



## ICTs Use in Sustaining Nigerian Democracy: Evaluation of Voters' Perception of the use of Smart Card-Readers in 2019 General Election

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### ABSTRACT

Smart-card reader technology had been introduced into the Nigeria's electoral system to eliminate electoral frauds and manipulations that lead to pre-, on- and post-election crises in Nigeria. This is serious problem which do not only undermine good governance but also lead to loss of lives. Against this background, evaluation of Voters' Perception of Smart-card readers in 2019 General Election was conceived on the need to investigate respondents' perception of the technology, whether the technology had stopped multiple voting and make election credible before the electorate. Using the survey research method, the study sampled a total of 400 respondents from Ayamelum and Dunukofia local government areas of Anambra state. The sample was drawn using Rakesh [1] sample determination formula while purposive sampling technique was used to select only the electorates who participated in the election for the study. The research was based on the uses and gratifications and technological acceptance theories of mass communication. Findings revealed that the smart-card reader technology is a total failure given that it could neither stop multiple nor make the election credible in the eyes of the electorates, a situation which attracted negative perception of the technology from the respondents. Among others, the researcher recommended that INEC should affect the corrections on all errors observed to have marred the use the technology and religiously improve on it for better elections in future.

**Keywords:** *Smart-card, ICT, good governance, democracy, Elections.*

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the study

The Nigerian democratic experience over the years has not been pleasant to all the participants and designers. The various transition exercises usually get the rejection of its life through complaints from different individuals and interest groups who have one thing or the other to report about. Historically, the Nigeria's first democratic experiment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic could not survive the challenges of clashing interests and as a result died quickly within six years owing to politicians' inability to properly manage electoral process and governance. This action prepared the stage well for the military to take over the reign of government [2].

Once again, the second republican mission could not provide the required political stability expected of it as a result of subsequent post transition election quandary which again ushered in another round of military rule in 1984. The next attempt for a Third Republic in the 1990s was stillborn [3] until the country managed to transit to another dispensation of democratic rule in 1999 [2]. Drawing from the subsequent collapse of the first and second republic and the abortion of the third republic by the annulment of the highly celebrated June, 12, 1993 Presidential Election are clear indicators of the failure of previous attempts to democratize elections in Nigeria [4].

The current democratic system that the country enjoys today, therefore, came to lime light in 1999. Though the country has witnessed a successful civilian to civilian change of government in the past 21 years and counting, the desperation of politicians and do or die attitude to electioneering, has continued to heat up the polity every now and then with different manipulation formulae being introduced every election year. This attitude of our politicians made them too ready to apply any means of manipulation in the electoral process in order to secure the position sought in an election. Killings, maiming, character assassination and buying of voters in the localities with money to vote for a candidate irrespective of their political ideology has been the order of the day in Nigeria since 1999 [5]. The people, no doubt had lost confidence in the country's electoral process leading to high level of political apathy observed among the electorate. More so, reports of civil society groups indicates that the cause of the tension in the land is the total lack of confidence by stakeholders in the Nigerian democratic project that is responsible for the threat of instability that characterize the Fourth Republic [6].

Obviously, series of elections have been conducted in the country since 1999 and many of them were faulted by different individuals and civil society organizations due to the accompanying fraud that characterize the elections [7,8]. Notable among these elections were the 2003 election which saw most of the gubernatorial elections cancelled in different states of the federation leading to the alteration of the governorship electoral calendar in some of the effected states of Anambra, Rivers, Edo, Bayelsa, Kogi and Osun states [9]. The next election of this kind was the 2007 general election which president Yar'Dua himself admitted was characterized by irregularities [10].

To address the problem, the federal government under President Jonathan attempted a better electoral process in 2011 and 2015 respectively using the smart card reader, a device that compelled all voters' card to pass through an electronic device for verification and authentication before being used to vote in a polling station. It was the desire to curb the high rate of electoral malpractices in Nigeria that led to the application of this electronic device in conducting election as a means of sustaining the country's democracy through enhancing transparency in the electoral process. This was a move to join all other countries of the world in the use of ICTs in both governance and electoral process in line with the height of technological development around the world. The essence of the adoption of this card-reader technology is to improve efficiency, equity and quality of democratic participation among the citizens of the country [11].

Had the deployment of ICT (smart card reader) indeed brought some positive development to the Nigerian electoral system in keeping with the desire to curb the high rate of electoral malpractices in Nigeria? This is the basic question that this study is set to examine with particular reference to the February, 23, 2019 presidential and national assembly elections in the country. Controlling the rate of rigging and manipulations of different kinds that had been adjudged to have marred previous elections in the country has led to injection of heavy fund in the application of the smart-card technology with a view to sustaining the country's democracy. Then, the big question begging for an answer is to what extent has the application of this device served the purpose it was intended to serve? It was against this background that the study is set to investigate Voters' Perception of Smart Card Readers use in the 2019 Presidential and national assembly Election.

