



A-Z about elections in your country and the world.

Much Ado About Electronic Voting

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Review



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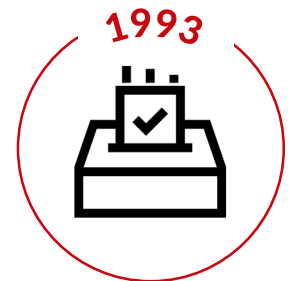
Introduction:

Nigeria's electoral body (INEC) is on course to make manual voting a thing of the past. This is one among 34 other electoral reforms being proposed as stated in the Electoral Amendment Act 2010. The Electoral Amendment Act seeks to further amend the provision in Section 52 (2) to mandate the Commission to conduct elections by electronic voting or any other method of voting as it may determine from time to time. In this new voting system,

“At the end of accreditation of voters,” the Bill orders, “the Presiding Officer shall transmit the voter accreditation data by secured mobile electronic communication to the Central Database of the Commission kept at the National Headquarters of the Commission

How Voting is currently Done in Nigeria:

Nigeria adopted the open ballot system in 1993 when it began its third republic. The election that ensued has often been described as the freest and fairest in the country's political history. In 1999, Nigeria switched to what is called the 'Paper-based' method which requires the electorate to indicate their support for a candidate or party listed on the ballot paper with a thumbprint and casting the ballot paper in a ballot box. The votes are then counted manually and sent to a central collation centre where all the results from all the states are collated and announced. In 2015, and for the first time in Nigeria, the use of biometric cards for voting was employed and with it, Nigeria was able to capture its 80 million voter population in an Electronic Voters Register(EVR) and included the Automatic Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) in the voting process. This is the closest to digitalisation that Nigeria's voting system has ever gotten to. According to this research, these changes have reduced the incidence of multiple registrations and multiple voting to the barest minimum. Nevertheless, Nigeria's 2019 elections were still characterised by ballot stuffing, intimidation of voters, hijacking of ballot boxes, violence and manipulation of election results.



Lessons From Namibia

Globally, only 13% of the world's countries have attempted the use of electronic voting, 16% of which have discontinued its use. However, nearly all countries now use digital technology for at least some aspects of election management which often include creating and managing voter registers, as well as transmitting and tabulating results. In 2014, Namibia was the first African nation to conduct its presidential and parliamentary elections with electronic voting. 1.2 million of its electorates went to the polls and the incumbent political party, SWAPO, retained its power. Namibia's e-voting process begins with the polling officers verifying voter cards on a device containing the national voters' roll. Next, in the booth, the voter selects their party of choice by pressing a button on an electronic ballot unit and the vote is taken into records. The choice is then printed on a ballot paper and the voter drops it into a ballot box. While the votes made with the EVM are transmitted live to a national central collation centre, the votes in the ballot box are also counted at the end of the voting process to ensure that it tallies with what the EVM records are.



Attempted
Electronic Voting
13%

Discontinued
it's use
16%

What Can We Gain From E-Voting?

According to a Brief Assessment Report by the Electoral Institute of Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), it took less than 30 seconds with each Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) for each Namibian voter to make their choice and cast their vote in the 2014 elections. This could mean that Nigeria's electorate population, which currently stands at 80 million could cast their votes in a shorter time frame during the 2023 elections, should the amendment be signed into law. The report also states that the EVM addressed the issue of spoilt and rejected ballots as all ballots were valid at the end of the process. E-voting can strengthen the credibility of elections by reducing the risk of double voting and spoilt ballot papers. Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) ensure that a voter's card can only be used once during an election and it often transmits voting results in real-time to a central location. This eliminates the loophole that having state collation centres give. Also, e-voting might be an end to hijacking of ballot boxes and ballot stuffing since the votes counted in the ballot box can only exist when voting on the EVMs has occurred and must be equivalent to the ones recorded by the EVMs.

What Could Go Wrong

The first challenge that Nigeria might experience is building a sense of trust in the new system among the electorate who are already used to the paper ballots. method. The Kaduna State Government of Nigeria experienced this at the polls where voters expressed their distrust in the new process during the 2018 Local Government Elections, which was Nigeria's first electronic voting exercise. After solving the people problem, there are also technical issues that could arise and cause further delays like slow internet connectivity or faulty devices. Hacking and pre-programming of results have also been associated with e-voting and is one of the major bottlenecks in the system.



Lack of Trust by the People



Hacking



Slow Internet



Faulty Devices

Bottomline

E-voting is a great proponent for digital democracy and can become the future of elections as the world continues to advance technologically. However, there is still a lot of ground to cover especially here in Nigeria from training staff on use of the machines, to voter sensitisation and education on how to vote. Infrastructural gaps like internet availability are also very necessary to fill.