitating continuous electoral reforms aimed at improving election administration and democratic governance (Omotola, 2010; Orji, 2020).

Various studies have acknowledged that electoral reforms constitute an important strategy for addressing recurring challenges associated with election administration in Nigeria. Successive reform initiatives have sought to improve electoral transparency, strengthen the legal and institutional framework for elections, and enhance public confidence in the democratic process (Orji, 2020; Aiyede, 2012). Despite these reform efforts, elections in Nigeria continue to be characterised by concerns relating to electoral malpractice, logistical shortcomings, political interference, voter disenfranchisement, and declining public confidence in the electoral process (Omotola, 2010; Orji, 2020). These recurring challenges suggest that while

electoral reforms have sought to strengthen the country's electoral framework, their effectiveness has often been constrained by weak institutional capacity, inconsistent implementation, and political interference (Orji, 2020; Aiyede, 2012).

The 2023 presidential election provided an important opportunity to assess the practical implementation of Nigeria's electoral reform agenda. Although the election was conducted under a reformed legal and administrative framework, reports by the European Union Election Observation Mission, YIAGA Africa, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) indicated that several implementation challenges persisted despite the introduction of significant legal and technological reforms (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023; CDD, 2023; IFES, 2023). Evidence from these reports shows that challenges relating to logistics, the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), delays in result uploads to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), election administration, and political interference affected the effective implementation of the reforms across different parts of the country (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; CDD, 2023). Furthermore, observer reports reveal that the nature and severity of these implementation challenges varied across states, reflecting differences in institutional preparedness, administrative capacity, logistical coordination, and local political dynamics (YIAGA Africa, 2023; ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, 2023). However, much of the existing literature has concentrated on national-level analyses, leaving limited empirical evidence on the implementation challenges experienced in individual states such as Edo State.

This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges associated with the implementation of electoral reforms during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the key electoral reforms introduced before the election, examine the major implementation challenges encountered during the electoral process, and analyse the institutional, technological, logistical, and political factors that contributed to these challenges. By focusing on Edo State, the study provides context-specific evidence that contributes to the growing literature on electoral reform implementation at the sub-national level and offers insights that can inform future electoral reform initiatives and strengthen election administration in Nigeria (Orji, 2020; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine the challenges associated with the implementation of electoral reforms during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the key electoral reforms introduced before the 2023 Nigerian presidential election
2. Examine the major implementation challenges encountered during the electoral process in Edo State
3. Analyse the institutional, technological, logistical, and political factors that contributed to these implementation challenges.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Elections

Elections are the central instrument through which citizens exercise their sovereign power to choose their leaders and influence the direction of governance. In Nigeria, elections have often been used to assess the strength and maturity of the democratic process. However, recurring problems such as electoral malpractice, poor logistics, and political interference have weakened citizens' trust in the system (Omotola, 2010). Elections are formal decision-making processes through which citizens of a country choose their representatives or leaders by casting votes. They serve as one of the most fundamental pillars of democracy, as they provide legitimacy to government, ensure political accountability, and allow citizens to participate in governance (Dahl, 1998). In Nigeria, elections are conducted periodically by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and they determine who holds positions in the executive and legislative arms of government at both the federal and state levels. The credibility of elections depends on how transparent, free, and fair the process is perceived to be by the electorate.

Heywood (2007) explained that elections perform several critical functions: they facilitate political participation, enhance accountability, foster political stability, and provide legitimacy to the political system. Through elections, citizens can peacefully transfer power, express approval or disapproval of policies, and ensure that governance reflects public interest. In a democratic society, therefore, elections

are expected to be free, fair, and credible, characterised by transparency, inclusiveness, and competitiveness. In Nigeria, elections have historically served as both a unifying and divisive factor. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the country has conducted multiple general elections; however, many of these have been marred by irregularities such as vote buying, ballot box snatching, and manipulation of results (Omotola, 2010). These recurring challenges have prompted widespread calls for reform to restore public confidence in the electoral process and consolidate democratic gains.

Despite these challenges, elections remain central to Nigeria's democratic experiment. Since the country's transition from military rule to democracy in 1999, successive governments have relied on elections as a means to confer legitimacy. Nevertheless, the credibility of these elections has often been questioned both domestically and internationally, leading to widespread calls for reform and innovation in the management of the electoral process. Therefore, within the context of this study, elections are viewed not merely as political events but as complex democratic processes that embody citizens' participation, institutional credibility, and the legitimacy of governance. The quality of elections directly determines the strength of democratic institutions and the sustainability of political stability in Nigeria.