### **Statement of Problem**

Nigeria as a country had identified that the main problem causing lack of trust and participation among her citizens in the electoral process is rigging and all other kinds of irregularities that characterize the process. As a means of solving this problem and restoring the much-desired credibility in the electoral process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) resort to the adoption of smart card reader to ensure that there is no rigging. Unfortunately, technology is just a tool and not an end in itself. The degree to which technology is deployed in an electoral process in a given country at a given time is perhaps directly related to the perceived level of trust of such technology and independence enjoyed by the Electoral umpire. It is this level of trust and independence that in the end determine the acceptance of electoral outcome by the various stakeholders and the general public. Since the introduction of the smart card readers in the electoral process, political parties, general public(s) and various stakeholders still complain that electoral outcomes do not reflect the masses wish after elections. In this situation, the ability of the smart card reader to satisfy the conscience of the electorate to make them have belief in the credibility of the process had not been ascertained. This subject the use of the smart card readers to question as to know if it has actually served the purpose for which it was introduced. Against this background, this study, seeks to ascertain the voters' perception of the use of the smart card-reader in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The research was guided by the following research questions.

1. Does the use of smart card reader stop the electorates from multiple voting during the election?
2. Does the use of the smart card reader make the respondents accept election results as credible?
3. What is the respondents' attitude towards the use of smart card reader technology?
4. What is the respondents' perception of the smart card reader technology?

### **Scope and Limitation the study**

This study covered only voters in two local government areas in Anambra state- Ayamelum and Dunukofia local governments. The study targeted only voters in the area who participated in the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly election in Nigeria. The means of selecting the respondents that participated in the 2019 general election is a serious challenge to the researcher since the researcher is not everywhere during the election. So, there is every tendency that some of the participants do not participate in the election. To handle this challenge, the researcher was very meticulous in the selection of the participants for the study to ensure that it was only those who are part of the elections were chosen for the study. This study could be influenced by the individual bias views of the participants which could have been motivated by their political interests or love for a candidate.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is an examination of the role of the smart card reader in the protection of the people's mandate in the choice of their leaders. This study is of very important to the development of the country as it exposes the importance of ICT use in protecting and strengthening the democratic ideology of the Nigeria. The study exposes the government and the citizens to the lapses in the INEC's use of the smart card readers in conducting election in Nigeria. The study equally provided a template for the understanding of the workings of the smart card and the level of its acceptance among the respondents with special attention to its ability in safeguarding the country's democracy which is the main focus of its adoption in the electoral process.

On the other hand, this study is an addition to media studies on the protection of the country's electoral system and as well provided an insight into the use of ICT in the electoral process. To INEC, this study revealed some loopholes that brought about the failure of the smart card readers in 2019 general elections. To the contestants, the study revealed a major flaw that brought about different result at different level of the election while exposing the strength and weakness of the smart card technology.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

This theory is based on motivations for a particular media use. It is the belief of the proponents of the theory that for every decision to adopt or use any media; there is a gratification which its use or adoption expected to fulfill or satisfy. The basic assumption of the Uses & Gratifications theory is that people are actively involved in media usage and interact highly with the communication media by building profile groupings of related uses and theoretically associated gratifications [12]. The theory describes why consumers use a particular medium and what functions the medium serves for them [13]. In this study, the use of this theory is to provide an understanding of why the smart card reader was adopted as the best technology to handle the electoral fraud which previous observations and outcomes have proved to be a challenge facing the Nigerian electoral system over the years. Ruggiero [14] claimed that the Uses and Gratifications theory has provided "a cutting-edge approach in the initial stages of each new communication medium: newspaper, radio, television, and now the Internet." When it comes to user behavior and motivation, the Uses and Gratifications theory has been the most common approach, explaining "why" certain media behavior occurs. Users are seen as goal-oriented, with rationales for their use (and non-use) of various media [15]. The import of this statement is that if the voters certify their motive for using the smart card reader in conducting elections in Nigeria, they will be likely to its use in future elections. It is pertinent to state here that one major factor that can motivate and hold voters' acceptance of the smart card reader is its ability to serve the purpose for which it was introduced in the electoral system.

If what they see as the outcome of the use of the technology gives them joy and satisfied the transparency, free and fair electoral process devoid of manipulation and cheating of any kind, the technology will be accepted but if otherwise, its use will be rejected by the voters in subsequent election in the country. The use of this theory in internet-based research is not new in media studies [16]. Media scholars' have strengthened society's understanding of the Uses and Gratifications theory by making distinction between gratifications obtained and gratifications sought when they expanded the concept of gratifications [17]. Gratifications obtained refer to those gratifications that audience members actually experience through the use of a particular medium.

