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INEC'S TECHNOLOGICAL FAILURES AND THE ELECTORAL TRUST DEFICIT: LESSONS FROM THE 2023 ELECTION FOR 2027

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's 2023 general election marked a major step in the country's electoral history with the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV). These technologies were introduced to improve transparency, reduce electoral fraud, and strengthen public confidence in the electoral process. However, widespread technical failures raised concerns about the credibility of the election. This study examines how technological failures during the 2023 general election contributed to declining public trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and identifies lessons for improving the 2027 elections. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data obtained from INEC reports, election observer mission reports, media publications, and relevant scholarly literature. The study found that failures in electronic result transmission, system glitches, poor network connectivity, inconsistent deployment of technology across polling units, and weak communication from INEC undermined confidence in the electoral process. These shortcomings fuelled allegations of electoral manipulation, reduced citizens' trust in INEC, and weakened perceptions of electoral transparency and institutional credibility. However, the study concluded that restoring public confidence requires stronger digital infrastructure, rigorous testing of electoral technologies before elections, improved training for election officials, transparent communication during electoral operations, and independent oversight of technology deployment. Implementing these reforms will strengthen the credibility of future elections, particularly the 2027 general election.

Keywords: 2023 General Election, BVAS, IReV, Electoral Integrity and Public Trust.

Introduction

Elections are central to democratic governance because they provide citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. The credibility of any election depends not only on the conduct of the voting process but also on public confidence in the institutions responsible for administering it. In Nigeria, this responsibility rests with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which has introduced several electoral reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and public trust.

In preparation for the 2023 general elections, INEC deployed two major technological innovations: the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). BVAS was introduced to strengthen voter accreditation through fingerprint and facial recognition, while the IReV portal was designed to promote transparency by enabling the real-time upload and public viewing of polling unit results. These innovations generated widespread optimism among political parties, civil society organisations, election observers, and the electorate, who viewed them as important steps towards reducing electoral fraud and improving the credibility of elections.

Despite these expectations, the 2023 general elections exposed significant technological and operational shortcomings. Reports of BVAS malfunctions, delays in uploading results to the IReV portal, and inconsistencies between polling unit results and officially announced figures raised serious concerns about the integrity of the electoral process. These failures fuelled allegations of manipulation, generated widespread public dissatisfaction, and intensified legal disputes over the election outcomes. Rather than strengthening confidence in Nigeria's electoral system, the challenges highlighted persistent institutional, logistical, and administrative weaknesses within INEC.

The consequences extended beyond technical failures. Public trust in both the electoral process and democratic institutions declined significantly, while questions were raised about the effectiveness of electoral management and dispute resolution mechanisms. The experience demonstrated that technological innovation alone cannot guarantee credible elections without adequate infrastructure, personnel training, institutional preparedness, transparency, and accountability. The 2023 elections therefore provide important lessons for strengthening electoral governance ahead of future elections, particularly the 2027 general elections.

This study addresses the gap between the expected benefits of electoral technology and the realities experienced during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Specifically, it examines how INEC's technological failures affected electoral credibility and public trust, identifies the institutional and operational factors responsible for these failures, and proposes practical reforms for improving electoral management before the 2027 elections. The paper is organised into sections covering the conceptual and empirical literature, methodology, analysis of INEC's technological performance during the 2023 elections, discussion of the implications for electoral trust, and recommendations for strengthening Nigeria's electoral system.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Electoral Technology

Electoral technology has become an essential feature of modern democratic elections as electoral management bodies increasingly rely on digital innovations to improve the quality and credibility of elections. It involves the use of electronic devices, computer systems, biometric technologies, and digital platforms to support different stages of the electoral process, including voter registration, voter accreditation, voting, vote counting, result transmission, and election management.

