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Managing Election-Related Violence in Nigeria: Focus on the Use of Technologies in the 2023 General Elections

Nijerya'da Seçim İle İlgili Şiddetin Yönetimi: 2023 Genel Seçimlerinde Teknoloji Kullanımına Odaklanma

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ABSTRACT

Election-related Despite the introduction of technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, Nigeria's 2023 general elections were still marred by persistent electoral violence. These technologies aimed to enhance transparency, credibility, and reduce malpractice. This study critically examined their application in mitigating election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State. Using the frustration-aggression theory as its analytical framework, the research adopted a qualitative approach and conducted thematic analysis. Findings revealed that political rivalry, thuggery, and intimidation by candidates and their supporters were major drivers of violence, especially in opposition-dominated areas. These acts created a climate of fear and significantly reduced voter turnout. Although BVAS and IReV were designed to promote electoral integrity, their effectiveness was compromised by reliability issues and a lack of public trust. The study concludes that technological innovations alone are insufficient in addressing systemic democratic deficits. It recommends the establishment of an independent "*Electoral Offences Commission*" with prosecutorial powers to investigate, arrest, and prosecute perpetrators of electoral violence and technological sabotage. Enforcing accountability is crucial to ending impunity, strengthening the rule of law, and building a more credible and peaceful democratic process in Nigeria.

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ÖZ

Seçimlerle ilgili Bimodal Seçmen Kimlik Doğrulama Sistemi (BVAS) ve INEC Sonuç Görüntüleme (IReV) portalı gibi teknolojik yeniliklerin getirilmesine rağmen, Nijerya'nın 2023 genel seçimleri hala sürekli seçim şiddetiyle gölgelendi. Bu teknolojiler şeffaflığı ve güvenilirliği artırmayı ve suistimali azaltmayı amaçlıyordu. Bu çalışma, Akwa Ibom Eyaletinde seçimlerle ilgili şiddeti azaltmada bu teknolojilerin uygulanmasını eleştirel bir şekilde inceledi. Analitik çerçeve olarak hayal kırıklığı-saldırganlık teorisini kullanan araştırma, nitel bir yaklaşım benimsemiş ve tematik analiz gerçekleştirmiştir. Bulgular, siyasi rekabet, adaylar ve destekçileri tarafından gerçekleştirilen zorbalık ve sindirme eylemlerinin, özellikle muhalefetin hakim olduğu bölgelerde şiddetin başlıca nedenleri olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu eylemler bir korku ortamı yaratmış ve seçmen katılımını önemli ölçüde azaltmıştır. BVAS ve IReV, seçimlerin dürüstlüğünü teşvik etmek için tasarlanmış olsa da, güvenilirlik sorunları ve halkın güven eksikliği nedeniyle etkinlikleri tehlikeye girmiştir. Çalışma, teknolojik yeniliklerin tek başına sistemik demokratik eksiklikleri gidermek için yeterli olmadığı sonucuna varmıştır. Seçim şiddetinin ve teknolojik sabotajın faillerini soruşturmak, tutuklamak ve yargılamak için savcılık yetkisine sahip bağımsız bir "*Seçim Suçları Komisyonu*" kurulmasını önermektedir. Hesap verebilirliğin sağlanması, cezasızlığın sona erdirilmesi, hukukun üstünlüğünün güçlendirilmesi ve Nijerya'da daha güvenilir ve barışçıl bir demokratik sürecin inşa edilmesi için hayati önem taşımaktadır.

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections have long been a popular way for nations that have embraced democracy to choose leaders who would serve for a specific period of time as defined by their constitutions. According to Ofomiyoan & Ikenga (2023), elections are crucial for every democratic country. It is through elections that people have the opportunity to vote their candidates into elected offices during elections (Samuel, 2023). Democracy, according to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, is the government of the people by the people and for the people (Wallace et al., 2021). This implies that the power resides with the electorate, the bedrock of the concept of popular sovereignty.