This is to say that in the course of the peoples' introduction of the smart card technology, they happen to get an election result that reflected the true representation of the peoples' mandate; they are likely to perceive the smart card reader as the solution to the electoral fraud which had caused the country a lot of harm in the previous years. By contrast, gratifications sought (herein, means the "needs" or "motives") refer to those gratifications that voters expect to obtain from the smart card technology before they have actually come into contact with it. Before the introduction of the smart card technology, INEC explained its importance to the people pointing how its use will eliminate manipulations of any kind in the election. This explanation sets the peoples' emotion optimistic with high expectations on the reliability of the technology. Research shows that gratifications obtained are a better predictor of media use than gratifications sought and that if a medium meets or exceeds the gratifications sought by a user, recurrent use will occur [18]. In the current study, the theory, challenged technologists to strike a balance between what the peoples get and what they actually sought in the use of their products.

While citing Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch [19], Khodabandelou, Karimi, Iran, & Ahmad, [20]. argue that mainly, Uses and Gratifications theory suggests that users have numerous technological options to choose from and suggests that the reasons and motivations for selecting a specific technology depend on its ability to serve the purpose for which it was introduced. Similarly, McQuail [21] cited in Khodabandelou, *et al*[20], proposed the idea of "user taste" when they examined the selection of media. In the contest of user taste, this study is grounded on the need for the smart card technology to fulfill the need for free and fair election for which it was adopted. The use of the smart card technology is to produce a popular government voted in through popular mandate. What is the result of using the smart card

technology? Providing an answer to this question will show if the voters are satisfied with the use of the smart card reader in the 2019 general election or not. It is in the position of the last paragraph that this theory was considered appropriate for this study.

### **Technological Acceptance Theory**

The theory supports this research at the acceptance level of the smart card technology as a means of curbing election crisis in Nigeria. The theory which originated from the fields of information systems, according to Chen, Li and Li [22], is one of the most influential research theories in the studies of the determinants of information systems and information technology acceptance in predicting intentions to use and acceptance of information systems and technology by individuals. Using the Technological Acceptance theory, Davis tries to explain the reasons why society or individuals accept a particular technology. The theory according to Mohammed and Suleiman[23], explains acceptance from three distinct but related perspectives: namely (a) perceived ease of use; (b) perceived usefulness; and (c) attitude towards the technology. Advancing on the above perspectives, Chuttur [24] affirmed that “the attitude of a user towards a system is the major determinant deciding whether the user will actually accept or reject the system. Here lies the basic objective of this study which is to ascertain the voters’ perception of the use of smart technology in conducting election in Nigeria from the 2019 general elections.

In another development, it will be pertinent to acknowledge the fact that the attitude of the user is prone to being influenced by two other beliefs. These beliefs according to Ha, Yoon, and Choi [25]; López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, & Bouwman [26]; Bouwman, López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, Van Hattum [27], are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The import of this postulation to our current study is that the acceptance of the smart card reader in the field of election conduct is dependent on the individual beliefs of the voters whose perception of usefulness of the technology and their perceived ease of use will either encourage accepting or rejecting the technology

Moreover, several research works done in the area of ICTs [28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35] all have used the Technological Acceptance theory to predict the user’s intention towards acceptance and adoption of mobile and internet enabled gadgets using the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

However, further researches in the area also have solicited for addition of other constructs that can help add more facts for better understanding the prediction of acceptance of new technology among the individuals. Drawing from the positions of Nysveen, Pedersen and Thorbjornsen, [36]; Kulviwat, Bruner, Kumar, Nasco, and Clark [37]; Stern, Royne, Sttaford, and Bienstock [38], these predictive variables are: subjective norms, social influence, perceived enjoyment, and critical Mass. In its unique nature, this study is more related to the variables of perceived enjoyment of the smart card technology and critical voters who are exposed to its use and functions during the election. This study was basically on the perceived ability of the gadget to satisfy the desired purpose for its adoption in the election. Here lays the main argument sustaining the study. If from the look of what had happened in the 2019 general elections in the country that the voters did not get the gratifications sought in the use of smart card technology in voter verification and authentication, it will not be adopted for the same purpose in the next election. The reason for this is that there is no perceived usefulness of the smart card technology in the election as expected. This theory was considered very apt for the study in respect to its ability to draw attention to the perceived ease of usefulness of the smart card technology in the conduct of elections in the country.

### **Smart card technology: A Review of Opportunities and challenges in Nigeria elections**

The interest in adopting the smart card technology in elections in Nigeria is to escape previous challenges encountered by the electoral umpire in conducting and presenting election results. The use of smart card technology in election management has witnessed an upsurge in Nigeria since 2011. This was following increased reliance on new technology for improving the credibility of the electoral process by Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) [39]. The adoption of smart card technology in the electoral process was based on the trust bestowed on it among the electoral umpire that it can enhance the integrity of electoral outcomes and as well make the public to accept the results as credible. The basic issue in this study is ‘*trust*’. It is trust that gave the electoral umpire the belief that smart card can help in curbing the issues that have led to the previous electoral crisis in the country usually encouraged by disagreement among parties on the outcome of elections. Truly, if the communicated experience that led to the adoption of the technology is feasible, the required effect would be achieved.

