

Corruption in Electoral Process and the Quest for Good Governance: An appraisal of the BVAS Machine in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

¹ANUKA, Anthony Onyebuchi, ² NLEMEDIM-ONYEBUCHI, Jennifer Iruoghene

Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences, Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution,
University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo, Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Corruption has become a pervasive issue in Nigeria, particularly in the electoral system, which has had the most significant impact on recent Nigerian elections. With the introduction of a new technology into the electoral system, known as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machine. Following the 2022 Electoral Act as amended. The BVAS automatically became a major factor in the new guidelines for decision-making in Nigerian elections. This is because it is the only accepted means of accreditation, verification, and voting. This means that the proposed new Nigerian agenda is possible, as our voting automatically should count without the interference of corrupt practices. But the reverse was the case during the presidential election, where election results could not be uploaded to the INEC result viewing center (IREV) for credibility, as proposed by the Independent National Electoral Commission. This research work is aimed at assessing the impacts of corruption on Nigeria's electoral processes with a focus on the 2023 Nigerian presidential and national assembly elections. The researcher adopted the historical research design. Secondary and primary type of data was used; secondary data was sourced from media print, newspapers, and internet print. Primary data was sourced from key informant interviews. This paper adopted the realist theory as propounded by Niccolò Machiavelli et al., as a framework to understand corruption and the quest for power in the Nigerian electoral processes, especially the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections. A major finding of this research is that the BVAS machine, during the 2023 Nigerian elections, was only used for accreditation and verification of voters, but not used to transmit the election results emanating from the polling units. This led to voter apathy during the governorship and state assembly elections that followed, as the will of the masses did not reflect in the election results. This research therefore recommends that Nigeria should split its presidential and national assembly election timetable into six weeks of voting, capturing all six geopolitical zones for convenience, credibility, and transparency. Also, there should be a strict adherence to electronic automated voting and immediate transmission of results from the polling units into the INEC result viewing center (IREV), which is devoid of manual or human manipulation, for the sake of democracy and the sanctity of the ballot box.

Keywords: Corruption, Election process, Technology, BVAS, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption in electoral processes is said to be so cancerous especially in developing countries with weak institution. According to Torulagha (2017), the Economic and financial crimes commission Act in Nigeria (EFCC), defined corruption as the violation or irregular alteration or debasement or subversion of a generally or an officially accepted standard or procedure or method for carrying out a duty or maintaining social, political, administrative, legal and or religious order. These actions include, but not limited to those non-violent criminal and illicit activity committed with the objective of earning wealth and power illegally either individually or group in organized manner, thereby violating existing legislations governing the economic activities of government and its administration. This includes, bribery, fraud, money laundering,

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and so on. This definition emphasizes the implication of corrupt practices as they violate the laws and norms governing the society, and further identifies the motivation and end for corrupt action which is wealth. Corruption could also mean the act of subverting public funds for private use. Corruption is corruption. According to the BBC English Dictionary, corruption is dishonesty and illegal behavior by people in position of authority or power. They all recognize also the fact that the goal of corrupt actions is always for monetary benefit. But then in a wider sense, according to Seumas Miller et al... (2006), we are led to understand analysis of corruption, that through proper moral analysis of incidence of corrupt practices, we can understand the moral significance of corrupt behaviors, for instance, an individual can comfortably engage in an act of corruption without involving other people, by luring people into certain wrong practices, without himself having any urge for financial benefits.

Other benefits, such as desire for fame and quest for honor can motivate a person for such corrupt behaviors. Miller et al further stipulate that benefits as such do not always flow to the one engaging in it, as often implied by most definitions of corruption; benefits can flow to other people related to the person engaged in acts of corruption, in one way or the other. In their book entitled *Corruption and Anti-corruption, 'an applied philosophical Approach'*, Miller *et al* (2006), are of the view that, to understand morally the concept of corruption, as it affects the political system, we have to properly organize the political institutions, and the laws and moral principles, to be well understood, specified and clarified. Then emphasis has to be laid on the people, their moral convictions and the moral status of the people around them. Then, finally the ethics and moral principles that guide the Society where they function. This claim implies that there is no point, to limit our understanding of corruption, to the definitions that restrict it to "abuse of entrusted power, for personal benefits, based on self-interest", as most definitions imply. Political Corruption is defined as the misuse of public or governmental power for illegitimate Purposes which are, usually secret and for private gain.

