INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: A CONTEMPORARY TOOL TO COMBAT ELECTORAL FRAUD IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The electoral process begins with an effective voters’ registration exercise which is one of the most complex and often contested part of the entire electoral process. In a country like Nigeria where there is no trustworthy population census and no reliable means of identification, the exercise becomes more complicated and lays the foundation for electoral fraud. This paper argues that information technology can serve as a good instrument for the management of the electoral process in a way that can curb malpractice. It observes that the drive towards technology has been facilitated by its largely apolitical nature and the general perception of its efficacy by electoral stakeholders. The paper adopts a qualitative research method with reliance on secondary sources of data and the cybernetics model of communications theory as a framework of analysis. It recommends the encouragement of scientific research for technological innovations, investment in technology, less reliance on foreign technology by Nigeria and concludes that the implementation of these recommendations will aid Nigeria in the conduct of free, fair and reliable elections.

Key Words: Information Technology, Electoral Fraud, Instrument, Combat, Nigeria

Introduction
The democratization of politics in most post-colonial and transitional democracies like Nigeria has not been successful in terms of reducing the incidence of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching and stuffing, vote buying, multiple voting, underage voting, falsification of results and other associated electoral malfeasances. The historical trajectory of elections in Nigeria is, therefore, inseparable from monumental and barefaced electoral manipulations. In addition to the role of civil society organizations and other principal stakeholders on election, the introduction of biometric smart card reader, an anti-rigging technological device for the authentication of voters’ cards seems to have made most of these electoral ills largely unfashionable (Nwangwu, 2015).

Free, fair and credible elections are central to electoral democracy and provide vital means of empowering citizens to hold their leaders accountable. In a multi-party democracy, it behoves both the elected and appointed government officials at all levels of the political system to render periodic account of their stewardship to the populace. However, accountability of public officials in Nigeria has been undermined by the fact that elections in the country are perennially fraught with irregularities. The democratization of politics has been unsuccessful in arresting electoral frauds perpetrated by different political parties and megalomaniac politicians. It has also been unable to address the administrative misconduct of officials of Nigeria’s Election Management Body (EMB) the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The collapse of the First and Second Republics, and also the abortion of the Third Republic through the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election are clear indicators of the failure of previous attempts to democratize elections in Nigeria (Nwangwu, 2015).
Elections are important elements of modern representative government. They typify the democratic process; hence, the abolition of elections is often interpreted as the abolition of democracy. According to Nnoli (2003, p.220), “elections are so clearly tied to the growth and development of representative democratic government that they are now generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of such government”. They are meaningfully democratic if they are free, fair, participatory, credible, competitive and legitimate.

However, since the return to civil rule in 1999, elections had been characterized by ineffective administration at all stages and levels (before, during and after), resulting in discredited outcomes. This was due in large to the weak institutionalization of the primary agencies of electoral administration, particularly INEC and Nigerian political parties. INEC is deficient of institutional, administrative and financial autonomy with attendant lack of professionalism and recurrent political interference. In addition, the desperation of many Nigerian politicians to win at all cost has compromised election administration in the country. The procedures for organizing and counting the votes are generally not transparent. In fact, the only election with some semblance of fairness and credibility remains the 2015 general elections due in part to the introduction of some biometric technology into the process.

The prevalence of electoral irregularities in many transitional democracies, especially in Africa, has accentuated the clamour for and use of voting technologies for uncovering and reducing election frauds. According to Golden, Kramon & Ofosu (2014, p.1), “these technological solutions, such as electronic voting machines, polling station webcams and biometric identification equipment, offer the promise of rapid, accurate, and ostensibly tamper-proof innovations that are expected to reduce fraud in the processes of registration, voting or vote count aggregation”. Biometric identification machines authenticate the identity of voters using biometric markers, such as fingerprints, that are almost impossible to counterfeit. The technologies are particularly useful in settings where governments have not previously established reliable or complete paper-based identification systems for their populations (Gelb & Decker, 2012).

These African fledgling democracies have persistent difficulties in registering their electors and establishing their identity. Following polemics about the quality of existing voter rolls, some of these countries have recently introduced reforms to their voter registration systems, such as the adoption of voter identities and of biometric technology. Gelb & Clark (2013) aver that biometric identification systems are already in widespread use for voter registration and as of early 2013, 34 of the world’s low and middle income countries had adopted biometric technology as part of their voter identification system. For instance, different kinds of biometric infrastructure have been used in some African States like Ghana, Mali, Kenya, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal and Mauritania, with varying degrees of success, to improve transparency in recent elections (Nwangwu, 2015).