According to International IDEA (2021), electoral technology refers to the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) throughout the electoral cycle to improve the efficiency, transparency, accuracy, and credibility of election administration. The organization explains that technologies such as biometric voter registration systems, electronic voter identification devices, and digital result management systems help strengthen electoral integrity when supported by appropriate legal and institutional frameworks. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, 2023) describes electoral technology as the collection of digital tools, software applications, and electronic systems employed by election management bodies to facilitate the conduct of elections. IFES argues that these technologies are designed to reduce human errors, improve operational efficiency, enhance transparency, and promote public confidence in electoral outcomes. However, it emphasizes that technology alone cannot guarantee credible elections without effective governance and institutional preparedness. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2026) defines electoral technology as the application of emerging digital innovations, including biometric systems, artificial intelligence, and electronic election management platforms, to improve the inclusiveness, efficiency, accountability, and transparency of electoral processes. According to the UNDP, technological innovations should strengthen democratic institutions rather than replace the principles of credible electoral governance. From a Nigerian perspective, Ogunmokun, Ayanlade, and Olaposi (2024) conceptualize electoral technology as the adoption of modern technological innovations by electoral management bodies to improve voter registration, voter authentication, election administration, and results transmission. They argue that the effectiveness of these technologies depends largely on institutional capacity, legal support, public trust, and the availability of reliable digital infrastructure. Furthermore, IFES (2026) views electoral technology as the strategic deployment of secure digital systems to support election administration, protect electoral information, improve voter participation, and safeguard election integrity against cyber threats and misinformation. The organization maintains that transparency, accountability, and cybersecurity are indispensable to the successful implementation of electoral technologies.

From these scholarly perspectives, electoral technology can be understood as the application of digital, electronic, and biometric technologies across the entire electoral cycle to improve the administration, transparency, efficiency, security, and credibility of elections. It covers processes such as voter registration, voter accreditation, vote counting, result transmission, and election management. Nevertheless, the success of electoral technology depends not only on the technology itself but also on strong legal frameworks, institutional competence, cybersecurity, political commitment, and public trust. This understanding is particularly relevant to Nigeria's adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal during the 2023 general elections.

Concept of Technological Failure

Leveson (2021) explains that technological failure occurs when a technological system is unable to perform the function for which it was designed. This may result from software errors, hardware defects, poor system design, human mistakes, or weaknesses in organizational management. Such failures reduce the effectiveness and reliability of technology, especially in sectors where accurate and timely service delivery is essential. According to the International Organization for Standardization (2020), technological failure refers to the breakdown or poor performance of technological systems caused by inadequate planning, weak implementation, insufficient maintenance, or ineffective risk management. The organization emphasizes that

technology fails not only because of technical defects but also because of shortcomings in the way it is managed and operated.

Leveson (2021) further argues that technological failure should be viewed as the inability of a socio-technical system to achieve its intended objectives because of failures in software, system design, human interaction, or organizational control. This perspective recognizes that technology and the people who use and manage it are closely connected, meaning that weaknesses in either can lead to system failure. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023) defines technological failure as the inability of digital technologies and information systems to deliver reliable, secure, and uninterrupted services due to poor infrastructure, cybersecurity threats, implementation challenges, or weak governance. Such failures often reduce public confidence in institutions that rely heavily on digital technologies. According to the World Bank (2022), technological failure occurs when digital technologies do not produce the expected results because of inadequate infrastructure, poor planning, weak institutional capacity, insufficient user training, or ineffective integration of technological systems. The World Bank notes that these failures are particularly significant in developing countries, where digital technologies are increasingly used to improve governance and public service delivery.

Concept of Electoral Trust

Norris (2022) posits that electoral trust as the confidence citizens have those elections are conducted fairly, transparently, and without manipulation. It reflects the belief that electoral institutions perform their duties impartially, follow established electoral laws, and produce results that accurately reflect the will of the people. High levels of electoral trust encourage citizens to accept election outcomes and strengthen the legitimacy of democratic governance. According to the International IDEA (2023), electoral trust refers to the confidence that voters, political parties, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders have in the integrity, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process. This trust is built when elections are administered professionally, electoral laws are consistently applied, and the process is perceived as free, fair, and inclusive. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2024) defines electoral trust as the public's belief that elections are managed honestly and efficiently, with every stage of the process from voter registration to the declaration of results being transparent, secure, and credible. Electoral trust grows when electoral management bodies demonstrate competence, accountability, and openness throughout the electoral cycle.

Concept of Electoral Trust Deficit

Norris (2022). Assert that Electoral trust deficit is the gradual decline in citizens' confidence in the electoral process and the institutions responsible for conducting elections. It occurs when voters believe that elections are not managed fairly, transparently, or impartially, making them doubts the credibility of election outcomes. Such distrust often arises from electoral irregularities, poor administration, technological failures, or perceived political interference.