CONCEPT OF ELECTORAL REFORMS

Electoral reforms refer to deliberate efforts to improve the structure, laws, and procedures governing the conduct of elections to make them more credible, transparent, and inclusive. Jinadu (2011) defines electoral reform as "a process of revising electoral frameworks to correct deficiencies and enhance the credibility and effectiveness of electoral management." In essence, reforms are responses to the shortcomings identified in previous elections and are meant to strengthen the democratic process. Suberu (2021) explained that electoral reforms in Nigeria have involved constitutional, statutory, administrative, and technological changes aimed at improving the credibility and effectiveness of electoral governance. These may include amendments to the electoral act, re-organization of the electoral management body (such as INEC in Nigeria), introduction of new voting technologies, voter education initiatives, and measures to regulate campaign financing and political party activities.

In the Nigerian context, electoral reforms have evolved through a series of constitutional and legislative changes. From the introduction of the Electoral Act 2002 to the more comprehensive Electoral Act 2022, reforms have sought to address issues such as voter registration fraud, result manipulation, and weak enforcement of electoral laws. The 2022 Act introduced innovative, which were first used in the 2023 presidential elections to promote transparency and reduce manipulation. However, as Centre for Democracy and Development (2023) notes, while these reforms represented significant progress, their implementation revealed lingering challenges, including technical failures, poor logistics, and resistance from political actors who benefit from the status quo. Thus, electoral reforms in Nigeria can be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time solution, an evolving effort to strengthen institutions, deepen democracy, and rebuild citizens' trust in the electoral system.

In the Nigerian context, electoral reforms have evolved through different democratic transitions and legislative adjustments. Key milestones include the establishment of the Justice Mohammed Uwais Electoral Reform Committee in 2008, which identified the need for an independent and credible electoral body, the creation of an Electoral Offences Commission, and the review of campaign financing regulations. The Electoral Act 2010 incorporated several of these recommendations, introducing the Smart Card Reader and the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) to improve voter authentication and reduce fraud.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Systems Theory. Ludwig von Bertalanffy first propounded the system theory in 1950 through his work on general system theory. He argued that no component of a system can function effectively in isolation, as each element depends on others for survival and efficiency (Bertalanffy, 1950). Later, social scientists and political theorists such as David Easton adapted Bertalanffy's biological framework to political analysis, giving rise to what is now known as the political system theory. David Easton's model conceptualized the political system as a set of interrelated institutions and processes that convert societal demands and supports (inputs) into authoritative decisions and policies (outputs). According to Easton (1965), the stability and survival of any political system depend on the continuous interaction and feedback between the environment and the political institutions that respond to citizens' needs. When the system fails to process demands adequately or respond effectively, instability, conflict, or systemic breakdown may occur.

Applied to the Nigerian context, the systems theory offers a useful analytical framework for understanding the electoral process and the necessity for electoral reforms. The electoral system can be seen as a vital sub-system within the broader political system, responsible for translating citizens' political preferences into leadership through elections. Each component of this system, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, voters, security agencies, and the judiciary plays an interdependent role in ensuring the credibility and legitimacy of electoral outcomes. When one component of this system malfunctions, such as through electoral malpractice, weak institutional capacity, or political interference, it disrupts the entire democratic process. This was evident in Nigeria's pre-reform electoral experiences, where electoral bodies lacked autonomy, political parties engaged in vote-buying, and judicial responses were inconsistent, leading to systemic inefficiency and public distrust. The resulting instability and loss of confidence often generated pressures (inputs) from civil society, opposition parties, and the international community demanding reforms (outputs).

The system theory helps to explain how electoral reform cannot succeed by reforming only one institution, as effective elections depend on the interaction between INEC, political parties, the judiciary, security agencies, and voters. Weaknesses in one component can undermine the entire electoral system. The theory also shows that the political system constantly receives demands from citizens for transparent and credible elections. These demands become inputs that require government action, leading to reforms such as amendments to electoral laws and improvements in election administration.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the challenges associated with the implementation of electoral reforms during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, Nigeria. The study relied entirely on secondary data obtained through documentary review. Data was sourced from official INEC reports and publications, electoral observation reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, newspapers, and other relevant scholarly and institutional materials. The collected information was organized and analysed thematically in line with the research objectives, with particular attention to the electoral reforms introduced, implementation challenges, and the institutional, technological, logistical, and political factors contributing to those challenges. To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, credible and authoritative sources were used, while data triangulation was employed by comparing information from multiple independent sources to cross-check facts and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Key Electoral Reforms Introduced before the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was preceded by significant legal, institutional, technological, and administrative reforms aimed at improving electoral integrity, enhancing transparency, and strengthening public confidence in the electoral process. These reforms represented the most comprehensive restructuring of Nigeria's electoral framework since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 and were driven by sustained demands from civil society organisations, election observers, political parties, and other stakeholders for a more credible electoral process.