One of the real issues about the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria was the use of innovative anti-rigging biometric devices. The administration of the elections witnessed the use of Smart Card Reader (SCR) for the authentication of biometric Permanent Voters” Cards (PVCs) and the accreditation of voters. The introduction of these devices was necessitated by the fact that reliable voter register and identification mechanism are some of the preconditions for free, fair and credible elections. However, the legality of the device was questioned. Although Section 52 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) prescribes electronic voting (e-voting), the SCR is a form of identification, not a means of casting a ballot. The use of the SCR in some quarters experienced glitches in its functionality, thereby leading to manual accreditation of some voters. This attracted negative reactions which consequently fuelled the erroneous conclusion that the Nigerian electoral system is not ripe for the application of such technology. However, it emboldened many disenchanted voters to exercise their franchise because of the assurance and confidence that the new system brought.

As a matter of fact, Nigeria Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was more technology compliant in 2015 than they were in the past elections. They actively utilized technology to conduct successful elections and fostered citizen participation, through social media engagement while the increased penetration of social media and technology use created an opportunity for the electoral body to mobilize and engage with citizens. INEC also developed with regards to the registration of voters, a system where people can access database on its website and confirm their registration status. INEC equally improved on the quality of trainings for their officers to ensure some of the mistakes that were made in 2011 elections, which resulted in mass loss of data, were not repeated.

However, despite these accolades for the innovative use of technology and its role in ensuring a successful 2015 election, the process was not without some challenges. The website of the INEC was hacked by unknown individuals during the presidential elections. In addition, some voters expressed their frustration during accreditation on Election Day due to failure of the Smart Card Readers (SCRs). Some attributed the
failure to the incompetency of some of the INEC officials. These strides recorded by INEC during the 2015
general elections and even the challenges gingers this study and energizes us to examine the use of
information technology as a veritable tool for the conduct of a free and fair elections in Nigeria. In doing
this, we attempt to answer the following basic questions: To what extent can information technology assist
in curbing electoral fraud in Nigeria? Can electronic voting aid the delivery of free, fair and credible polls?
What are the likely challenges faced by the electoral umpire in the country at the use of technology in
elections? These questions and more is what this paper attempts to address. We therefore begin with an
examination of the cybernetics model of communication theory, an overview of electoral fraud in Nigeria
since the return to democratic rule in 1999, a discourse on the efficacy of information technology in curbing
electoral fraud in the country as well as the likely challenges of the use of technology in elections before
drawing appropriate conclusions.

Statement of the Problem
The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is a nonpartisan Nigerian government agency
charged with the conduct and supervision of elections. In the late 1990s, the agency began modernizing its
information technology infrastructure by migrating from an outdated legacy voting system heavily
dependent on inaccurate paper records and polling cards to the newer Electronic Voting System (EVS). At
the heart of EVS is the Electronic Voter Register (EVR), which, by capturing the names of all eligible voters,
eliminates duplication and thereby minimizes discrepancies in the electoral process. As such, EVR is viewed
as a means of ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria. However, contrary to the expectations that the use
of electronic system including the card reader will guarantee free, fair and credible elections in the country
the reverse has always been the case as there exists records of diverse forms of malpractices at the end of
every elections in Nigeria. It is this problem of electoral fraud that this paper attempts to address by
advocating for a fully electronic process in the country’s electoral system from the voters’ registration to the
election proper.

Cybernetics Model of Communications Theory
The communications theory was developed through the pioneering research efforts of Louis
Couffignal, John von Neumann, Norbert Wiener, McCulloch, W. Ross Ashby, Alan Turing, W. Grey Walter
and Karl W. Deutsch. In the field of computer technology, cybernetics has become a conceptual relic of
communications theory. The significance of Deutsch’s Nerves of Government: Models of Political
Communication and Control lies in that it is the first attempt to formulate a fully developed theory of politics
based on a communications model. He particularly introduced the techniques of cybernetics to the sphere of
political analysis. However, it was Wiener’s work: Cybernetics that gave the cybernetics model its analytic
impetus. Wiener (1948, p.62) further popularized the social implications of the model, drawing analogies
between automatic systems and human institutions in his work, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society.