Norris (2022) views electoral trust deficit as the gap between what citizens expect from a credible electoral process and what they actually experience during elections. When election management bodies fail to uphold transparency, neutrality, accountability, and efficiency, public confidence weakens. This loss of trust may reduce voter participation and increase the likelihood of disputes over election results. However, International IDEA (2023), posit that electoral trust deficit is the erosion of public confidence in the integrity of elections resulting from weaknesses in election administration, technological failures, misinformation, political manipulation, or a lack of transparency. As trust declines, citizens become less willing to accept election outcomes, which can undermine democratic stability and legitimacy. The International Foundation for Electoral

Systems (IFES, 2023) explains electoral trust deficit as a situation in which citizens question the credibility and impartiality of electoral institutions because of repeated administrative shortcomings, governance failures, or poor communication by election officials. When this happens, confidence in democratic institutions diminishes, voter turnout may decline, and post-election conflicts become more likely.

Concept of Electoral Integrity

Electoral integrity is widely regarded as one of the cornerstones of democratic governance because it determines whether elections genuinely reflect the will of the people. It goes beyond the mere conduct of voting on Election Day to include the fairness, transparency, credibility, and legality of every stage of the electoral process. Scholars and international organizations have offered different but complementary perspectives on the concept.

Norris (2014) explains electoral integrity as the consistent application of internationally accepted democratic standards and universal electoral principles throughout the entire electoral cycle. According to her, an election can only be considered credible when activities such as voter registration, political campaigns, voting, vote counting, and the announcement of results are carried out transparently, impartially, and in accordance with the law. This perspective emphasizes that electoral integrity is a continuous process rather than an event that occurs only on Election Day. International IDEA (2020) describes electoral integrity as the extent to which elections are conducted in line with democratic values such as political equality, transparency, accountability, respect for the rule of law, and the protection of citizens' political rights. In this view, elections possess integrity when every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate freely and when the final results accurately represent the choices made by the electorate without manipulation or interference.

Birch (2011) views electoral integrity as the faithful observance of legal and democratic principles in the conduct of elections. She argues that electoral integrity requires electoral institutions to remain neutral, prevent electoral fraud and intimidation, enforce electoral laws fairly, and provide equal opportunities for all political contestants. According to Birch, public confidence in elections largely depends on whether citizens perceive the electoral process as fair and impartial. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021) defines electoral integrity as the conduct of elections in a manner that is transparent, inclusive, peaceful, and accountable throughout the electoral cycle. The organization maintains that electoral integrity is strengthened when electoral management bodies perform their responsibilities professionally, political actors comply with electoral laws, and citizens have confidence that their votes will count. This definition highlights the importance of public trust alongside effective electoral administration.

James and Garnett (2020) argue that electoral integrity reflects the quality of electoral governance demonstrated through professionalism, transparency, impartiality, and strict adherence to legal procedures. According to them, electoral institutions with high levels of integrity are more likely to inspire public confidence, reduce post-election disputes, and enhance the legitimacy of democratic governments. Conversely, administrative failures, political interference, or weak institutional capacity can significantly undermine electoral integrity and erode citizens' trust in elections.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Cognitive Mobilization Theory (CMT), which explains how citizens form opinions about political institutions and democratic processes as they become more educated and politically informed. The theory, developed by Ronald Inglehart (1977) and later expanded by Dalton (1984), argues that informed citizens are less likely to rely on political elites

or party loyalties when judging elections. Instead, they assess electoral processes based on their own observations and the information available to them.

This perspective is particularly relevant to elections that rely heavily on technology. Electoral trust refers to the confidence citizens have in the fairness, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process (Norris, 2014). Technological reliability, on the other hand, is the ability of electoral technologies to function accurately, consistently, and without disruption throughout the election (Alvarez & Hall, 2008). When these technologies work as expected, they strengthen public confidence in election outcomes. However, when they fail or perform below expectations, citizens are more likely to question the integrity of the entire electoral process.

Cognitive Mobilization Theory was selected for this study because it offers a better explanation of voter reactions to technological failures than general theories of political or institutional trust. While trust theories focus mainly on citizens' confidence in public institutions, CMT explains why politically aware and informed citizens become more critical when institutions fail to meet expected standards. In the Nigerian context, many voters closely followed the performance of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) during the 2023 general elections. As reports of technical failures, delayed result uploads, and inconsistencies became widespread, public confidence in the electoral process declined significantly.