The kind of political system any given society operates would be a major factor that will determine the occasions of corrupt practices, depending on how weak or strong such institution is found to be, and goals it seeks to achieve for the welfare of the people Miller *et al*. (2006). For example, in Nigeria since May 1999 when she went back to civilian rule (democracy), the structure of governance, and the democratic institution, which is supposed to be the government of the people by the people and for the people, has become so weak, that the level of corruption has risen tremendously. In political corruption, Government officials that are supposed to be trustees of the common wealth turn into wolves enriching their private interest. They do not only undermine their obligation, but also misuse the power delegated to them, for their own private gain. Bribery represents a theft of public resources for private end. And the politician who receives the bribe abuses his political office; since he tends to siphon the funds into overseas accounts, without using them for any public good in the country. He exhibits a morally corrupt character to undermine a legitimate political process for instance, the abuse of elections and election processes in Nigeria.

Electoral malpractice such as vote buying and rigging are such evidence of abuses and symptom of corruption in the electoral system, which takes the form of bribery as the means used by Politicians to achieve their desired goal; here they have to offer bribes, in the form of money or incentives to people, and sometimes they go as far as engaging in thuggery, hijack of ballot boxes to subvert the peoples will, in order to get elected into political prestigious positions. Corruption is highly witnessed in Nigeria electoral process because we have multi-party system, so political parties in Nigeria needs huge amount of money to conquer each other in the event of election. Parties and their candidates need money to operate, to print posters, brochures and leaflets, or to pay TV and radio commercials to make their agenda or Manifesto publicly known to voters. They have to pay staff, pay for equipment to organize and run campaigns, and finance campaign-related travel for candidates and party leaders. In their struggle to succeed, individual candidates and party leaders are willing to accept payoffs or illegal monies offered by wealthy donors in exchange for promises of future favors.

According to the former Governor of Abia State, Okezie Ikpeazu in an exclusive interview with Udora Orizu, reported on Thisday news, Tuesday 4th of April, 2023. The difference between the 1999 election and the 2023 election is that in the 1999 election, you could see and track rigging. But in 2023, they put the rigging beyond what you can see. People are left more frustrated than they were in 1999. In 2023, you don't need to hijack ballot boxes. All you need is a pen and a few friends in INEC. In 1999, if somebody is rigging the election, you'll see the person rigging the election, and you can shout. The jurisprudence of election litigations will be very interesting this time around. Let's see what happens. But here again, when facts and figures are hidden inside the computer, according to him, leaving the right to retrieve such facts and figures in the hands of one man, so you can imagine? I don't know how it will be. I blame Nigerians, we spent a whole lot of time glorifying what we didn't completely understand; the Bvas. What I expected, especially from our young ones, is that a

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deeper interrogation of the shortcomings of BVAS would have been brought to the fore. ‘‘I’m not a very strong person in terms of ICT, but those who know it would have just walked up to us to say, this thing cannot do what they’re saying it will do, and we take it up from there. Nigerians going forward should henceforth interrogate some of the stories they sell to us. Expectations were very high, and people thought we had it covered end-to-end, but you can now see that it is not so. Furthermore, he said, I don’t know how we can pick up from here. I encourage Nigerians to remain resolute. If we had interrogated properly and asked the right questions, we would not be here. That’s why, particularly, I advised those who can bear to bear and those who can’t bear should follow the law to ventilate it. I said so because if I could not ask questions and I trusted, it’s a risk I brought upon myself, and otherwise, why should you trust them? If you took the risk, then bear the brunt (Ikpeazu, 2023).

According to a press interview granted by former president Olusegun Obasanjo, reported on ThisDay news on the 27th of February, 2023. He alleged that officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have been compromised to manipulate the results of the presidential election, conducted on Saturday, 25th February 2023. Obasanjo specifically faulted the failure of the INEC to transmit the election results electronically through the use of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS), via the INEC Server, which resulted in the use of a manual collation system. The former president expressed his mind in a press statement entitled ‘2023 Presidential Election: An Appeal for Caution’, made available to journalists in Abeokuta. Obasanjo said I issued this statement to make President Muhammadu Buhari aware of what is happening about the election, pointing out that there is danger ahead. He alleged that what had been released manually did not reflect the wishes of Nigerians, which they expressed freely. While stating that he had in the past pointed out mistakes in some actions of former president Buhari’s administration. Obasanjo said as far as the election issues were concerned, the president has proved beyond reasonable doubt that he wants to leave a legacy of free, fair, transparent, and credible elections. He said, ‘‘Until last Saturday night, February 25, 2023, the good and noble plan and preparation for the elections seemed to be going well. For the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a lot of money was spent to introduce the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and the Server for immediate transmission of results from polling units.