Unfortunately, the device is confronted by certain challenges that were observed to have marred its success in achieving its aims [39]. Among the challenges that were encountered in the use of the device are poor network coverage, technical know-how, failures of the device to capture and authenticate fingers prints and cards. Majority of the devices break down during operations in the fields. All these challenges culminate in disenfranchisement in many cases and sudden return to the use of manual accreditation of voters which encourage manipulation of election results by the political party with the strongest muscle in a given area. Another basic challenge facing the use of the smart card

technology is inappropriate and selective implementation [39]. It is not uncommon to have a situation where there is none card reader use, yet elections were accepted to have been conducted in that area while there is strict order for the use of smart card reader in all other areas. This is the bases of the Atiku presidential election petition.

### **Smart Card Technology: A Descriptive Overview**

The smart card is an electrical device designed to capture voters' biometric details as registered during voters' card registration. The device which has a finger print capturing scan and network that reads both finger impression of voters and the voters' card for the sake of authentication and verification reveals the faces and polling stations of various voters in an election [40]. The device has the ability to receive, count and transmit data electronically collated from the polling station to INEC server from where the data can be retrieved at the end of the poll [41,42]. The essence of this device is to ensure that the number of voters accredited as verified and authenticated will correspond to the final output at the end of the election. It means that no political party will have the power to inflate the figures of the electoral outcome. It also means that even when such manipulations are made at the polling station, the smart card reader will expose such manipulations and render the result useless in the election [43]. Drawing from the outcome of the post-election reactions among Nigerians and candidates in the election, it is imperative to understand that the smart card reader was not well utilized by the handlers who were meant to use it in getting it right.

It could be acknowledged that the smart card reader recorded some achievements and as encountered some challenges in its use in the 2019 election. On the achievement, the smart card technology was seen to have reduced the rate of impersonation but did not completely eradicate it entirely. It gave the people the impression that the election will be free and fair and therefore attracted the people to coming out on time to vote.

In another development, the smart card reader could not read all the cards and verify many candidates thereby returning the system to manual accreditation. It was also found that power supply is a challenge as well as technical know-how and inability of the smart card reader to access

### **Election Years in Nigeria from 1999: A Critical Overview**

The return to civil rule in Nigeria on 29 May 1999 is a product of two futile attempts by Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. The process for conducting the 1999 General Elections and the overall outcome were more acceptable and relatively less outrageous than the successive elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011, 2015 and 2019. Although there were isolated sharp practices and irregularities as reported by Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI) and the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM)[44], the Alliance for Democracy and the All-Peoples Party candidates could not mobilize substantial evidence to reverse the trend.

In all standard and ramifications, the 2003 General Elections were remarkably different from the 1999. The elections were replete with irregularities and violence, unlawful replacement and imposition of candidates. The nature of the election made it the worse rated political transition by both domestic and international election observers in their various reports where it was admitted in clear terms that there were massive electoral malpractices during the elections. In line with the reports of the international and domestic observers, the presidential candidate of the All-Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), in the election General Muhammadu Buhari, described the elections as the most fraudulent Nigeria had had since independence and at the same time called for its cancellation and the constitution of interim government to take over from 29 May 2003 [45].

Other electoral misconducts perpetrated by INEC and its unscrupulous officials include unlawful possession of ballot papers and boxes, unlawful possession of authorized and un-authorized voters' cards, stuffing of ballot boxes, forgery of results, mutilations and falsification of result sheets, tampering with ballot boxes, collusion with party agents to share unused ballot papers for fat financial rewards and inconsistent application of INEC's procedures across the country [46]. This shows a drastic decline in the quality of Nigerian electoral processes which is a threat to democratic consolidation. Today, the impact of the 2003 general election is still being felt in the democratic mission of the federation owing to the split in the governorship elections of some of Anambra, Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa, Osun, Ekiti and Kogi states.

The 2007 General Elections was the third in the series marking Nigeria's democratization since 1999. The irregularities recorded in the 2003 general elections opened the people's eye to monitor the 2007 elections very carefully. However, judging by the overall quality and outcomes of the elections, the expectations of many Nigerians and international partners were violated. The elections were marred by massive irregularities as reported by different accredited election observers like the TMG, NDI, IRI and EU-EOM [44] whose reports revealed that the election is a broad day rape to democracy. In this regard, the election generated higher number of petitions at different levels.

According to Aiyede [47] cited in Omotola [4] from the conduct of the elections alone, 1,250 election petitions arose. A breakdown of the petitions revealed that a total of 8 petitions were against the presidential election, 105 against the gubernatorial, 150 for senate, the 331 for House of Representatives, and 656 for the State Houses of Assembly. With a few exceptions, especially the gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun States, most of these cases were decided in the final appellate court. For example, the two leading opposition candidates in the presidential election (Atiku of AC and Buhari of CPC) pursued their cases to the Supreme Court where the case was decided in favor of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) not on the bases of the law but on the bases of national interest as even Yar'Adua admitted that the elections were marred by strong irregularities.