However, election-related violence has always occurred in certain places during the process of electing leaders in the government. This is a recurring problem in many developing nations, including Nigeria. In Nigeria, there is a "do-or-die" mindset among politicians and their supporters as a result of the fierce fight for scarce resources (political power), which is frequently motivated by economic, religious and ethnic concerns (Ajoku & Adigwe, 2022). Several electoral malpractices have resulted from this, including ballot box snatching, excessive voting, intimidation and suppression of voters, vote buying and compromise of security personnel and electoral officials (Kassem & Osasona, 2021; Asangausung et al., 2021).

Africa, especially West Africa, has recently embraced electronic voting devices to reduce electoral fraud and malpractice by voters and stakeholders (Ofomiyoan & Ikenga, 2023). The use of technological gadgets in election administration

has resulted in a greater degree of confidence among voters (Samuel, 2023). In Nigeria, the necessity to enhance the election and voting process led to the adoption of electronic voting, which allows a significant number of eligible voters to participate (Ware, 2022; Ofomiyoan & Ikenga, 2023).

As the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has the authority to register political parties, issue electoral guidelines, handle elections for the presidency, national assembly, governorship and state houses of assembly and declare the results of elections that were conducted correctly. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended and the Electoral Act 2022 both affirm these obligations (LFN, 1999; LFN, 2022).

A law known as the Electoral Act 2022 (LFN, 2022) was created to provide guidelines for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the conduct of Nigerian elections. The country's election procedures, including political party activities like registration and merger, are governed by this legislative framework (Dunoma & Benisheikh, 2023). The Electoral Act 2022 permits the use of the Bimodal Voter Registration System (BVAS) for both the accreditation of voters and the whole election administration. Additionally, the Electoral Act 2022 allows election results to be transmitted electronically in compliance with the process decided upon by the Commission (Clement, 2022).

Many issues and difficulties plagued the usage of smart card readers in the past, including the culture of duplicate Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs), which has persisted in Nigeria and includes all types of electoral fraud (Ifedi et al., 2023). To address the shortcomings of the smart card

reader and provide a trustworthy and legitimate election process, the BVAS was implemented. To upload election results, INEC Results Viewing (IReV) was utilised (Ofomiyoan & Ikenga, 2023; Iguh & Onah, 2023). According to Samuel (2023), the INEC implemented the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) in an effort to increase credibility and transparency. However, there were a lot of technical issues recorded across the country.

It is noteworthy that the 2023 General Elections were characterised by serious security issues, such as conflicts between political supporters, assaults on election-related materials, instances of vote-buying, logistical difficulties and the growing significance of technology in electoral procedures (Ogbonna, 2024). The elections' security architecture placed a strong emphasis on the deployment of security forces and the use of technology for quick incident response (Elechi et al., 2023). A number of institutional, operational and political issues, however, made their efficacy a mystery (Asangausung and Brown, 2025; Ifedi et al., 2023). In some cases, voters' rights are violated by security personnel who were meant to protect them (Bassey and Asangausung, 2023). This is the reason many voters do not feel confidence in the security personnel during elections (Bassey et al., 2024).

Previous studies like Ajoku and Adigwe (2022) looked at the reasons for and consequences of violence in Nigeria during elections. Ifedi et al. (2023) looked at electoral and security difficulties, concentrating on critical issues for the general election in Nigeria in 2023. In order to ensure legitimate elections in Nigeria, Iguh and Onah (2023) investigated the socio-legal implications of implementing the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). Yet, none of these studies were conducted in Akwa Ibom State to offer a more recent and localised analysis by looking at the precise reasons behind election-related violence in the state during the general elections in 2023 and how it directly affected voter turnout, as well as how well the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) worked to increase the legitimacy of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Against this background, this study examined how technologies were utilised to manage election-related violence in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Attention was given to the causes of election-related violence during the 2023 general elections and its implications on voters' turnout in Akwa Ibom State. Also, the study investigated the effectiveness of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study was guided by these questions: What were the major causes of election-related violence during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State? How did the election-related violence affects voter turnout? How effective were the Bimodal Voter

Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Historical Root Causes of Election-Related Violence in Nigeria

Since Nigeria gained independence in October 1, 1960, elections have been marred by various forms of violence (Adebayo, 2022). The factors to these persistent challenges include poor governance, ineffective security forces, unemployment and poverty, power abuse, political alienation, a "*winner-takes-all*" political system, a climate of impunity, the spread of small arms and more. Scholars including Oyewole and Jamiu (2023) and Nkwede et al. (2014) argued that the root causes of political violence in Nigeria include:

i. *"Lack of a tolerant political culture: Nigeria's "winner takes it all" and "do or die" political philosophies breed intolerance and a willingness to use any means necessary to obtain what one wants. In such a setting, the intentional purpose and outcomes of violent acts are planned in a number of ways, either to influence the election process as a whole or to use coercion or other manipulative techniques to persuade voters to cast ballots against their will."*

ii. *"Godfatherism and party politics: Some political parties are unable to structure themselves in a way that complies with democratic standards for conducting elections. As certain political elites who are viewed as godfathers seize control of the parties and sway their decisions, this problem adds stress and violence to the electoral process. These political godfathers have an impact on the selection of party delegates who cast ballots for the parties' leaders and primary candidates. Through their control over the delegates, the godfathers determine who should lead the party and who is nominated to run for elective office."*

iii. *"Sit-tight syndrome: Leaders in Africa, particularly Nigeria, are often reluctant to resign because they reap the rewards of governance. When it is anticipated that the current state leadership will be replaced and the incumbent is unwilling to cede power, violent actions take place. One party's dominance or an intolerance for opposition could be the cause of this situation."*

iv. *"The nature of the electoral and party system: These are key factors that can exacerbate or moderate the occurrence of violence in the process of an election since they directly affect the character and political ideology of the party. The level to which these systems are viewed as just, equitable, inclusive and democratic may control or mitigate the likelihood of eruption of violence."*

v. *"The administration of elections by electoral bodies: Electoral management bodies play significant roles in ensuring the effective management of elections and ensuring credibility, fairness and success of elections. If such a body behaves in a manner that cast doubts on the otherwise*

fairness and credibility of an election, the ensuing reactions and discontents may result in conflict when election results are declared."

In a report submitted by Adebayo (2022), more than 200 people died as a result of the outcry that followed the first election held in 1964/1965, particularly in the Southwest. Following the 1983 election, the nation also saw "*massive post-election violence*", which resulted in the destruction of property and the loss of several lives. Even the 1993 presidential election, which is generally regarded as the most free in the nation's history and devoid of significant violent incidents, had a mixed record. A wave of protests and public outcry followed the military government led by Ibrahim Babangida's annulment of it. Over 100 peaceful protesters and bystanders were reportedly shot dead by security personnel who were allegedly attempting to quell the violent offshoot of the July protests, according to the Campaign for Democracy (CD), which was led at the time by Beko Ransom-Kuti.

Following claims of fraud in the 1999 election that brought Olusegun Obasanjo to power, there was a great deal of violence. An estimated 80 people lost their lives. In a similar vein, at least 100 people died in violent incidents brought on by the 2003 federal and state elections and four years later, over 300 people died as a result of electoral violence, with over 70 deaths coming from pre-election violence alone. Once more, the worst incident in Nigeria's political history occurred in 2011, when post-election violence in 12 states in northern Nigeria resulted in at least 800 deaths during three days of rioting.

The violence began with large-scale demonstrations by supporters of Muhammadu Buhari, the main opposition candidate and a Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change from the north, after incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the southern Niger Delta and the candidate for the ruling People's Democratic Party, was re-elected. The International Crisis Group reports that more than 100 individuals lost their lives during and during the general elections in 2015. About 150 people were killed in violence related to the 2019 national elections, according to the European Union Election Observation Mission.