Among the most notable reforms were the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022, the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), the introduction of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, reforms to party primaries, and the expansion of the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise. These reforms were introduced to enhance electoral transparency, improve the credibility of election administration, strengthen voter confidence, and address persistent shortcomings that had characterised previous electoral cycles in Nigeria (Orji, 2020; IFES, 2023). The cornerstone of Nigeria's electoral reform agenda before the 2023 presidential election was the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022, which was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari on 25 February 2022. The Act replaced the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) and strengthened the legal framework governing election administration in Nigeria. Among its notable provisions were the legal recognition of electronic voter accreditation, electronic transmission of election results were determined by INEC, improved timelines for party primaries and candidate nomination, enhanced provisions for the participation of persons with disabilities, and stricter sanctions for electoral offences (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022; INEC, 2023a). Section 47(2) of the Act empowered the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to deploy electronic

devices for voter accreditation, thereby providing the legal basis for the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

Collectively, these provisions were intended to strengthen electoral integrity, improve transparency in election administration, reduce opportunities for electoral manipulation, and enhance public confidence in the electoral process (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022; Orji, 2020; IFES, 2023). A major technological innovation introduced before the 2023 election was the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). Developed by INEC, BVAS combines fingerprint and facial recognition technology to verify the identity of voters and prevent multiple voting. Unlike the Smart Card Reader (SCR), which relied primarily on fingerprint verification, BVAS authenticates voters using two biometric modalities, thereby improving the reliability of voter accreditation and reducing opportunities for identity-related electoral fraud (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023a; IFES, 2023).

Beyond voter accreditation, BVAS was integrated with the process of uploading polling unit results to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, making it both an accreditation device and an instrument for promoting electoral transparency. The integration of BVAS with IReV was intended to strengthen the integrity of result management by enabling polling unit results to be electronically uploaded and made publicly accessible, thereby reducing opportunities for result alteration during the collation process (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023a; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). Its introduction represented a significant technological advancement in Nigeria's electoral management system and generated high public expectations regarding the credibility, transparency, and accountability of the 2023 presidential election (YIAGA Africa, 2023; IFES, 2023). Complementing the deployment of BVAS was the introduction of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, an online platform designed to enhance transparency in the collation and management of election results. The portal enabled polling unit result sheets to be uploaded electronically and made publicly accessible immediately after vote counting. This innovation sought to reduce opportunities for result manipulation during collation by allowing political parties, election observers, and citizens to compare officially declared results with those uploaded from polling units (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). According to INEC (2023a), IReV was introduced in response to longstanding concerns regarding the integrity and transparency of result collation during previous elections. Consequently, the platform was expected to strengthen public confidence in the electoral process by enhancing transparency, improving public access to polling unit results, and promoting accountability in result management (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). The Electoral Act 2022 also introduced reforms aimed at strengthening internal democracy within political parties. Political parties were required to adopt transparent procedures for candidate selection through direct, indirect, or consensus-based primaries, with clearly prescribed guidelines governing each method. These provisions sought to minimise arbitrary candidate selection, reduce the influence of political godfathers, and enhance accountability within political parties (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022; Orji, 2020). By introducing clearer legal procedures for party primaries, the Act sought to improve the credibility of candidate nomination and reduce intra-party disputes that had characterised previous electoral cycles (Aiyede, 2012). Although compliance differed across political parties, the reforms recognized that credible general elections are closely linked to transparent and democratic candidate nomination processes.

Another important administrative reform preceding the 2023 election was the expansion of the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise. Prior to the election, INEC registered approximately 10.5 million new voters, increasing the national voter register to over 93 million, the largest in Nigeria's electoral history (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023b; IFES, 2023). The exercise significantly expanded electoral participation, particularly among young Nigerians aged 18 to 34 years, who constituted a substantial proportion of newly registered voters. The expansion of voter registration reflected efforts to promote inclusiveness and broaden citizens' participation in the electoral process by increasing access to voter registration opportunities nationwide (IFES, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). The expansion of the voter register was expected to broaden political participation and reinforce the legitimacy of the electoral process by providing greater opportunities for eligible citizens to exercise their voting rights.