However, results were annulled in several states and at different levels, including the gubernatorial elections in Adamawa, Edo, Ekiti, Kebbi, Kogi, Ondo and Sokoto States. In most of these cases, a rerun was conducted, which the PDP won, except Edo and Ondo States where declaratory judgments were given, leading to the restoration of the electoral victory of the Action Congress and Labour Party in the respective states.

The 2007 General Elections experience strengthened civil activism and calls from different groups for electoral reform in which the government were pressurized to grant some limited concessions. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Pro-Democracy forces and opposition political parties fought relentlessly for a comprehensive reform of the electoral system. Some of the groups such as the Electoral Reform Network; the Centre for Democracy and Development and other credible election advocacy groups submitted memoranda to the Mohammed Uwais led Electoral Reform Committee and followed them up in the National Assembly [4]. The outcome of these pressures from the groups was the substitution of the much controversial and discredited Maurice Iwu for Professor Attahiru. Moreover, this electoral reform by Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration contributed to the 2011 level of acceptance of the 2011 General Elections which were relatively considered credible, free and fair among Nigerians and the international communities [48,49,50,51,52]

The success recorded by the 2011 election was due to the INEC's consciousness drawn from the flaws of the 2003 and 2007 general elections. To handle the challenges of the previous years, preparation for the elections began as far back as August 2009 with a strategic retreat by INEC in Abuja. The change of Iwu with Jega went a long way in securing public trust in the ability of the electoral umpire to be fair. With Jega at the helm of affair, the Commission also improved the conduct of the elections, creating a new voters' register, improving transparency in reporting results, and publicly pledging to hold accountable those who broke the rules [53]. The result was the possible conduct of the Elections in most areas of the country in a smooth and peaceful atmosphere, with fewer reported incidents of violence or blatant police abuses than recorded in previous years. The outcome of the presidential election also led to the eruption of post-election violence with the attendant destruction of valuable lives and property in states like Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, among others.

Corroborating the above, the National Democratic Institute [54] holds that "the violence caused over 800 deaths and substantial destruction of property". It is pertinent to note that the outbreak of violence was not only as a result of poor handling of the elections by INEC as observed in some areas though very minimal, but also a practical expression of frustration and disappointment, as well as a demonstration of the "do or die" attitude of the political elite to electoral contests in Nigeria by those who believed that it is either them or no Nigeria.

The few observed lapses in the 2011 elections were seen by INEC as a challenge that must be confronted in the next election. Thus, Independent National Electoral Commission admitted to embark on "a painstaking approach to the 2015 General Elections drawing from its belief that though the 2011 election was accepted as credible as and qualitatively better than the previous elections, it was by no means perfect". This makes the electoral body to admit to conduct a better one in 2015 by investigating how the SCR technology improved the credibility Elections in Nigeria.

Drawing from the level of conduct of the 2015 elections, Nigerians were very optimistic that the 2019 election will be more transparent and credible than the 2015. Unfortunately, their expectations were violated by the outcome of the election based on the manner and nature in which it was conducted by the Prof Mahmud led INEC and the Nigerian security intelligent network who in one way or the order allowed the election to be marred by irregularities of different caliber at all levels. Among the most disturbing observations made in the election is the subsequent denial of the existence of server by INEC. This server was recorded to be successful in the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria [41]. Among the four functions of the smart card reader is to receive information from the field and transmit same to the INEC central server from where the umpire will retrieve them and verify through the data if there were alterations in the electronic copy against the hard copies returned after the election.

## **Empirical Review**

Danida [55] this study centered on the use of ICT to foster transparency, accountability and credibility in governance. The objectives of the study are to examine the strategic opportunities for using ICT in promoting governance and democratization in modern societies for enhanced economic and social development of the people and reduction of unemployment. The focus of this study is on the use of mobile phones for SMS, social media and voice calls and how such uses can foster transparency and accountability in governance. The study adopted a narrative approach in order to highlight the practical opportunities and limitations of the use of mobile phones and other ICTs to support governance. To achieve the desired objective as stated, the study recommended that Kenya should engage on several scaling up initiatives to cover accountability and transparency. Unlike in the current study where the researchers are looking at the smart card technology in the conduct of the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections as a means of sustaining the Nigerian democracy by encouraging majority rule and transparency in the electoral process.