According to Adebayo (2022), between April 2014 and May 2022, at least 350 individuals died in Nigeria as a result of electoral violence. 51 additional individuals, mostly officials from the INEC, were abducted over the same period. Violence can take many forms, including shooting, thuggery, terrorism, crises caused by hate speech, coercion, violent disruption, kidnapping, assassinations, arson and vote box theft. The bulk of the casualties were civilians; however, 21 security officers also lost their lives. Between 2014 and 2022, the states with the highest number of incidences were Rivers, Lagos, Kogi, Ondo and Ekiti. Most of the occurrences took place in the country's southeast and southwest. Seven of the cases were from Imo State, six from Osun, five from Akwa-Ibom and four from Abia and Cross River. The rest occurred in Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Ebonyi, Enugu, Kaduna, Lagos, Ondo and Taraba States.

Empirically, the causes of political violence during Nigeria's general elections in 2023 and its effects on national integration in Lagos State were investigated by Moliki and Oluwatobi (2023). A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 215 respondents as part of the descriptive survey study design. The mean and standard deviation were used to evaluate the data. The study found that a number of composite factors, including power shift syndrome, religiosity, ethnic politics, excessive monetary politics, politics of sentiment and entitlement (Emilokan's "it is my turn" mantra) and others, encouraged the political violence that was observed during general elections in Lagos State. The study also found that political violence during the general elections in Lagos State in 2023 further strained already strained and divided relations between the state's ethnic groups. The elections engender animosity, division and mistrust, endangering the state's democracy, economic activity and friendliness.

The gap in the literature is that while Moliki and Oluwatobi (2023) focused on political violence in Lagos State and its impact on national integration, this study examines election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State and its effect on voter turnout. Unlike the previous study, which emphasised ethnic tensions and monetised politics, this research explores how violence directly influenced electoral participation. It also extends the geographical scope of analysis, recognising regional differences in election violence dynamics.

Ajoku and Adigwe (2022) investigated the primary causes of election violence and the resulting consequences for property and human life. Information was gathered for this study using a mixed techniques approach. Five hundred randomly chosen employees of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) participated in interviews and completed questionnaires. While a significant majority of participants (71%) reported having observed election-related violence (ERV), only around 3% expressed excitement in electoral activities, compared to 42% who did so before witnessing ERV. ERV has had disastrous effects on the majority of industries responsible for viable growth and public image of the nation. This study specifically looks at the causes of election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State and its impact on voter turnout during the 2023 elections, whereas Ajoku & Adigwe (2022) concentrated on the general causes of electoral violence and its impact on life and property at a broad level. This is a gap in the literature. Unlike the previous study, which analysed electoral violence's psychological and socio-economic consequences, this research explores its direct implications on voter participation, offering a more localised and election-specific perspective (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the causes of Nigeria's election-related violence and its implications

Historical root causes	Implications
Colonialism and ethnic divisions	Fragmented national identity; ethnicised politics
Post-independence power struggles	Distrust in democratic processes; precedent for political violence
Military rule (1966-1999)	Weak democratic culture; militarisation of politics
Return to civilian rule (1999)	High-stakes politics; proliferation of political thuggery
Youth unemployment	Vulnerable population for political manipulation
Electoral malpractice	Erodes public trust; incites violence
Weak institutions and judiciary	Lack of accountability; poor dispute resolution

Source: Created by authors.