It is no secret that INEC officials, at operational level, have been allegedly compromised to make what should have worked not to work and to revert to manual transmission of results, which is manipulated and the results doctored ThisDay news (2023). According to ThisDay news of 27th February 2023, Obasanjo said that the Chairman of INEC may claim ignorance but he cannot fold his hands and do nothing when he knows that election process has been corrupted and most of the results that are brought outside BVAS and Server are not true reflection of the will of Nigerians who have made their individual choice. At this stage, we do not need wittingly or unwittingly to set this country on fire with the greed, irresponsibility, and unpatriotic acts of those who allegedly gave money to INEC officials for perversion and those who collected the blood money. Let me appeal to the Chairman of INEC, if his hands are clean, to save Nigeria from the looming danger and disaster which is just waiting to happen. If the Chairman can postpone elections four days to the election, he can do everything to rectify the errors of the last two days – no BVAS, no result to be acceptable; and no uploading through Server, no result to be acceptable (Obasanjo, 2023).

Whereas, BVAS and Servers have been manipulated or rendered inactive, such results must be declared void and inadmissible for the election declaration. Chairman INEC, I thought that you would use this wonderful opportunity to mend your reputation and character for posterity. Your Excellency, President Buhari Muhammadu, tension is building up and please let all elections that do not pass the credibility and transparency test be cancelled and be brought back with areas where elections were disrupted for the governorship scheduled for, March 4, 2023, and BVAS and Server officials be changed (Obasanjo, 2023).

To know which stations or polling units were manipulated, let a Committee of INEC staff and representatives of the four major political parties, with the Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association, look into what must be done to have hitch-free elections on the governorship election. Mr. President, may your plan and hope for leaving a legacy of free, fair, transparent, and credible elections be realized. Mr. President, please don’t let anybody say to you that it does not matter or it is the problem of INEC. On no account should you be seen as part of the collusion or compromise. When the die is cast, it will be your problem as the Chief Executive of the nation. The Chairman of INEC may sneak out of the country or go back to his ivory tower. Obasanjo called on Nigerians to exercise patience until the wrong is righted, expressing the belief that nobody will toy with the future and fortune of Nigeria at this juncture.

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According to a news report on Sahara television, March 8th, 2023. Dr. Offordile Fabian Onah was duly registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission to vote in the 2023 general elections. He had obtained his permanent voter card and waited for February 25, 2023, to cast his votes. Alas, Dr Onah was rejected by the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System! The plight of Onah and his likes as well as the options left for them, is the focus of this report. Dr Offordile Fabian Onah arrived at his Ozalla Ezimo polling unit on February 25, 2023, to exercise his franchise in electing a president of Nigeria as well as a senator for Enugu North zone and a House of Representatives member for his Udenu/Igboeze North Federal Constituency. He joined the queue and waited patiently for his turn. He approached the INEC election official in charge of accreditation. Unlike other voters who easily got accredited and voted, Dr Onah's first attempt was not successful. He tried again, and he was again rejected. He was later asked to wait for some time; probably it was a network problem. After copious trials without succeeding, Dr Onah left disappointed. According to him, the BVAS machine rejected me over ten times. It was like a joke to me because I was prepared to cast my votes for candidates of my choice. The machine couldn't recognize my face as well. My fingerprints, both left and right, were all rejected. Nothing was recognized as many times as they tried to capture my data. They didn't give me any reason, except that I couldn't vote, and I didn't vote. I was duly registered at the Udenu INEC office. I never registered twice. I will go to the INEC office to complain. My impression is that since I was not able to vote, I wish the candidates I wanted to vote for good luck. I am not holding any bad feelings against anybody because electronically anything can happen, and it has happened in my case, and I thank God for that. I don't know what happened to my card because I have used it to vote before now. It has not expired, and my name is on the list. I complained to them that I should be able to vote because my name is on their database, but they didn't listen to me. I went home very sad and disgruntled."