Cybernetics is a transdisciplinary approach for exploring regulatory systems, their structures,
constraints, and possibilities. Norbert Wiener (1948, p. 34) defined cybernetics as “the scientific study of
control and communication in the animal and the machine”. In the 21st century, the term is often used in a
rather loose way to imply “control of any system using technology.” In other words, it is the scientific study
of how humans, animals and machines control and communicate with each other.

Cybernetics is applicable when a system being analyzed incorporates a closed signaling loop,
originally referred to as a “circular causal” relationship, that is, where action by the system generates some
change in its environment and that change is reflected in the system in some manner (feedback) that triggers
a system change. Cybernetics is relevant to, for example, mechanical, physical, biological, cognitive, and
social systems. The essential goal of the broad field of cybernetics is to understand and define the functions
and processes of systems that have goals and that participate in circular, causal chains that move from action
to sensing to comparison with desired goal, and again to action. Its focus is how anything (digital, mechanical
or biological) processes information, reacts to information, and changes or can be changed to better
accomplish the first two tasks (Kelly, 1994). Cybernetics includes the study of feedback, black boxes and
derived concepts such as communication and control in living organisms, machines and organizations
including self-organization. The word cybernetics was first used in the context of "the study of self-
governance" by Plato in The Alcibiades to signify the governance of people (Barnabas, 1977). The word ‘cybernétique’ was also used in 1834 by the physicist André-Marie Ampère (1775–1836) to denote the
sciences of government in his classification system of human knowledge.
In political science, Project Cybersyn attempted to introduce a cybernetically controlled economy during the early 1970s. In the 1980s, unlike its predecessor, the new cybernetics concerns itself with the interaction of autonomous political actors and subgroups, and the practical and reflexive consciousness of the subjects who produce and reproduce the structure of a political community. A dominant consideration is that of excursiveness, or self-reference of political action both with regards to the expression of political consciousness and with the ways in which systems build upon themselves (Harries-Jones, 1988). One characteristic of the emerging new cybernetics considered in that time by Felix Geyer and Hans van der Zouwen, according to Bailey (1994, p.163), was “that it views information as constructed and reconstructed by an individual interacting with the environment. In the sciences, cybernetics is the branch of science concerned with the study of systems of any nature which are capable of receiving, storing and processing information so as to use it for control.

For Gauba (2003, p.98), “cybernetics is the study of the operation of control and communication systems; it deals both with biological systems and man-made machinery”. Similarly, “the term cybernetics covers not only the versions of information theory but the theory of games, self-controlling machines, computers and the physiology of the nervous system” (Varma, 1975). The model is based on a multidisciplinary approach which arose as an offshoot of the Eastonian systems analysis and seeks to explain how actions within a given system generate some changes in its environment. Thus, “the system codes incoming information, recognizes patterns, stores the patterns in its memory unit, learns from its experience, recalls information on command, recombines information in new patterns, and applies stored information to problem-solving and decision-making” (Winner, 1969).

The growing complexity of the world has made the use of ICT for administrative purposes a desideratum. Accordingly, Winner (1969, p.3) argues that “in a world which has become increasingly complex and bureaucratized, “information” may well provide a form of theoretical shorthand useful for the understanding of how regimes operate and how they tend to break down”. The 21st century has been generally characterized as the “electric” or “jet” age in order to underscore the pervasiveness of computer technology in different spheres of human existence. Hence, the practice of politics has increasingly involved the use of electronic mass media, mobile telephony and high-speed digital computers.

As an activity in which men and machines participate hand-in-circuit, it is not surprising that the cybernetics model should become plausible as a basis for understanding electoral democracy. Men, machines, and political units all dispose of information from their environments in essentially the same manner. They act on certain varieties of messages and reject others. Progress has now been greatly accelerated by the use of digital computers as a new instrument for stating and testing theories. One of the earliest studies on voting decisions where the cybernetics model was applied is The American Voter where Angus Campbell led other researchers to give sophisticated accounts of how computer technology influences electoral processes (Nwangwu, 2015).