Taken together, these legal, technological, institutional, and administrative reforms represented one of Nigeria's most comprehensive electoral reform efforts since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 (Orji, 2020; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). Collectively, the reforms reflected an institutional commitment to improving electoral integrity, strengthening election administration, and

restoring public confidence in Nigeria's democratic process, although their effectiveness ultimately depended on successful implementation during the 2023 presidential election.

Major Implementation Challenges Encountered during the Electoral Process in Edo State

Despite the ambitious scope of the pre-election reforms, the 2023 presidential election revealed significant gaps between the objectives of electoral reform and their practical implementation. Reports from election observer missions, civil society organisations, and post-election assessments consistently documented technological, logistical, institutional, and security-related challenges that undermined the effectiveness of the reforms and limited their ability to deliver a transparent and credible electoral process.

One of the most prominent and widely reported challenges was the inconsistent deployment and performance of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). Reports from the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023), the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023), and YIAGA Africa (2023) indicated that several polling units, including some in Edo State, experienced difficulties because BVAS devices failed to authenticate voters through either fingerprint or facial recognition. These technical failures delayed voter accreditation, prolonged the commencement of voting, and in some cases resulted in the disenfranchisement of eligible voters. In situations where BVAS devices malfunctioned, electoral officials resorted to alternative accreditation procedures in line with INEC guidelines, thereby creating inconsistencies in accreditation procedures and undermining one of the principal objectives of introducing biometric accreditation (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023a). Election observer reports further attributed these challenges to operational issues such as inadequate technical support, connectivity problems, insufficient training of ad hoc personnel, and the absence of effective contingency measures in some polling units (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; IFES, 2023). These recurring technical failures weakened public confidence in the consistency and reliability of the voter accreditation process and raised concerns about the capacity of election management institutions to effectively implement technology-driven electoral reforms (YIAGA Africa, 2023; CDD, 2023).

Another major technological challenge was the operation of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal. Although the Electoral Act 2022 provided the legal framework for the use of electoral technology and INEC promoted IReV as a mechanism for enhancing transparency in result management, the portal did not function as expected during the election. Observer missions reported that many polling unit results were not uploaded to the portal immediately after vote counting, while others were uploaded several hours later or only after collation had progressed, contrary to public expectations of near real-time publication (European Union Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). The delay in uploading results undermined one of the primary objectives of IReV, which was to promote transparency through timely public access to polling unit results. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) observed that the failure to upload results promptly weakened transparency, fueled public skepticism, and contributed to concerns over the credibility of the result collation process. Similar concerns were reported in Edo State, where election observers documented discrepancies between polling unit results available to party agents and those announced during collation (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

Beyond technological shortcomings, logistical inefficiencies significantly affected the smooth conduct of the election. In many polling units, voting failed to commence at the scheduled time because of the late arrival of electoral officials and voting materials. Reports by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2023), YIAGA Africa (2023), and the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) indicated that some polling units experienced delays of several hours, thereby reducing the time available for voting and creating congestion at polling centers. Extended waiting periods not only discouraged voter participation but also increased the likelihood of tension and disruption at polling units. In addition, the uneven distribution of election materials and the delayed deployment of polling officials reflected weaknesses in election logistics and operational coordination (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; IFES, 2023). In Edo State, accreditation and voting were similarly affected in several local government areas due to logistical delays, raising concerns regarding INEC's operational preparedness despite extensive planning before the election (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

Reports of voter suppression and electoral violence constituted another major implementation challenge during the election. In several states, including parts of the South-South region, incidents of ballot snatching, voter intimidation, attacks on election officials and observers, destruction of electoral materials, and politically motivated violence were recorded (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). These incidents disrupted

voting in affected communities, discouraged voter participation, and compromised the ability of eligible citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote freely. The presence of insecurity in some polling areas also affected the timely conduct of voting and undermined public confidence in the ability of electoral authorities and security agencies to guarantee a peaceful electoral environment (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). The persistence of electoral violence demonstrates that legal and technological reforms alone cannot guarantee credible elections without adequate security arrangements capable of protecting voters, electoral officials, and election materials.