The theory therefore provides a suitable framework for understanding the relationship between technological reliability and electoral trust in Nigeria. It helps explain how the technological challenges experienced during the 2023 general elections influenced public perceptions of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and why improving the reliability of electoral technology will be essential to restoring confidence ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative desk-based research design to examine how the technological challenges experienced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the 2023 general elections affected public trust in Nigeria's electoral process and to identify lessons for the 2027 elections. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables a detailed examination of existing evidence and provides a deeper understanding of institutional performance, electoral processes, and public perceptions.

The study relied entirely on secondary data collected from a wide range of credible sources. These included official reports published by INEC, reports from domestic and international election observer groups, court judgments arising from election petitions, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government policy documents, and newspaper reports from reputable media organisations. The review covered publications produced between 2023 and 2025 to capture both the events surrounding the 2023 general elections and the subsequent debates and reform proposals leading towards the 2027 elections.

To ensure the quality of the evidence, documents were selected using clear inclusion criteria. Only sources that focused on the 2023 general elections and discussed electoral technology, particularly the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), electoral transparency, or public confidence in the electoral process, were included. Preference was given to official publications, peer-reviewed academic studies, and reports from recognised organisations with established credibility. Materials that lacked verifiable authorship, contained insufficient evidence, or were not directly related to the objectives of the study were excluded.

The selected documents were examined using qualitative content analysis. Information from different sources was carefully compared to identify recurring themes, common patterns, and differing viewpoints on the causes of technological failures, their impact on electoral credibility, and the implications for public trust. Comparing evidence from multiple sources helped strengthen the reliability of the study's findings and reduced the risk of relying on a single perspective.

Although the desk-based approach made it possible to draw on a broad range of documented evidence, it also has some limitations. The study did not involve interviews, surveys, or other forms of primary data collection, meaning that its findings are based entirely on previously published materials. As a result, some sources may reflect institutional, political, or editorial biases. To minimise this limitation, evidence was cross-checked across multiple credible sources, ensuring that the conclusions were based on consistent and well-supported information rather than on individual opinions or isolated reports.

INEC's Technological Failures in 2023 Elections

BVAS Glitches and Voter Disenfranchisement

The introduction of BVAS was widely seen as a major step towards improving the credibility of elections in Nigeria. However, the experience of the 2023 general elections showed that the technology alone could not guarantee a transparent electoral process. Technical failures, operational challenges, and inadequate support during voting disrupted accreditation in many polling units and prevented thousands of eligible voters from exercising their right to vote.

Reports by election observers provide clear evidence of these challenges. Yiaga Africa (2023) observed that BVAS devices experienced frequent authentication failures, making it difficult for many voters to complete the accreditation process. The organisation also reported that only about 41% of polling units opened by 8:30 a.m., while many others experienced significant delays caused by the late arrival of officials, logistical problems, and BVAS-related technical faults. As a result, long queues developed across many polling centres, and some voters, particularly older persons and those with disabilities, left without voting.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2023) reached a similar conclusion. While acknowledging that BVAS improved voter accreditation, the Mission noted that the electronic transmission of presidential election results to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal was inconsistent in many locations. According to the report, the failure to upload polling-unit results promptly reduced transparency and weakened public confidence in the credibility of the election. The delay between the announcement of results and their appearance on the IReV portal created doubts among many Nigerians and sparked allegations of manipulation.

These technical difficulties were compounded by operational shortcomings. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) found that many ad hoc electoral officials lacked sufficient practical experience to resolve BVAS faults at polling units. Where devices malfunctioned, officials often had to wait for technical assistance, leading to further delays and confusion. The International Crisis Group (2023) also noted that these problems were more severe in rural and conflict-affected communities, where poor network coverage and insecurity made it difficult to provide timely technical support.

The effects of these failures were felt across the country. In cities such as Lagos and Abuja, many voters, especially young people and first-time participants, became discouraged after waiting for several hours before accreditation could begin (Yiaga Africa, 2023). In other areas, delays in uploading polling-unit results to the IReV portal raised fresh concerns about transparency and the integrity of the electoral process (EU EOM, 2023). These issues later featured prominently in post-

election litigation, with several petitioners citing BVAS failures and problems with electronic result transmission as grounds for challenging election outcomes.