Thus, in whatever field cybernetics is adapted, the basic ingredient remains the use of information in achieving a pre-designed aim and objective and in this case, the desirability of achieving credible electoral democracy through the use of computer technology. In Nigeria, this came to clear manifestation when advances in information and communications technology (ICT), especially through various social media platforms, appreciably improved the transparency and credibility quotient of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. Through Face book, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger, YouTube, Skype, GSM, SMS, among others, many voters, especially the youths, were mobilized and sensitized on the need for registering, collecting their PVCs and actually voting for candidates of their choice. All these thrived through the power of information sharing, a development which makes the cybernetic model of communication quite apt for this study.

Electoral Fraud in Nigeria since 1999: An Overview

Perhaps, credit should be given to late Umar Musa Yar’Adua, Nigeria’s president who succeeded Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007 for openly acknowledging the bare faced truth that the elections that brought him to power was generally flawed. The late president on the basis of this, made a resolute commitment to improve the electoral process in the country, a promise which he could only partially fulfill by the time he joined he died in 2010. However, his death notwithstanding, Nigerians has come to applaud this open admission by a sitting president that the election that brought him to power was fraudulent. This scenario paints a vivid but gloomy picture of the electoral process and elections in Nigeria.

Prior to the return to civil rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, two futile attempts by Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha to transit to civil rule were recorded in quick succession. As a matter of fact, the twist and turns in the transition programme of General Babangida which eventually led to his “stepping
The 1999 elections threw up the bandwagon effect into the Nigerian political lexicon as that was used to describe the sweeping dominance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which swept majority of the seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives. However, if these elections were deemed credible, the same cannot be said of the subsequent ones in 2003, 2007 and 2011. As rightly observed by Nwangwu (2015, p.8), 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. Although there were isolated sharp practices and irregularities as reported by Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the Carter Centre, National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM), AD and APP candidates could not mobilize substantial evidence to reverse the trend.

Nonetheless, the situation during the 2003 General Elections conducted by the administration of President Obasanjo was markedly different. There were reported cases of ballot snatching and stuffing as well as other forms irregularities and violence that both local and international observers were unanimous in declaring the election as the most fraudulent in the annals of Nigeria. Equally recorded as cases of electoral misconducts perpetrated by INEC and its unscrupulous officials were unlawful possession of ballot papers and boxes, unlawful possession of authorized and unauthorized voters’ cards, stealing ballot box keys, forgery of results, 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 among others.

Legal opinions maintained that the outcome of the April/May 2003 elections conducted under the contentious Electoral Act 2002 should be annulled. This flows from the fact that the Act was found to be inconsistent with the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In the words of Nwabueze, “the April/May 2003 General Elections, being a proceeding or act founded on a law that is a nullity are themselves a complete nullity”. Thus, the tendency of the political leadership to flout and subvert the rule of law with impunity laid foundation for the flagrant irregularities and monumental fraud perpetrated during the elections (Okolie, 2005).

The elections were characterized by violence, intimidation and use of coercive apparatuses of the state to commit acts of rigging, suppression and disenfranchisement of eligible voters (Okolie, 2005). In fact, there was widespread resentment by both domestic and international observers that the entire exercise was
a sham. All the 28 opposition presidential candidates and their respective party chairmen addressed several press conferences rejecting the results of the elections. The presidential candidate of ANPP and current president of Nigeria, General Muhammadu Buhari described the elections as the most fraudulent Nigeria had had since independence and, therefore, called for their cancellation and the constitution of interim government to take over from May 29, 2003 (Odeh, 2003).

It is a statement of fact that the declining quality of elections in the country poses a serious threat to democratic sustainability and consolidation. The 2007 election being the third in the series since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999 offered an opportunity for change as the country transited from one civilian president to another for the first time in quick succession. However, this lofty development was marred by the porous outcome of the election which the person that emerged as president from that process acknowledged. The election was not only marred by massive irregularities but was adjudged the worst by both local and international accredited observers. In fact, the level of contestations by parties to the election also spoke volumes about the quality of its outcome as a total of 1,250 petitions were recorded from the 2007 elections.

According to Nwangwu (2015, p.10), the 1,250 election tribunal and court cases recorded were just the tip of the iceberg. This is so when elections are considered to be a combination of pre-election, election and post-election events. Thus, in an astonishing revelation, Lawal (2008, p.1) notes that “the 2007 elections recorded an alarming 6,180 cases throughout the electoral process”. This may be correct given the high level of impunity that characterized the political scene. The most relevant example relates to the manipulation of party primaries to pave the way for anointed candidates of the godfathers, especially within the ruling PDP. Also, as a proof of its weak institutionalization, INEC was unabashedly enmeshed in barefaced political partisanship. The Commission was severely distracted by its demeaning stance of serving as a tool in the hands of President Obasanjo to stop the presidential bid and candidature of the Vice-President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. However, INEC was stopped from disqualifying Atiku through the Justice Iorgyer Katsina-Alu led Supreme Court judgment of April 16, 2007 which ruled that the Commission has no powers to disqualify candidates already cleared by their political parties.