Odeyemi and Mosunmola [56] conducted an empirically appraisal of the use of ICTs platforms by the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, the media and accredited election observers as major stakeholders in the 2015 general electoral process. The study examined and compared the utility of the ICTs platforms, especially the social media and web pages, as used by these stakeholders in carrying out their duties, and the impact of such platforms on performance, credibility and the overall conduct of the elections. The study concluded that the use of ICTs in the 2015 general elections encouraged credibility and transparency in the election which impacted on the general acceptance of the results of the elections. The researchers recommended that appropriate utilization of ICTs should be advocated in Nigeria in future elections while INEC and Nigerians should be guided not to miss the track. This study is related to the current one because they both look at ICT but the current study differs in the sense that it questions the citizens' assessment of the use of the smart card technology rather the use by stakeholders.

Relying on the views that several leaders that emerged and controlled many governments have suffered from some undeserved ugly electoral trends owing to flawed elections that were unable to meet international best practices, Sakariyau, Mohd and Ummu [57] blamed the failures of leadership that is rampant in Nigeria to the failure of INEC to conduct free and credible elections. According to the authors, the means and manners in which INEC conduct elections has made it easier for the political elites to impose candidates against the people will leading to political cynicism in the country. The paper concluded that these manners of electoral conduct question and challenge the legitimacy of the government and remains a threat to Nigeria's democracy. The authors recommended stakeholders' cooperation towards ensuring credible and transparent elections so as to enhance political leadership that enjoys popularity within and outside the country, if peoples' commitment and supports for government will be ensured.

In another development, Babayo, Mohammed, Mohammed and Bakri [58] investigated how corruption influenced the process and outcome of the 2015 General Election using the qualitative case study method of data collection and analysis where some agencies and stakeholders (INEC, EFCC, politicians, party stakeholders, academicians and members of the general public) related to the area of study were studied using interview and FGD. The researchers found that the entire process of 2015 General Elections was affected by corruption and corrupt practices in terms of using public treasury for campaign activities by politicians from the two major parties; APC and PDP in their campaign and other electoral activities including vote buying and bribing of INEC officials. It was recommended that; INEC should be allowed a free hand in running the elections and the EFCC should be involved in screening contestants for political office with violators of electoral laws permanently banned from active politics in Nigeria. This study targeted corruption while the current one targeted ICT use and the citizens' level of satisfaction paying special attention to the motive for the adoption of the smart card technology.

In another study, Ayeni and Esan [59] examined how the sophisticated technologies applied by INEC at different points in the country's elections helped in achieving the required international standard that the body wants to maintain. The study lasted from 1999 to 2017 covering several elections that were conducted in different states of the federation. The study concluded that the incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria electoral process has reduced excessive electoral fraud to the barest minimum and foster credible election while the development of e-collation support platform has drastically reduced incidence of result manipulation at collation centers. However, this study considers all the technologies that have applied by INEC including the Electronic Voters Register (EVR), Automatic Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) and Smart Card Reader (SCR). This study differs from the current study which is limited on the smart card technology alone.

Tenove, Buffie, McKay and Moscrop [60] addressed key questions on the use of digital communication technologies (DCTs) to interfere in democratic elections by foreign actors. The researchers applied the schema of a cyber-security "threat model" as a means of investigating the things in a system that is most valued and needs to be secured, the actions adversaries could take to harm a system, the potential adversaries that can do the harm and their capacities and intentions. The study further considers the system's key vulnerabilities and what will be the most effective counter-measures to address these threats. They draw from existing research to engage these objectives and found that foreign actors can

jeopardize the success of electoral process through different means including mass misinformation, propaganda and hack attacks where private and secret information are tempered with by foreign actors. It is pertinent to state that this study differs from the current one in the sense that the as this current study is interested in how the citizens see the application of ICT in conducting election, the previous one is concerned with the manipulations of the system by foreign actors.

Nwangwu, Onah and Out [8] investigated the role of the card reader in improving the credibility of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria using a qualitative research method while relying on the cybernetics model of communications theory. The study found that the novel technology has rekindled the confidence of most Nigerian voters and international partners and recommended that e-voting should be adopted as a tool for curbing electoral fraud in the country.

## METHOD OF STUDY

This study adopted the survey and Focus group discussion methods in investigating whether the smart card reader actually stopped the voters from multiple voting and make them see the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections as credible. The population of this study is all voters in Dunukofia and Ayamelum local government area of Anambra state which forms the universe of the study. Ayamelum local government has a total of 60,034 voters out of which only 23,837 representing (39.7%) of the entire registered voters while Dunukofia has 63,861 out of which only 18,632 (29.1%) participated in the election. In all, a total of 123871 formed the population for the study according to INEC data, 2019 on the voters' participation as obtained from the results. From this population, a sample of 400 respondents were selected using the Rakesh [1] formula for estimating sample whereas the participants were selected using purposive sampling technique to ensure that only the voters from the two local governments who participated in the elections were covered in the study. Moreover, 39 participants were selected for these 400 respondents for the FGD. These 39 participants were further divided into three groups of 13 discussants each. The criteria for their selection were based on their level of political consciousness in their respective local governments. The study used researchers designed questionnaire and interview guide which were tested using the test-retest method for its reliability and validity test.