Cyril Ani got the same disappointment at his Ogrute polling unit in Igboeze North LGA of Enugu State. According to him, I don't know what happened. I had been voting in previous elections. But this one is strange. They tried to capture me seven times, and each time, it failed. I didn't vote, and I am sad. I travelled from Makurdi to exercise my franchise. Nobody has been able to explain to me what happened. I am not the only one. An INEC ad-hoc staff working at Amagunze in Nkanu East LGA of Enugu State, Othniel Chukwu, said two eligible voters could not cast their votes in his unit because they were rejected by BVAS. According to him, under such circumstances, the attention of the supervisors ought to be drawn. I experienced about two of such cases, Chukwu said. By our training, we were to alert our supervisors. But the phone number of my supervisor was not connecting at that time. So, there was nothing I could do. I told such people that their matter could not be handled. Most of them left with anger (sahara reporters 3rd march, 2023).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite how old the Nigerian democracy has existed within contemporary regimes/administrations, and the availability of abundant natural/human resources, which is enough to accelerate development, build a strong institution and expunge corruption from her electoral system. The Nigerian state has not been able to attain a good level of competitive democracy amongst the community of African nations and the rest of the world. The will of men has for long taken over the institutions instead of the rule of law, thereby institutionalizing Corruption. This has placed Nigeria's development at the weakest pace of corruption and its index vis-à-vis the rest of the world. The 2023 electoral act and the BVAS machine have tentatively brought a curse instead of a blessing to the Nigerian people and the political system. This is due to the influence of corruption, realpolitik's vested on the Bimodal voter's accreditation system (BVAS), which was originally designed to checkmate the excesses of corruption and produce people-friendly (democratic) results through the dictate of democracy and the sanctity of the ballot box. But reverse was the case, as Nigerian politicians still had their way in manipulating the electronic machine and rendering it useless, as they subverted democracy for oligarchic selection.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess the impact of corruption on Nigeria's electoral system and the use of BVAS technology in the last presidential and national assembly elections. **The specific objectives are to:**

- i. examine the impact of corruption on Nigeria's electoral system.
- ii. examine the impact of BVAS on the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections
- iii. examine the role of INEC in the 2023 presidential and national assembly election

1.3 Research Questions

What is the impact of corruption on the Nigerian electoral system?

What was the impact of BVAS on the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections?

What was the role of INEC in the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Literature

The literature review for this paper was done on a few areas as follows: Godfatherism, corruption, systemic corruption, Electoral malpractice:

Godfatherism

According to Mbamara (2004), 'godfatherism' is the invasion of the political candidate by a discarnate powerful sponsor, tending to complete possession for selfish gratification. Mbamara, (2004) believes that godfatherism is a political slave trade or political sponsorship based on political manipulation with several evil agendas. In this context, the godfather is the political slave merchant, while the godson is the political slave boy or political article for sale. The godson is purchased with a large sum of money under oath. The aims and objectives of the deal include access to appointments, stealing of government treasure.

Corruption

According to Ekiyor (2005), corruption is the "unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or elongate his stay in government position and/or any other person at the expense of the public, contrary to the conventions or laws guiding his oath of office. Gould and Kolb (1964) contend that corruption is not a characteristic of one period in political history nor of any one country. It is endemic in both authoritarian and party systems of government. As evidence that the history of corruption is as old as the world. Scott (1972) is of the view that corruption must be understood as a regular, repetitive, and integral part of the operation of most political systems, especially in Nigeria. A vital view of corruption is that it is intentional. This is a view that was heralded by Brooks (1970), who believed that a corrupt official knows his duties, "but it is neglected or misperformed for reasons narrower than those which the state intends. Interestingly, Brooks (1970) went ahead to distinguish the corrupt from the inefficient official. In his view, 'the corrupt official must know the better and choose the worse (but) the inefficient official does not know any better'".

Systemic Corruption

According to the World Bank and other Bretton Woods institutions, corruption is simply the "abuse of public office for private gain". In its expanded form, the World Bank Report (1997) in its definition differentiated 'isolated' (or accidental) corruption from 'systemic corruption'. Isolated (or accidental) corruption is "rare, consisting of a few acts, it is straightforward (though seldom easy) to detect and punish. In this sense, non-corrupt behavior is the norm. Public and private sector institutions support integrity. Both formal and non-formal systems are strong enough to return the system to a "non-corrupt equilibrium". Systemic corruption, on the other hand, is pervasive, or entrenched, where corruption is routine between and within the public sector, companies or individuals. Formal and informal rules "are at odds with one another". Corruption may be illegal, but in this case, it is understood to be routine in transactions with the government or business. Equilibrium exists (also called a "systemic corruption trap") where incentives for corruption are very attractive for companies, individuals and public servants – attractive to be exploited and not resisted, because of a high likelihood of success in a supportive corrupt environment.