The irregularities recorded in the 2007 elections heightened the demand for electoral reforms by civil society organizations, pro-democracy groups and opposition political parties, a development which pressured the government into constituting the Mohammed Uwais led Electoral Reform Committee. These groups also submitted memoranda to the committee and made representations to the National Assembly on how best to reform the electoral process. It is also believed that the pressure from these groups led to the replacement of the disgraced and controversial Chairman of INEC, Maurice Iwu by Professor Attahiru Jega, a renowned political scientist, trade unionist and pro-democracy activist.

The part implementation of the report of the Electoral Reforms Committee by the Yar’Adua/ Jonathan administration laid the foundation for the 2011 general elections which recorded some level of credibility. It was adjudged by both domestic and international observers as being free and fair while others saw the outcome of the elections as a fulfillment of the promise made by President Yar’Adua on assumption of office to deliver a free, fair and credible election even though he died before the exercise. However, this did not happen without some challenges particularly on the side of the electoral umpire, INEC. One of these was the credibility gap, especially those that arose from the conduct of the 2003 and 2007 General Elections. To overcome these challenges, the first step taken by the Federal Government was to build public confidence on the credibility of the 2011 elections through the appointment of Professor Jega as the new INEC helmsman. According to Oladimeji, Olatunji & Nwogwugwu (2013, p.114), “the Commission significantly 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”.

Elections were held in most areas of the country in a largely peaceful atmosphere, with fewer reported incidents of violence or blatant police abuses than in previous years. Despite the improvements, there were still incidents of violence, reports of police misconduct, voter intimidation, hijacking of ballot boxes by party thugs, ballot box stuffing, vote buying, multiple voting, over voting, underage voting, falsification of results and other associated electoral irregularities (Oladimeji, Olatunji & Nwogwugwu, 2013). The outcome of the presidential election also led to the eruption of post-election violence with the attendant destruction of valuable lives (including those of some members of the National Youth Service Corps) and property in states like Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, among others. Corroborating the above, National Democratic Institute holds that “the violence caused over 800 deaths and substantial destruction of property” (NDI, 2015, p.6). However, worthy of note is the fact that the outbreak of violence was not only as a result of poor handling of the elections by INEC 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.
Combating Electoral Fraud through Information Technology

During the 2011 general elections Nigerians celebrated the use of social media for successful elections. The social media in whatever form has become an integral part of information technology which many Nigerians believe could help sanitize the electoral process. Technology has continued to foster government accountability, as well as active citizen participation in the country. During the 2015 elections, young Nigerians, who make up 70 percent of the country’s population, again utilized information technology. In fact, they went a step further, beyond social media to include live streaming of panel discourse before elections and utilizing mobile apps to report live incidents from different polling units across the country.

Fusing different innovative mobile apps with social media helped them mobilize and report incidents from various polling units with the hope of reducing electoral fraud and manipulation. Also during the 2015 election, Nigeria’s electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also introduced the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) which made it difficult for people to impersonate or make use of other peoples’ card to vote. The Commission also introduced the Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) popularly called the Smart Card Reader (SCR) for the purpose of authenticating the identity of voters in order to check fake and unregistered voters.

The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria was the 5th quadrennial election to be held since the end of military rule in 1999. The successful conduct of the 2011 General Elections marked a watershed in Nigeria’s democratic trajectory, as it contrasted sharply with the mismanagement and widespread fraud of previous polls. At the end of the voter registration exercise in 2011, INEC had claimed that a total of 73 million Nigerians had registered out of which the Automated Fingerprint Identification System had removed 800,000 persons for double registration (Aziken, 2015). Thus, determined to improve the outcome of the 2011 polls, INEC introduced technological innovations which were used to curb electoral fraud. These included a biometric PVC and card reader machine used to verify the authenticity of the PVC and also carry out a verification of the intending voter by matching the biometrics obtained from the voter on the spot with the ones stored on the PVC.