Overall, the 2023 elections demonstrated that technology can improve electoral administration only when it is supported by adequate planning, reliable infrastructure, effective technical support, and well-trained election officials. Strengthening these areas before future elections will be essential if BVAS is to achieve its intended purpose of promoting transparency, protecting voters' rights, and restoring public confidence in Nigeria's electoral process.

IReV Transmission Breakdown in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

The 2023 presidential election was expected to mark a turning point in Nigeria's electoral process through the use of technology. At the centre of this expectation was the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Results Viewing Portal (IReV), which was introduced to allow polling unit results to be uploaded and viewed by the public in real time. The platform was widely promoted as a tool that would improve transparency, strengthen public confidence, and reduce opportunities for electoral manipulation. Instead, its failure during the presidential election became one of the most controversial issues of the entire electoral process.

Before the election, INEC repeatedly assured Nigerians that presidential election results would be uploaded to the IReV portal immediately after they were recorded at polling units. However, this promise was not fulfilled. While many National Assembly election results appeared on the portal without major delays, presidential results were uploaded much later, with some taking days to become available. The unexplained difference in the transmission of the two sets of results generated widespread public concern and fuelled allegations of possible manipulation. Election observer groups, including Yiaga Africa and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), criticised the delays and called on INEC to provide a clear and transparent explanation. They argued that the failure to upload results as promised weakened the credibility of the electoral process and reduced public trust in the Commission.

The breakdown also exposed weaknesses in INEC's technological preparedness. Conducting electronic result transmission across more than 176,000 polling units required reliable digital infrastructure, sufficient server capacity, and an effective backup system. However, reports of server congestion, system downtime, and network failures suggested that the platform was not adequately prepared for the demands of election day. The absence of a clearly communicated contingency plan further increased public suspicion and left many Nigerians questioning the reliability of the system.

In addition to the technical challenges, operational difficulties affected the smooth use of the technology. Many ad hoc electoral officials struggled to operate the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), especially in rural communities where internet connectivity and electricity supply were unreliable. These challenges caused delays in accreditation and result transmission, disrupted voting in some polling units, and, in certain cases, contributed to voter disenfranchisement. The experience demonstrated that introducing new technology alone cannot improve electoral credibility unless it is supported by adequate infrastructure, proper training, and effective technical support.

Public concern grew even stronger because the transmission problems appeared to affect only the presidential election, while National Assembly results were uploaded with fewer difficulties. This inconsistency led many Nigerians to question whether the problem was purely technical. Although INEC explained that the delays resulted from technical glitches, the explanation failed to convince many stakeholders because it was not supported by an independent

technical assessment or detailed public communication. As a result, a technology introduced to strengthen electoral transparency instead became a major source of public distrust.

The consequences were significant. The delayed transmission of presidential results triggered protests, election petitions, and widespread criticism from political parties, civil society organisations, and election observers. Public confidence in INEC declined sharply, particularly among young and first-time voters who had viewed technology as a safeguard against electoral malpractice. Rather than strengthening confidence in the electoral process, the IReV breakdown deepened the trust deficit surrounding the 2023 presidential election and raised important questions about the credibility of future elections.

To restore public confidence ahead of the 2027 general election, INEC must address the weaknesses exposed in 2023. This requires upgrading its digital infrastructure, improving server capacity, strengthening cybersecurity, providing more comprehensive training for election officials, and establishing clear contingency plans for technical failures. Equally important is the need for timely and transparent communication whenever challenges arise, supported by independent technical audits of electoral technologies. These measures are essential if technology is to fulfill its intended role of enhancing transparency, accountability, and public trust in Nigeria's electoral process.

Lack of Technical Contingency Planning

Beyond the operational challenges associated with BVAS and the IReV portal, another major weakness of the 2023 general elections was the absence of a comprehensive technical contingency plan. While INEC invested considerably in digital innovations to improve electoral transparency and credibility, less attention was given to preparing for situations where these technologies might fail. In any technology-driven election, disruptions are always possible. What often determines the success of the process is the availability of effective backup measures that allow electoral activities to continue without undermining public confidence.

The events of the 2023 elections suggest that INEC's contingency planning was inadequate. As technical difficulties emerged, there was little public information about alternative procedures that would ensure continuity while safeguarding the integrity of the election. This uncertainty created confusion among election officials, political parties, election observers, and voters, many of whom questioned whether the challenges were being managed in a transparent and consistent manner.