Electoral Malpractice

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1980, p 534), Bello-Imam (2007), there are several ways in which electoral processes can be vitiated. The most significant of these is corruption. Corruption of electoral practices is of course, not limited to bribery or intimidation of the individual voter. The possibilities are endless, ranging from the dissemination of scurrilous rumors about candidates and deliberate false campaign propaganda, to tampering with the election machinery by stuffing the ballot box with fraudulent returns, dishonest counting or reporting of votes, and total disregard of electoral outcomes by incumbent officeholders... Section 131 (1&2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria specified forms of vote

buying as electoral offences under the sub-title 'Bribery and Conspiracy', which are treated as offences. (1) A person who: (a) directly or indirectly by himself or by any other person on his behalf, gives, lends or agrees to give or lend, or offers, promises. (2) promises to procure or endeavor to procure, any money or valuable consideration to or for any voter, to or for any person on behalf of any voter, or to or for any other person, to induce any voter to vote, to refrain from voting, or corruptly does any such act on account of such voter having voted or refrained from voting, at any election; (c) directly or indirectly, by himself or any other person on his behalf, corruptly makes any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement, or agreement to or for any person, to induce such person to procure or to endeavor to procure the return of any person as a member of a Legislative House or to an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election upon or in consequence of any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement or agreement, corruptly procure, or engages or promises or endeavors to procure, the return of a person as a member of a legislative house or an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election.

(3) advances or pays or causes to be paid any money to or for the use of any other person, with the intent that such money or any part thereof shall be expended in bribery at any election, or who knowingly pays or causes to be paid any money to any person in discharge or repayment of any money wholly or in part expended in bribery at any election;

(4) after any election directly, or indirectly, by himself or by any other person on his behalf receives any money or valuable consideration on account of any person having voted or refrained from voting, or having induced any other person to vote or refrain from voting or having induced any candidate to refrain from canvassing for votes for himself at any such election. Elections in Nigeria have, since independence, been increasingly contentious and confrontational, largely because of acts such as election rigging and manipulating the rules of the electoral contest, which have covertly or overtly corrupted the electoral procedures. Indeed, one outstanding feature of Nigeria's various attempts at political succession is electoral malpractice.

Since the Nigeria independence, elections have been increasingly contentious and confrontational, largely because of acts such as election rigging and manipulating the rules of the electoral contest, which have covertly or overtly corrupted the electoral procedures. Indeed, one outstanding feature of Nigeria's various attempts at political succession is electoral malpractice. Mackenzie (1958, p 14) listed four conditions for the holding of free elections: (i) An honest, competent, non-partisan administration to run elections; (ii) A general acceptance throughout the political community of certain rather vague rules of the game, which limits the struggle for power because of some unspoken sentiment that if the rules are not observed more or less faithfully, the game itself will disappear amid the wreckage of the whole system, (iii) A developed system of Political Parties, traditions and teams of candidates before the electors as alternative between which to choose; and (iv) An independent Judiciary to interpret the electoral laws. According to Edwin (2003), critical evaluation of electoral experiments in Nigeria shows that the above conditions are often absent. Indeed, there is an avalanche of literature on the problem of conducting free and fair elections in the country, and most scholars who have written about elections in Nigeria have been emphatic that elections have hardly ever been free or fair. Edwin (2003), for instance, declared: 'My finding is that every election in Nigeria since independence has tried to perfect the electoral malpractices or forms of election rigging employed in the preceding election, while introducing new ones'.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the realist theory as propounded by Niccolo Machiavelli. Realism is a paradigm of international relations theories. For this paradigm, the earliest modern argument in history can be traced back to 'The Prince', written by Niccolo Machiavelli in the Renaissance in 1513, which was his theoretical summary of centuries of political practice and radical reform in Florence and his own experience in politics. In this book, Machiavelli could get rid of the shackles of moral and theoretical norms and began to summarize the reasons for the gains and losses of state power based on people's experience. Machiavelli proposed the thought of international relations, such as the theory of evil humanity, supremacy of national interests, power politics, and diplomatic trickery in The Prince. Therefore, based on a critical analysis of the thought of realism contained in The Prince, it is practically significant to grasp the essence of international relations and understand the Nigerian politics/policy, and behavior of the ruling class. He put forward the theory of evil humanity, which has been recognized as a central thesis of realism. For him, the idea about the theory of good humanity is humane, but is absurd in real political life. Machiavelli reinforces the conception that human nature is malicious, and he regards humans as the most pernicious creatures on the surface of the earth. "Men in general that are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours; they offer you their blood, their goods, their life, and their children just for power.