The 2011 voters’ register, Nigeria’s first electronically compiled register helped in the production of the PVCs that were used in the 2015 General Elections. The card reader is designed to read biometric information in the embedded chip of the PVC. It displays voters’ names and facial images, and authenticates their fingerprints. The deployment of the device ensured that each elector only voted in the ward where he or she was registered. Although technology does not offer solution to all forms of electoral malpractice, the use of the SCRs made it more difficult to brazenly rig the 2015 General Elections (Nwangwu, 2015).

On March 7, 2015, INEC test-ran the reliability of the biometric technology in 225 out of the total 120,000 polling units and 358 out of the 155,000 voting centres that were used for the elections (Idowu, 2015). The test-run of the device took place in 12 states namely: Rivers and Delta (South-South), Kano and Kebbi (North-West), Anambra and Ebonyi (South East), Ekiti and Lagos (South West), Bauchi and Taraba (North East) as well as Niger and Nasarawa (North Central). While acknowledging the challenges of the device in confirming fingerprints, the Commission expressed satisfaction that the basic duty of the card reader to authenticate the genuineness of PVCs was in almost all cases achieved.

The relative success of the use of technology in the elections of 2011 and 2015 to curb electoral fraud has also led to widespread calls for a fully automated electoral process in the country where voting will be done electronically. The basic argument here is that such process will allow for vote counting and announcement of results to be done within the shortest possible time as votes cast for each candidate will automatically record itself in the central recording and processing unit. Thus, at the conclusion of voting, the totals votes for each candidate would have been seen at a glance and therefore curtail the possibility of any person tampering with the result of the election. Electronic voting will also eradicate the popular practice of changing figures of votes counted for candidates, ballot snatching and stuffing as well as inflation of figures in favour of a particular candidate. If all of these are achieved through the use of electronic voting, then issues of thuggery and harassments of supporters of opponents particularly by members of the party in power would have been curbed.

The use of technology in election will also reduce the level of post election violence. This is because elections in Nigeria are coterminous with brinkmanship and legal fireworks. Post election dispute resolution is, therefore, a key activity which brings a final closure of the electoral process. Both the 1999 Constitution and the 2010 Electoral Act create the necessary ambience for election petition tribunals to adjudicate on petitions filed by complainants against the conduct of elections. Thus, the court is the only institution after the Commission that can determine the winner of an election or review and reverse the pronouncement of
the Returning Officer on a poll. Often times, the courts are overstretched and the petitions are delayed unnecessarily but this scenario will be near absent with electronic voting.

Prior to the use of any form of technology in the country’s electoral process, numerous petitions arose after elections. This must have informed the decision of the then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Mahmud Mohammed, who on February 3, 2015 inaugurated 242 judges who were selected to serve at various elections petition tribunals before the 2015 General Elections. The Chief Justice in constituting the tribunals was obviously envisaging the likelihood of aggrieved candidates and parties seeking judicial redress. Under Section 134 of the Electoral Act 2010, all petitions must be filed within 21 days of the declaration of the result of an election. Unlike the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections, the 2015 elections witnessed a general reduction in election litigations. It therefore follows that the adoption of electronic voting will put the issue of election petitions in abeyance.

Although data on the exact number of petitions filed at the tribunal after the 2015 General Elections are sketchy, it would not amount to hasty generalization to argue that there is a significant reduction in the volume of election petitions filed across the country. Following the expiration of the 21 days statutorily allowed for petitions after the declaration of results, there was no petition filed at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (Appeal Court) which has original jurisdiction according to Section 239 (1) (a) of the 1999 Constitution. This is a radical departure from the past elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011 in which the results of the presidential elections were contested from the Appeal Court to the Supreme Court. This was due in part to the use of technology which conferred some level of credibility to the entire process. The fact that President Jonathan of PDP had conceded defeat and congratulated General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC on March 31, 2015 showed a mark of confidence in the credibility of the elections which witnessed significant reduction in electoral fraud.

Equally, it is believed that the use of technology will build confidence and positive disposition of Nigerians, Election Observer Missions and development partners in the capacity of the electoral management body, INEC to conduct free, fair and transparent elections in the country. The disposition of many Nigerian voters towards elections has been that of apathy and a demonstration of lack of confidence in the entire process. However, this disposition was to change during the 2015 elections which adopted the novel anti-rigging technology as demonstrated by the large number of voters during the elections. This confidence was based on their conviction that their votes would not only be counted, but actually did count.