Beyond technological and logistical failures, the election also exposed institutional weaknesses that affected the implementation of electoral reforms. Election observer missions, political parties, and civil society organisations raised concerns regarding the impartiality of some INEC officials at the state and local government levels, alleging that aspects of accreditation, result management, and collation lacked sufficient transparency (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). Although these allegations varied across locations and were not uniformly substantiated, they raised broader concerns about institutional accountability and public confidence in electoral administration. Furthermore, observer reports noted that inconsistencies in the application of INEC's operational guidelines and varying levels of preparedness among electoral personnel affected the uniform implementation of electoral procedures across polling units (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; IFES, 2023). The existence of legal and technological reforms is unlikely to achieve their intended objectives where institutional capacity, professionalism, and administrative neutrality remain weak.

The scale of post-election litigation following the 2023 presidential election further reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the conduct of the electoral process. The presidential election result was challenged before the Presidential Election Petition Court and subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court of Nigeria. Petitioners alleged non-compliance with the Electoral Act 2022, INEC's operational guidelines, and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Similar disputes were recorded in several governorship and legislative elections across the country, indicating that concerns about the implementation of electoral reforms extended beyond the presidential election alone. The widespread resort to judicial resolution of electoral disputes illustrates the continued contestation surrounding election administration and reflects the limited level of confidence that many political actors had in the implementation of the reforms (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, 2023; African Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that although Nigeria implemented far-reaching legal, technological, institutional, and administrative reforms before the 2023 presidential election, significant implementation challenges persisted. These implementation challenges suggest that electoral reform extends beyond the enactment of legal provisions and the introduction of technology; it also requires effective institutional capacity, adequate logistical planning, strong security arrangements, and sustained political commitment.

Factors Contributing to the Implementation Challenges of Electoral Reforms in Edo State

The implementation challenges experienced during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State were as a result of multiple interrelated institutional, technological, logistical, and political factors. Although the Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant legal and technological innovations to improve electoral integrity, the effectiveness of these reforms depended largely on the capacity of electoral institutions, the availability of technological infrastructure, efficient logistical planning, and a conducive political environment. Weaknesses across these areas limited the successful implementation of the reforms and contributed to the operational challenges observed during the election.

Institutional capacity constituted one of the principal factors contributing to the implementation challenges of the 2023 presidential election. While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduced several legal, administrative, and technological innovations, their effective implementation depended largely on the Commission's institutional capacity to coordinate personnel, deploy logistics, and respond to operational challenges on election day. Reports from election observer missions indicated limitations in operational preparedness, staff coordination, and contingency planning (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023). Observer reports further noted inconsistencies in the application of electoral procedures across polling units, particularly in the operation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), voter

accreditation, and result management processes, suggesting variations in the training, supervision, and preparedness of ad hoc electoral officials (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). Similarly, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, 2023) observed that although INEC demonstrated considerable administrative improvements before the election, implementation challenges persisted due to institutional capacity constraints, uneven operational efficiency, and differences in implementation across states. These findings suggest that the success of electoral reforms depends not only on the adoption of appropriate legal and technological innovations but also on the institutional capacity of election management bodies to implement reforms consistently and effectively. Consequently, strengthening staff training, operational coordination, and institutional preparedness remains essential for improving future electoral administration in Nigeria.

Technological limitations also significantly contributed to the implementation challenges experienced during the election. The deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal represented important innovations intended to improve transparency and reduce electoral malpractice. However, technical failures associated with BVAS, delays in uploading polling unit results to IReV, unstable internet connectivity, and inadequate technical support limited the effectiveness of these technologies during the election (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023a; YIAGA Africa, 2023; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2023). The European Union Election Observation Mission (2023) further reported that the failure to upload results to the IReV portal in real time created uncertainty regarding the transparency of the collation process and weakened public confidence in the management of election results. Observer reports also attributed some of these challenges to inadequate technical support for election officials, uneven digital infrastructure across polling locations, and the limited availability of effective contingency mechanisms where technological failures occurred (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA Africa, 2023). These technological shortcomings demonstrated that digital electoral reforms require reliable communication infrastructure, adequate system testing, effective contingency measures, and continuous technical capacity building to achieve their intended objectives.