Experiences from other democracies show that successful election management extends beyond the deployment of technology. Electoral management bodies in countries such as India, Brazil, and Estonia complement digital voting and result management systems with well-developed contingency measures. These include backup servers located in different regions, disaster recovery centres, secure offline data storage that can be synchronised once connectivity is restored, continuous system monitoring, and dedicated technical support teams that can respond immediately to system failures. Such safeguards help minimise disruptions and preserve confidence in the electoral process.

For Nigeria, strengthening technical contingency planning should become a priority ahead of future elections. INEC should establish redundant digital infrastructure, maintain standby replacement devices for polling units, develop secure offline result storage and synchronisation mechanisms, and create rapid-response technical support teams that can address problems as they arise. Regular simulation exercises and system stress tests should also be conducted before elections to identify potential weaknesses and ensure that emergency procedures are well understood by election officials.

The experience of the 2023 general elections demonstrates that introducing new technology alone is not sufficient to guarantee credible elections. Digital innovation must be supported by effective contingency planning capable of sustaining electoral operations when unforeseen technical challenges occur. By adopting a more resilient and proactive approach to risk management, INEC can strengthen public confidence in the electoral process and improve the credibility of future elections, particularly the 2027 general elections.

Electoral Trust Deficit and Public Perception

Public trust is the foundation of every credible election. Before Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) assured Nigerians that the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal would improve transparency, minimise electoral fraud, and strengthen confidence in the electoral process. However, the failure to upload presidential election results to the IReV portal as promised created a clear gap between these expectations and what eventually occurred, leaving many citizens questioning the credibility of the election.

Evidence from public opinion surveys confirms that confidence in INEC declined after the elections. The Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey (2024) found that only about 35% of Nigerians trusted INEC, a noticeable decline from previous survey rounds. The survey also reported that fewer than four in ten Nigerians believed the 2023 general elections were free and fair, suggesting that many citizens were dissatisfied with how the elections were conducted.

These findings align with the observations of the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023), which reported that the inconsistent transmission of presidential election results through the IReV portal weakened transparency and undermined public confidence. While results for many National Assembly elections were uploaded without major difficulties, delays in uploading presidential election results created uncertainty and raised concerns about the integrity of the process. Although INEC attributed the delays to technical challenges, the absence of timely and clear communication allowed speculation and suspicion to grow.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) similarly observed that many Nigerians, especially young people and first-time voters, felt disappointed because the technology that had been presented as a safeguard for electoral credibility did not perform as expected. Their concerns were reflected not only in public debates and traditional media but also in organised surveys and election observer reports, indicating that the decline in confidence was both widespread and measurable.

The loss of public trust has important implications for Nigeria's democratic development. When citizens believe that electoral institutions cannot guarantee transparent and credible elections, they are more likely to withdraw from the political process, while the legitimacy of elected leaders becomes increasingly contested. If left unaddressed, this growing trust deficit could reduce voter participation, deepen political divisions, and weaken democratic governance. Rebuilding confidence before the 2027 general elections will therefore require INEC to go beyond introducing new technologies. The Commission must ensure that electoral technologies function reliably, communicate openly during technical challenges, hold officials accountable where failures occur, and consistently demonstrate fairness and transparency throughout the entire electoral process.

Legal and Institutional Ramifications of the 2023 Nigerian Elections

The 2023 Nigerian general elections began with high public expectations that the new electoral technologies would improve the credibility and transparency of the voting process. However, the challenges experienced during the elections exposed serious legal and institutional weaknesses. Instead of strengthening confidence in the electoral process, the operational problems

associated with BVAS and IReV led to widespread controversy and a surge in election petitions. Many political parties and candidates challenged the presidential election, alleging vote suppression, irregularities in result management, and violations of the Electoral Act 2022 (Ujo, 2023).

The judiciary, especially the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (PEPT) and the Supreme Court, came under intense public scrutiny as they considered these petitions. Although the courts maintained that their judgments were based on the law and the evidence before them, many legal scholars, election observers, and members of the public believed that greater attention was given to procedural requirements than to the substantive allegations concerning the conduct of the election (Ojo, 2023). This perception weakened public confidence in the judiciary's role as an impartial guardian of electoral justice.