2.2. Implications of Election-Related Violence on Voters' Turnout in Nigeria

Ola (2018) investigated how election violence affects the electorate, the society as a whole and Nigeria's political system, as well as the connection between electoral violence and the spread of armaments. They used desktop research, gathering data from conference papers, textbooks, journals and other sources. The study's conclusions showed a connection between election violence and small guns. Fear and low voter turnout in Nigerian elections have been exacerbated by this. The gap in the literature is that while Ola (2018) focused on the link between arms proliferation and electoral violence in Nigeria using a desktop research approach, this study provides a more localised and recent analysis by examining the specific causes of election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections and its direct impact on voter turnout. Unlike the previous study, which broadly linked small arms to electoral violence nationwide, this research offers a contemporary, state-specific perspective on the factors driving violence and how they influenced electoral participation.

The Bwari Area Council's voter participation in the 2023 presidential election was evaluated by Ogbonna (2024). In this investigation, mixed method approach was used. This approach was chosen on purpose since the study used both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques to meet its goals. Even though there were 279,792 registered voters in the Bwari Area Council prior to the 2023 presidential election, the study found that only 96,444 people, or 35% of the total, actually cast ballots on election day. This indicates that the voter turnout for the 2023 presidential election in the Bwari Area Council was low in comparison to the number of registered voters. The results also revealed that a number of factors contributed to the low voter turnout in the 2023 presidential election in the Bwari Area Council, including voters' fear of election violence, their lack of confidence in the electoral process, their lack of faith in the electoral umpire and their lack of faith in political leaders as a result of broken campaign promises.

The gap in the literature is that while Ogbonna (2024) analysed voter turnout in Bwari Area Council during the 2023 Presidential Election, this study focuses on election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State and its implications for voter turnout during the general elections. While Ogbonna identified factors contributing to low voter turnout, including fear of violence, this study specifically investigates the causes of election-related violence itself and how it directly influenced voter participation in a different geopolitical context. This provides a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between violence and electoral engagement in Akwa Ibom State.

2.3. Effectiveness of the Application of Technologies in Nigeria's Elections

Ofomiyoan & Ikenga (2023) investigated the degree of awareness raised regarding the usage of BAVS in the Anambra State 2021 election as well as the effect of BVAS on the election's legitimacy. The study used a descriptive survey design and the quantitative research approach. Only 375 of the 389 copies of the questionnaires that were sent to INEC officials and registered voters who took part in the Anambra State 2021 election were recovered and coded. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the study questions and frequency distribution tables and percentages were used to analyse the coded questionnaire data. Findings revealed that, there was enough public knowledge of the usage of BVAS in the Anambra State election of 2021 and its implementation helped make the elections there a success.

However, Ofomiyoan and Ikenga's (2023) study was limited to a single state election and did not explore the broader effectiveness of BVAS and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in a nationwide electoral context. Furthermore, while their research assessed awareness and general impact, it did not comprehensively evaluate the operational challenges, successes and limitations of these technologies in a high-stakes general election. Given that the 2023 general elections marked a full-scale national deployment of BVAS and IReV, this study seeks to fill the gap by assessing their overall effectiveness in enhancing electoral credibility across Nigeria, considering variations in implementation, voter experience and systemic challenges beyond a single-state election.

With an emphasis on the 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, Okundia (2022) investigated the sustainability and dependability of using technological devices during Nigerian elections. This study was conducted using the survey approach. To obtain responses from a sample of respondents in certain Edo State local governments, copies of the questionnaire were distributed. The questionnaire has 41 items, to which 485 individuals replied. The Taro Yamane sampling approach was used to determine the sample size from the research population. In contrast, the opinions of the respondents were examined and displayed in straightforward numerical and percentage tables. Chi-Square was used to assess the null hypothesis (H0) and the research hypothesis (H1). The findings showed that voters' election participation, confidence and trust were all impacted by electronic gadgets and that the outcomes accurately reflected their desires. An increasing number of people are calling for the introduction and use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in Nigerian elections as a result of the desire for a credible election free from rigging and result manipulation in order to influence the outcome to suit the preferences of the electorate or citizens.