Logistical deficiencies further constrained the implementation of electoral reforms during the election. Timely deployment of election materials and personnel remains essential for effective electoral administration. Nevertheless, observer reports documented delays in the distribution of sensitive materials, late arrival of electoral officials, and transportation challenges affecting several polling units, including those in Edo State (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). These delays disrupted accreditation and voting schedules, increased congestion at polling centers, and prolonged waiting times for voters, thereby reducing the overall efficiency of the electoral process. YIAGA Africa (2023) similarly noted that logistical shortcomings were particularly evident in remote communities where poor transportation networks complicated the movement of election personnel and materials. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2023) further observed that effective election logistics require coordinated planning, adequate funding, and efficient deployment mechanisms capable of responding to operational challenges across diverse geographical locations. The persistence of these operational weaknesses suggests that improvements in electoral technology must be complemented by effective logistical planning, resource management, and stronger institutional coordination.

The broader political environment also contributed significantly to the implementation challenges experienced during the election. Nigeria's electoral process continues to be characterised by intense political competition, allegations of vote buying, voter intimidation, misinformation, and electoral violence, all of which complicated the implementation of electoral reforms. Reports by the African Union Election Observation Mission (2023), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Election Observation Mission (2023), European Union Election Observation Mission (2023), Centre for Democracy and Development (2023), and YIAGA Africa (2023) documented incidents of political intimidation, attacks on election officials, disruption of voting activities, and election-related violence in several parts of the country, including the South-South region. These developments created an environment in which electoral officials were required to implement complex technological and administrative reforms under significant political pressure and security risks. Observer missions further noted that political polarization and widespread distrust among electoral stakeholders increased public scrutiny of election administration and heightened tensions surrounding the implementation of new electoral technologies and procedures (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; YIAGA

Africa, 2023). Furthermore, persistent allegations of political interference and attempts to influence electoral outcomes undermined public confidence in the impartiality of election administration despite the introduction of new legal safeguards (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023). As Bekoe (2012) argues, electoral reforms are unlikely to achieve their intended objectives where political actors fail to respect democratic norms, electoral rules, and the independence of democratic institutions.

Although the Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant reforms aimed at strengthening electoral credibility, the successful implementation of these reforms depended on effective institutional capacity, reliable technological infrastructure, efficient logistical coordination, and sustained political commitment. The experience of the 2023 presidential election demonstrates that electoral reform extends beyond legislative and technological innovation to include the effective implementation of reforms within a supportive institutional and political environment. Addressing these underlying factors is therefore essential for improving the credibility, transparency, and effectiveness of future elections in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the electoral reforms introduced before the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and assessed the implementation challenges encountered during the electoral process in Edo State. Drawing on documentary evidence from secondary sources, the study found that the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022, the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), the introduction of the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal, reforms to party primaries, and the expansion of the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise reflected a deliberate attempt to not just strengthen electoral transparency, and credibility, but also modernise election administration through legal, technological, institutional, and administrative innovations.

However, the findings revealed that the implementation of these reforms was constrained by a combination of institutional, technological, logistical, and political challenges. Technical failures associated with BVAS and IREV, logistical shortcomings in the deployment of electoral personnel and materials, institutional capacity limitations, and political interference, including electoral violence and voter intimidation, collectively undermined the effective implementation of the reforms. The study therefore concludes that while Nigeria has made considerable progress in strengthening its electoral framework, the credibility and effectiveness of future elections will depend not only on the introduction of new reforms but also on strengthening institutional capacity, improving technological infrastructure, enhancing logistical preparedness, and fostering a political environment that promotes transparency, accountability, and respect for democratic principles.

Consequently, the study recommends that INEC should strengthen institutional capacity through continuous training of permanent and ad hoc electoral officials, improved operational coordination, and comprehensive contingency planning for electoral technologies. Greater investment should also be made in strengthening the technological infrastructure supporting electoral innovations, including rigorous pre-election testing of BVAS and the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) portal, to minimise technical failures during elections. In addition, electoral logistics should be enhanced through the timely deployment of personnel and election materials, improved transportation arrangements, and stronger coordination with security agencies, particularly in difficult-to-access communities. Furthermore, political parties, security agencies, civil society organisations, and other electoral stakeholders should intensify efforts to curb electoral violence, voter intimidation, and vote buying through stricter enforcement of electoral laws, sustained voter education, and the prosecution of electoral offenders. Finally, future electoral reforms should be accompanied by broader stakeholder engagement, periodic review of the Electoral Act based on lessons from the 2023 presidential election, and sustained investment in institutional and technological capacity to ensure that electoral reforms translate into credible, transparent, and democratically acceptable electoral outcomes in Nigeria.

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