The tribunal proceedings also highlighted concerns about INEC's institutional performance. Questions surrounding the delayed uploading of polling unit results, technical failures, and inconsistencies in the Commission's explanations during the hearings raised further doubts about its preparedness, transparency, and independence (Ogbondah, 2023). These issues reinforced existing concerns about the capacity of electoral institutions to effectively manage complex elections and maintain public trust.

The legal disputes that followed the elections had consequences beyond the courtroom. Many Nigerians came to believe that election outcomes are increasingly determined through litigation rather than by the votes cast on election day. Whether or not this perception is entirely accurate, it has contributed to growing political apathy, declining trust in democratic institutions, and concerns about the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

To restore confidence in Nigeria's electoral process, meaningful reforms are needed. INEC should strengthen transparency and communication throughout the electoral process, while the judiciary should continue to build capacity in handling election disputes in a timely and consistent manner. There is also a need to ensure that the provisions of the Electoral Act 2022 are applied consistently and that unnecessary procedural barriers do not prevent courts from fully examining the merits of election petitions. Implementing these reforms would help strengthen electoral integrity, rebuild public trust, and reinforce Nigeria's democratic institutions ahead of future elections.

Lessons and Recommendations for the 2027 General Elections

The experience of the 2023 general election provides important lessons for strengthening Nigeria's electoral process ahead of the 2027 elections. While the deployment of BVAS and IReV represented significant technological innovations, their implementation exposed weaknesses in technical infrastructure, operational planning, and institutional preparedness. Technical failures associated with BVAS contributed to voter delays and, in some instances, disenfranchisement, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Similarly, the failure to upload results to IReV as expected during the presidential election undermined public confidence and intensified concerns about the transparency and credibility of the electoral process.

Drawing from these experiences, the following recommendations are proposed for the 2027 general elections:

1. INEC should upgrade its digital infrastructure by expanding server capacity, adopting more reliable cloud-based systems, improving cybersecurity, and establishing effective backup systems. These measures will reduce the likelihood of technical failures and ensure smoother election-day operations.

2. An independent review of the performance of BVAS and IReV during the 2023 elections should be carried out to identify operational weaknesses, assess compliance with established procedures, and provide practical recommendations for improving future elections.
3. INEC should introduce regular and standardised training programmes for permanent and ad hoc staff, particularly those responsible for operating electoral technologies. Practical simulations and field exercises before elections will improve competence and minimise operational errors.
4. The National Assembly should address the legal uncertainties surrounding electronic transmission of election results, the admissibility of electronic evidence in electoral disputes, and appropriate sanctions for the sabotage or manipulation of electoral technology. Clearer legal provisions will improve accountability and reduce unnecessary litigation.
5. INEC, in collaboration with civil society organisations and the media, should intensify voter education campaigns to improve public understanding of how electoral technologies function, their benefits, and their limitations. Well-informed voters are more likely to participate confidently in the electoral process and are less susceptible to misinformation.
6. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and accredited election observers should be provided with the necessary legal protection and institutional support to monitor elections effectively. Their independent assessments can help promote transparency, strengthen accountability, and improve public confidence in election outcomes.

Conclusion

The 2023 general election was expected to usher in a new era of transparent and credible elections through the deployment of BVAS and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal. While these innovations reflected INEC's commitment to electoral reform, the technical and operational challenges experienced during the election revealed that technology alone cannot guarantee credible electoral outcomes. The failure of key digital systems, delays in the electronic transmission of results, inadequate contingency planning, and poor communication with stakeholders undermined public confidence and deepened the electoral trust deficit.

This study has shown that the credibility of elections depends not only on the availability of modern technology but also on the strength of the institutions responsible for managing it. Reliable digital infrastructure, adequate preparation, continuous training of election officials, transparent communication, and effective accountability mechanisms are essential for ensuring that electoral technologies achieve their intended purpose. Where these elements are lacking, even the most sophisticated technologies may fail to inspire public confidence.

As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 general elections, the lessons from the 2023 elections should serve as a catalyst for meaningful electoral reforms. INEC must priorities institutional capacity, strengthen its technological systems, improve collaboration with relevant stakeholders, and adopt proactive measures to prevent future technical failures. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can rebuild public trust, enhance electoral integrity, and promote elections that genuinely reflect the will of the people, thereby strengthening the country's democratic development.

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