Challenges Facing the use of Information Technology in Elections in Nigeria

The first challenge faced by the electoral management body (EMB) in Nigeria that is INEC in its bid to sanitize the country’s electoral process is finance. The electoral umpire has been battling with the problem of lack of adequate funds to perform its statutory functions that is embedded in the electoral Act. This becomes worrisome as the electoral body cannot function properly without adequate funds.

Secondly, with the giant strides recorded so far by INEC in the use of biometric technology in the elections of 2011 and 2015, it is surprising that section 52 of the Electoral Act 2010 prevents INEC from adopting electronic voting which would have completed the process in the use of technology in elections in the country. However, as surprising as this act may be, analysts and public commentators are unanimous in the thinking that given the “do or die” nature of electoral contest in the country, the use of electronic voting will not be in the interest of political office seekers as it leaves no room for any form of manipulations. This position was corroborated by the Chairman of INEC, Professor Attahiru Jega who in reaction to critics of the use of Card Reader maintained that it was only those that hitherto nurtured plans to fraudulently manipulate the outcome of the elections that were crying foul over the introduction of the technology.

There is also the issue of the separation of accreditation and voting by the electoral umpire. The reason for having accreditation and then voting is to prevent voters who wish to vote at more than one polling unit on Election Day from doing so. The card reader makes it impossible to get accredited in two places (card reader only works with PVC specifically programmed for a particular unit. This separation makes the voting process somewhat cumbersome as voters may have to go back home after accreditation before returning to vote when voting proper begins.

Finally, a fully automated electoral process is challenged by the epileptic public power supply in the country. For the 57 years of Nigeria’s independence, the country has not been able to provide steady and uninterrupted power supply despite the amount of money pumped into the power sector. It is therefore doubtful that e voting can be supported by the kind of electricity supply in Nigeria except with a private power supply arrangement by INEC which will also be an added cost in its operations.

Conclusion
This paper analyzed the role of information technology in combating electoral fraud and by extension improving the credibility of elections in Nigeria. It acknowledged the contributions of information technology in the restoration of voters’ confidence in the electoral process particularly in the 2011 and 2015 elections in which some aspect of technology was used. It observed that the country’s electoral umpire had earlier laid the foundation for the use of information technology in the conduct of elections when in the late 1990s, the agency began modernizing its information technology infrastructure by migrating from an outdated legacy voting system heavily dependent on inaccurate paper records and polling cards to the newer Electronic Voting System (EVS).

Using the cybernetics model of communications theory, the paper found that at the heart of EVS is the Electronic Voter Register (EVR), which, by capturing the names of all eligible voters, eliminates duplication and thereby minimizes discrepancies in the electoral process. As such, EVR is viewed as a means of ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria. It concludes that with the use of electronic voting in subsequent elections in the country the issue of electoral fraud would be curbed if not totally eliminated.

On the basis of foregoing we make the following recommendations:

(1) INEC should maintain the usage of the card readers in all elections in the country. Despite the hiccups associated with the use of the machines, it is very important that their usage be maintained in all subsequent elections. The 2011 and 2015 elections have shown that technology has its merit and is the way to go in Nigeria’s elections.

(2) The electoral umpire should intensify her lobby of the National Assembly to give consent to the use of electronic voting machine which will not only reduce the chances of election rigging and manipulation but will also enable results of elections to be released in a record time frame as the vote counting process will take place simultaneously with the voting itself. To achieve this, however, the Commission should work with the NASS to get Section 52 of the Electoral Act 2010 amended. It is also important to test-run the e-voting on smaller mid-season elections in Ekiti, Ondo, Anambra, Bayelsa, Kogi, Edo and Osun States before the main deployment in 2019 for maximum impact. Equally, the e-voting will enable Nigerians in the Diaspora to vote in elections instead of the present situation where they are completely disenfranchised.

(3) To make the process less cumbersome and encourage high turnout of voters, the accreditation should be done simultaneously with voting so that voters will not have to move to and from the polling stations for both items. The reason for having accreditation and then voting is to prevent voters who wish to vote at more than one polling unit on Election Day from doing so. The card reader makes it impossible to get accredited in two places (card reader only works with PVC specifically programmed for that unit). For this reason, there is no major reason to continue separating the two activities especially since the card reader has addressed this issue.
References