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The concept of power, according to Machiavelli, is the key to understanding international relations. For realism, power and security are the two important factors for all countries to formulate their foreign policies. Machiavelli thought about the question of power politics from the viewpoint of evil nature. For him, the essence of politics is power politics, or the struggle for power. State power originates from humans' pursuit of personal desire, which is endless; perhaps this is a direct explanation of President Tinubu's popular slogan Emilokon (it is my turn to rule). The ruler must exercise power to keep everyone under his rule to stay in power, here we feel the direct impact of the sit tight syndrome and tenure elongation orchestrated by political parties and ruling class in Nigeria, in an attempt to hold on to power for relevance e.g the ruling all progressive congress (APC) under former president Muhammadu Buhari, despite the yearnings of Nigerians for change of government, did everything possible to retain power for eight years and also in the just concluded presidential election he played the power politics for his party the All Progressive Congress (APC) to be reelected. The fundamental problem of the state is domination, and politics is the power struggle, as we could boldly see the three major political parties, the ruling All Progressive Congress, the People's democratic Party, and the Labor Party, in the past elections vigorously scrambling for the presidential seat. However, the ruler aims at maintaining power. Machiavelli ignores the issue of the end of the state in extra-political (ethical, religious, cultural) terms. He assumes that power is an end in itself, and he confines his inquiries to the means that are best suited to acquire, retain, and expand power. Machiavelli thus separates power from morality, ethics, religion, and metaphysics, and sets up the state as an autonomous system of values independent of any other source.

Lastly, Machiavelli puts forward a set of political foreign and domestic trickeries as the core of "Machiavellianism", including deceit and upholding the weak against the strong. For Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, (political leader should deny the relevance of morality in political affairs and hold that craft and deceit are justified in pursuing and maintaining political power. In a word, the end justifies the means in the arena of power. According to Machiavelli, power (the lion) and deception (the fox) are the two essential means for the conduct of foreign policy. I like this to be a true behavior exhibited by the ruling party and the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mamud Yakubu, when he introduced the BVAS machine into the Nigerian electoral process. Perhaps he assured Nigerians of a free and credible election where only BVAS was going to be used for voter accreditation, verification, and transmission of results. He further said that, no Bvas no election. This gave Nigerians huge confidence in a free and transparent election. But reverse was the case when Bvas machine was seen abandoned and results computed and declared manually against the Electoral Act of 2022 as amended, by the same INEC chairman who has long upheld Bvas to high esteem given the 2023 elections.

This is purely deceptive, as in the case of the fox and the lion as stated by Machiavelli.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This paper adopted the historical research design. The historical research design is the process of summarizing data and information to establish the central theme of the inquiry. This was augmented with information/data obtained from a key informant interview (KII). The historical research design is used to analyze variables on subject matter; these variables include but not limited to Bvas, corruption, 2023 election.

3.2 Types of Data Collected

This paper cross examined Primary and secondary data in considerable details. The secondary data was gathered from media prints, internet and newspaper publications. Primary data was sourced from key informant interview (KII 2023). As key persons were interviewed in selected states for example. River state one local governments was selected which is Obiakpor LGA, then in Lagos State, Ikeja was selected. In Kastina State, Batangarawa local government was selected in Adamawa State, Gombi was selected, in Imo state Amaike was selected and lastly in Abuja Asokoro was selected. One person each was interviewed in all selected areas, as the researcher visited these areas and had interactions with inec adhoc and election observers who worked within these areas during the February elections.

Method of Data Collection

Secondary and primary methods of data collection was used. The researcher was able to access the internet, and other media prints like newspapers. The researcher also visited five local governments and Abuja, each from one state as selected from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria as mentioned above, during the KII interview.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis was done through the qualitative analysis of secondary data. The historically reviewed secondary data was used to support or question theoretical assertions of the impacts of the impact of corruption and Bvas on the 2023 presidential election. This analytical procedure is not how ever without limitations,

4. PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Presentation of Data

The BVAS devices, which were used during the controversial February 25th elections, EMP2920 Biometric tablets, were manufactured and supplied by Shenzhen Emperor Technology. According to Business Day, the unit cost of the device is \$795 (N366,089.55 at the rate of N460.47/\$) on Amazon, where the device sells under a different name SecuMind tablet Biometric CX2920. According to the information on the Federal Communications Commission website on the product, it was built on March 16, 2017. INEC said it acquired 200,000 units of the device. At the rate of \$795 for each device, at dollar rate of N850, that is (N675, 750). It implies that 200,000 devices would cost \$1,590.000 million (N1,351,500.000), just for the BVAS devices.

The commission's budget has become a major subject of discussion for the public; many of whom say the electoral umpire's execution of the February 25th election was underwhelming and was not commensurate with the huge amount of money deployed for the exercise. "You should not be INEC chairman if you have not run a major logistics company before; don't understand the technology and its limitations; or have a history of questionable character. Given the budget allocated to the 2023 elections, INEC failed woefully," Kola Oyeniya, founder and CEO of Venia Group, said. INEC had asked and got approval for an N305 billion war chest. The election budget was different from the N40 billion the commission wanted for its annual operations. The 2023 election budget is the highest budget the electoral body has ever received. INEC got N234 billion in 2019, a record compared to the N18.8 billion used to execute the same presidential and National Assembly elections in 2015. In terms of size, the budget is the largest in Africa; however, in terms of spend on each voter, it lags the budget of Kenya for the August 2022 elections. The Eastern African country's budget for the election was N176.6 billion, which amounts to spending an average \$17 on each voter, compared to Nigeria's \$9 spend.