## Data Presentations

The researcher in this study distributed a total of 361 copies of the research questionnaire to the respondents selected for this study. At the time of returning the questionnaire, 16 copies were not recovered leaving the researcher with 345 copies controlling 95.5 percent of the total participants sampled for the survey aspect of the study. This means that the analysis hereunder was based on these 345 respondents whose questionnaire was returned and found valid for the study.

**Table 1** Does the use of smart card reader stopped the electorate from multiple voting during the election?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	0	0
No	267	77.3
Can't say	78	22.6
Total	345	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Table 3 above demonstrated that no respondent admitted that the smart card reader use in the election was able to stop multiple voting from taking place in the field. With the high number of respondents admitting that the smart card reader did not stop the electorate from multiple voting during the election, the application of the device in the system becomes questionable since it has failed to even stop multiple voting. This means that the introduction of the smart card technology has no positive impact but an ordinary formality by the electoral umpire to deceive the gullible public.

**Table 2:** Does the use of the smart card reader makes the respondents accept election results as credible?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	92	26.6
No	210	60.8
Can't say	43	12.4
Total	345	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Looking at the information from the table above, the smart card reader did not make the respondents accept election results as credible. Of all the 345 respondents, only 92 said they believe the election results because of the use of the smart card reader in the system. This is far less than the 210 others who vehemently said that the use of the smart card technology did not move them into believing that the election is free and fair.



**Table 3:** Respondents' attitude to the introduction/use of smart card reader technology?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Indifference on its capability of curbing election rigging	104	30.1
Optimistic that it is a solution that needs improvement	73	21.1
Pessimistic that the technology has failed completely	168	48.6
Total	345	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Table one demonstrated that the respondents are more pessimistic on the ability of the smart card reader to provide Nigeria with the required solution that can set their electoral process free from frauds. From among the 345 respondents, only 73 respondents accounting for 21.1 percent were optimistic in the strength of the technology to provide succor to the long-lasting problem of electoral irregularities which have marred the Nigerian electoral system since 1999. The implication of this is that the respondents have negative attitude towards the use of the smart card technology.

**Table 4:** What is the respondents' perception of the smart card reader technology

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Is a failed corrective attempt	97	28.1
It needs improvement	84	24.3
The technology has reduced rigging	51	14.7
It cannot handle electoral fraud	113	32.7
Total	345	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

The table above revealed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents have negative perception of the use of the smart card reader technology for election in the country with very few admitting that the technology needs improvement to serve the purpose it was meant for. The implication of this data is that the people have no confidence in the smart card reader that was employed to curb the rate of electoral malpractices in the country. Generally, the smart card reader has negative perception among the respondents.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Drawing from the empirical data presented in the frequency tables and percentages, the field data were discussed one after another to provide link with previous studies and theoretical frameworks used in the study.

On the first research question investigating if the smart card reader stopped the electorate from multiple voting, data from table one revealed that people voted more than once in different polling units. The focus group discussion also revealed that the voters were able to vote more than once at the same polling stations at will. According to one of the discussants from group 3 held at Omor Junction, *'The smart card readers were actually used but were unable to stop us. We beat the Corp members and present other voters' card to vote once we are paid'* to another discussant from group 1 held at Ukpo event center, *'we mobilize some guys to be distracting the Corp members as we use our Inc to mark our nails and proceed to the APOs who issue voters card o us to votes. In majority of our polling stations, there are over voting and none correspondent of data from the card reader and the obtained result after voting'.*

By this development, it is clear that the smart card reader has failed Nigerians since it could not identify and reject an electorate who had voted before. This is a possible reason that the citizens could not have trust in its use and INEC as a body. This finding agrees with the previous one by Nwangwu, Onah and Out, [8] who found that the move to secure the Nigerian electoral system to be fair has not been successful in terms of reducing the incidence of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching/stuffing, multiple voting, falsification of results and other associated electoral irregularities. In this regard, the study disagrees vehemently with the findings of

Considering the second research question which investigated whether the adoption of the smart card reader encouraged acceptance of the election results as credible among the respondents, field data as recorded in table 2 demonstrated that the smart card reader use could not make the people accept the election to be credible due to visible irregularities committed even with the presence of the smart card reader.