An analysis of the INEC's 2023 election budget shows that nine items account for 79.68 percent of the total budget. Procurement of accreditation devices took the bulk, accounting for 34.51 percent of the entire budget, while provision for run-off elections is 8.89 percent. Honoraria for ad hoc staff, logistics, and printing of ballot papers cover 7.79 percent, 7.54 percent, and 6.78 percent, respectively. Tech experts who spoke to BusinessDay said the electoral commission would not be paying their technical partners, Emperor Technology, nor spending it all on logistics to bring the devices into the country. Emperor Technology, the supplier and partner of INEC, is not a new company. The Chinese company was established in 1995 to provide identity information services. Some of its services include carrier data security, physical and digital identity verification, smart card, and card-free e-payment. Besides subsidiary companies in Beijing, Hong Kong, Baotou, Changsha, and Huizhou, and five branch offices in Shanghai, Zhengzhou, Xi'an, and Chengdu in China. Emperor Technology also has service centers in the United States, India, Russia, and Nigeria to provide local supports and customer care.

4.2 Analysis of Data

What role did the bvas technology played in your polling units, local government and state during the 2023 election? How free and fair can you say the conduct of the presidential and national assembly election were? What challenges were commonly seen during the exercise and how better could it have been done?

An inec adhoc-staff by name Mr. Bethel said "I worked as an APO (assistant presiding officer) in Asaba Delta State during the presidential election in Oshimili south local government area, the election went peaceful as the bvas was helpful and fast for accreditation and verification of voters. The major challenge we had in our polling unit was uploading the result to the IREV (inec result viewing center) after all party agents have dutifully signed the result sheet. We were later directed to submit the results to inec at the collation center which we did, since the bvas network could not permit for an upload of the presidential result from the polling unit as directed by inec meanwhile we were able to upload the national assembly results.

worked as an observer in Obi-Akpor local government during the presidential election, the elections were conducted peacefully but after I visited several polling units, I discovered that most inec adhoc-staff complained of the same problem

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of not been able to uploading the presidential results while the national assemblies were smoothly uploaded. But I asked; why only the presidential results? Well, this brought me to the thinking that probably there was yet an uncovered agenda which I could not account for, so the results shouldn't go online as computed by the inec adhoc. Also, there was impunity by the thugs who came forcing voters to vote either vote for a particular party's presidential candidate or leave the polling unit and be automatically be disenfranchised (Mr. Princewill Tamono KII 2023). "Situation report from Amaike ward, there's missing of presidential ballot papers, senatorial ballot papers are also missing in Amaike ward in Imo state, all the bvs machine not working. Please share to all inec, PDP, LP other political party platform now". This was my exact words during election as an observer in Imo state for the presidential election (Dr. Joseph KII, 2023).

I was an SPO during the presidential and national assembly election, I worked in Ohaji-Egbama local government in one of the wards. In all the polling units under my ward, there was no election, so I was forced to fill out form EC40 form, which is an indication that election did not hold in my area. But when I got to the collation center, I couldn't find any inec official to receive the form I filled. All attempts made to reach out to inec official in charge of my local government was proved abortive. But to my greatest surprise, results were produced and declared in favor of a presidential candidate in the same ward where elections did not hold due to no electoral material (Mrs Umejkwu KII 2023).

I worked in Abuja as an inec observer, I dutifully went around especially polling units to observe the progress of the election. The BVAS did marvelously well as a tool for accreditation and voter verification. It was quite interesting and impressive as all information garnered in it may not easily be erased or falsified. Election was much more transparent with BVAS compared to other previous elections manually conducted which was marred with corruption and man-made errors. And from our results genuinely recorded in the BVAS, the Labor Party won a vast population of the polling units in FCT and perhaps was declared the winner of Abuja (Mr. Abatti KII 2023) I was a presiding officer (PO) in one of the polling units in Buari area council, I enjoyed participating in the 2023 election because of the bvas, it was less stressful as the bvas did more of the job which was usually done manually in time past. E.g., accreditation, verification and voting were made very easy, counting and collating also was easy. The actual facts with records in the bvas will remain intact and can be used to validate any post-election issues in the law court, the military were on ground as though they didn't have to do much job because Abuja is known to be peaceful for elections. For us here, our result was in favor of the labor party presidential candidate as declared also by inec (Mr. Samson KII 2023).

I was a presiding officer (PO) for the 2023 presidential and national assembly election in Lagos, Ikeja precisely, the election was peaceful and the BVAS experience was nice, but I was surprised the result that was declared wasn't the original result from my polling unit. Because by my polling unit original result computed, the Labor party was leading, but with the result declared, the APC won with the same and exact figures with which the labor party was leading. So, I think so many things went wrong with the result before it was declared because we couldn't even upload directly from the polling unit as hard copies were submitted to inec (Comrade fumi KII, 2023). The election in mainland was peaceful, as the police and military were adequately on ground, the bvas was really helpful and productive, with this new technology introduced by inec, I am hopeful that if enhanced to be better, Nigeria will be free from corrupt practices in her electoral system. I was an observer during the presidential and national assembly elections. I can boldly say that if inec (Independent national electoral commission) chooses to do the right thing to all vote cast and verified by the bvas machine, the right candidate would have emerged the winner of the presidential election of the 2023 (Mr. Bayo Olatunji KII 2023).

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The study asserts that: the introduction of BVAS in the Nigeria electoral act 2022, was a landmark in the 2023 national assembly and presidential election. Especially the BVAS helped the masses to quickly dictate the rigging which occurred during the presidential election. This was because presidential election results were not been uploaded from the polling units to the inec result viewing server as contained in the Bvas machine, rather it was manually declared. while the senate and house of representatives were instantly uploaded and transmitted to the server. So, Nigerian's feel it was a deliberate action by inec chairman to shut-down the presidential server so that electoral officials cannot electronically upload the result as gotten directly. This actually gave them room to manually compute and doctor the result to suit their candidate of choice. From the above analysis and discussions, the study asserts that, a vast majority of the Nigerian populace actually did not vote for inec preferred candidate because all those thugs who were caught on camera with impunity, mandating voters to either vote for APC or be disenfranchised, were all boys/foot soldiers to the same inec candidate and people working for

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them. Perhaps the APC presidential candidate is head bent on becoming Nigeria's president undermining if he is the people's choice or not. This was seen in one of his popular trending videos known as "EMILOKON" meaning it's my turn. To him it's a do or die affair.

5. SUMMARY/CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**5.1 Summary/Conclusion**

The study has demonstrated that corruption indeed is a parasite, and has eaten deep into the debris of the Nigerian system thereby creating political instability in Nigeria. corruption is a syndrome of a weak institution and political impunity in the Nigeria electoral system. It is obvious that Nigeria has lacked the capacity and political willingness to combat corruption. It also points to a huge decay and backwardness in the Nigeria electoral system as a result of corruption, this needs an urgent attention else it will consume the entire country someday. Nigeria also needs a massive technological attention in her electoral system, to repeal the existing wrongs already established by corruption through the will of oligarchic few.

Just as the utilitarian's rightly advocates for the happiness of the greater number of people, it is achievable through the dictate of democracy and the sanctity of the ballot box.

However, the Nigeria's political system is likely to embrace a new dispensation with the introduction of BVAS technology. From the findings above, I am convinced that Nigeria has not got it right in the last presidential election of 2023.

5.2 Recommendations

The study therefore recommends for the splitting of Nigerian presidential and national assembly elections into six different weeks of voting. Six weeks for the 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria, hence every zone shall be giving one week to vote electronically. This is because Nigeria is too populated to be taking care of by the few available number of police personnel. Since the police is the only armed forces allowed on election matters. Perhaps with this splitting, the federal government can be able to make available sufficient number of men of the police force to each geopolitical zones at the time of their voting, as the exercise can last for seven good days uninterrupted to enable electorate exercise their franchise at will and within the said time frame and geopolitical zone.

The study also recommends for an e-voting system, to enable individual vote at their convenient within this stipulated one week for such zone. This will enable a voter, vote from the comfort of his or her home without necessarily asking for aid from the security personnel. For instance, during the big brother Naija programs, viewers vote for their candidates of choice from the comfort of their bed room without unnecessary altercations from hoodlums or security agencies. Perhaps these votes are automatically going to a central server that collates the results automatically and by the end of every voting exercise in each zone, the electoral umpire who is vested with the power to declare the result shall dutifully make the declaration as it is on the central server. This should rather reduce cost of voting per voter, reduce the risk of accident, electoral violence/casualties, hoodlum activities, and promote free and fair election, since voting will be done as a one off-thing per voter, within that electoral year. This will reduce government budget for elections as inec will officially launch a special mobile application for this exercise which is subject to improvement/upgrade, just to suit the test of time

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