The reports from the FGD as documented from the discussion show that the discussants did not accept the election results as credible. According to a female discussant from group one held in Ukpo events center, *'we are aware from the onset that the election has had problem. It won't reflect the massive wishes because of perceived desperateness of some politicians'* while reacting to the discourse, another participant from group 2 held at Ukwulu said *'nobody is in the dark about the failure of the smart card technology. Based on what we saw in the field, the smart card reader cannot make anyone think that the election is well conducted. I did not vote twice but at the end of the elections, we have different*

*number of votes for different positions showing that there were discrepancies from the normal things as expected'. To another discussant from group 3 held in Omor, 'we do not use the smart card reader at all. They came with it and we gathered but many dismissed once they said they cannot start voting because their machines are not responding to instructions' the import of this finding is that the result from the FGD corroborated the one from the survey study.*

This is a pointer to the fact that the smart card technology did not save the image as required of it before the citizens of the country. Acceptance or rejection of any technological use among the citizens according to the proponents of the technological acceptance theory is controlled by their beliefs. These beliefs according to Ha, Yoon, and Choi [25]; López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, & Bouwman [26]; Bouwman, López-Nicolás, Molina-Castillo, Van Hattum [27], are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Based on the citizens' perceived usefulness of the smart card technology, it cannot make them see the electoral result as credible because of observed faults that the technology could not handle. This finding disagrees with Odeyemi and Mosunmola [56] who found that the use of the smart card reader encouraged public acceptance of the 2015 election results as credible.

On the third research question which was designed to ascertain the respondents' attitude towards the use of the smart card technology, the researcher found that the respondents were more pessimistic than optimistic in the application of the smart card reader in the electoral process. This same finding was also reflected in the FGD given the level of disappointment expressed on the adoption of the smart technology by INEC. From the majority of the opinions as documented, the discussants are forced to cast off their trust for the technology after what they see on resumption of the election. This accounts for the sudden dismissal of voters who have already reported at the polling units.

This is a glaring signal of loss of confidence in the technology which was applied to save a situation reportedly seen as very damaging to the image of the electoral umpire and the nation at large. This finding corroborated the ideas of the proponents of the technological acceptance theory which was based on the attitude of the people towards the imported technology that was introduced to manipulate that hard task for man. Chuttur [24] affirmed that "the attitude of a user towards a system is the major determinant to whether the user will actually accept or reject the system. Drawing from the recorded data in table one, smart card reader falls within the respondents' latitude of rejection.

Finally, the last research question revealed that the respondents have negative perception of the smart card technology in Nigerian electoral system. This response was a significant reflection of the previous vies of the smart card held among the respondents. From the data collected for the study, only 84 respondents accepted that an improvement on the technology can meet the required standard with 51 accepting that the technology reduced rigging in the just concluded election in Nigeria. Every other one has negative perception with 113 respondents saying that the smart card reader cannot handle electoral fraud in Nigeria while 97 others see it as a failed curative measure that cannot provide the expected results (see table 4 for more).

During the FGD, the researchers found that these views expressed above were reiterated by the discussants who in their different opinions stated different degree of perception of the technology. Among the most troublesome response from the discussion was a question from an average aged male discussant from Ukwulu who asked violently, '*how do you want or expect us to perceive your failed technology? You people think we don't know what you are doing? We know but just watch because we are incapacitated*' The above finding corroborates the revelation made by Election Monitor [9] that the smart card reader malfunctions in some places and creates an enabling environment for multiple voting which ends up given chance for over-voting. Unfortunately, the problems found to have been the basic issues with the smart card reader in 2015 were not addressed by INEC before using it again for the 2019 elections. There are places where the smart card reader failed completely and others where massive rejection of voters' card and finger print verifications were rampant especially among the elderly [54]. All these and many other factors contributed to the perception as reflected above.

## **Summary**

This study examined the citizens' perception of the smart card reader use by the INEC in the 2019 election. The study used the survey research method to examine electorate from two local government areas in Anambra state. Being a study on the use of ICT in the Nigerian electoral system, the study adopted the technological acceptance theory as the theoretical framework. The essence of the study is to examine if the smart card reader was able to meet the required purpose for its use through the views of the electorate who participated in the election who watched how the technology worked during the election. The study investigated the use of the smart card reader while paying attention to the previous elections from where it was found that the earlier observed faults of the technology were not handled by the INEC before its application in the 2019 election, a situation which makes the technology to lose the people's trust in its ability to serve the purpose for which it was adopted. The study further looked at the electorate's perception of the smart card reader technology paying attention to what it was designed to do in the election.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing from the data from the field it was concluded that the smart card reader did not meet the people's expectation in making the election unique and credible hence, attracted a negative perception from the people who were studied in the research. In another development, the smart reader was not able to stop electorate from multiple voting as many of them beat the smart card reader to vote again and again in order to be paid by the politicians. Generally, the smart card reader was found to be a perfect failure as all the respondents have no trust in its ability of making the election credible not even in the four years going by what they see in the last election.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings and conclusions made in the study, the researcher recommended that:

1. The smart card technology must be carefully improved upon if it is going to be used for future elections in the country.
2. INEC should affect the corrections of the errors observed to have marred the use of the smart card technology in conducting elections in the country.
3. Each political party should device a means of monitoring their votes and the electoral processes in future election to avoid the story of being rigged out of the system.
4. Federal government should attempt to allow free and fair elections to hold in the country for accountability and democracy to be protected.

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