While Okundia (2022) examined the reliability and sustainability of electronic devices in Nigerian elections, focusing on the 2020 Edo State Governorship Election, the study did not specifically assess the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, which were introduced to enhance electoral credibility on a national scale. Additionally, Okundia's research primarily investigated the general impact of electronic devices on voter confidence and participation, but it did not explore the specific challenges and effectiveness of BVAS and IReV in ensuring transparency, reducing fraud and improving electoral outcomes. Given the unique context of the 2023 general elections-where these technologies played a central role-there remains a gap in understanding their practical efficacy, limitations and implications for electoral integrity at a broader level. This study aims to fill that gap by providing an empirical assessment of how these innovations influenced the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

The effectiveness of the smart card reader was investigated by Kassem and Osasona (2021) in order to highlight its strategic significance for free, fair and legitimate elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The INEC introduced the smart card reader to help reduce electoral malpractice, which further strengthened public confidence in the electoral process. Nigerian elections were manually conducted and plagued by violence, fraud and rigging. Key concerns like the smart card reader and elections as a concept and a model were clarified by the article using qualitative data from secondary sources. Although there were issues with some smart card readers' operation, the study also found that the accreditation process was sluggish due to inadequate internet service in some places and that voters' fin-

gerprints were either incomplete or not verified even after their permanent voter cards were deemed legitimate.

However, Kassem and Osasona's (2021) study did not address the more recent technological advancements, specifically the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, which were introduced to further enhance electoral credibility. While their research highlighted challenges associated with the smart card reader, such as fingerprint verification failures and internet connectivity issues, it did not examine how BVAS and IReV addressed these limitations or introduced new challenges in a broader electoral context. Given that the 2023 general elections marked a significant shift in Nigeria's electoral process with the deployment of these technologies, there remains a gap in assessing their effectiveness in ensuring transparency, minimising irregularities and improving voter confidence on a national scale. This study seeks to bridge that gap by evaluating how BVAS and IReV contributed to the credibility of the 2023 general elections.

2.4. Theoretical Framework
This study was anchored on the Frustration-Aggression Theory originally formulated by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears in 1939. The theory posits that aggression is often the result of frustration (Dollard & Miller, 1939, as cited in Nickerson, 2023; Abang et al., 2025). In the context of electoral politics, especially in fragile democracies, this theory offers a lens for understanding how perceived or real barriers to political goals such as rigged elections, voter suppression, or technological malfunctions, can provoke aggressive reactions.

In Nigeria's 2023 general elections, widespread reports of voter suppression, malfunctioning of technological tools like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the lack of transparency on the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal heightened tensions. These disruptions generated frustration among political actors and their supporters, some of whom perceived the electoral process as biased or flawed. In several cases, these frustrations translated into violent actions, aligning with the core assumptions of the Frustration-Aggression Theory.

At different points during the electoral process, different actors with varying goals may employ violent or illegal tactics. To obtain an electoral edge, candidates and parties often working with gangs or mafias, may use violence or intimidation prior to election day. Insurgents and other marginalised groups may intensify their attacks on election day in an effort to challenge the legitimacy and authority of the established power structures. Losing parties may contest election results and plan protests or rebellion after the elections, which can be extremely risky.

However, relying solely on this theory limits the scope of analysis. Comparative studies in the field of political violence and electoral conflict (example, Wilkinson, 2004; Collier & Vicente, 2014; Höglund, 2009) reveal that elec-

toral violence is often not a spontaneous reaction to frustration but a strategic tool employed by elites to influence outcomes, intimidate opposition, or assert dominance. This is particularly salient in the Nigerian context, where deeply rooted political rivalries, patronage networks and weak enforcement of electoral laws contribute significantly to the recurrence of violence. Moreover, socio-economic incentives-such as unemployment and poverty-make it easier for political actors to mobilise youth for violent activities during elections.

Therefore, while the Frustration-Aggression Theory provides a psychological basis for understanding the emotional triggers of election-related violence, it must be integrated with structural and strategic perspectives from the broader comparative politics literature. Such a multidisciplinary approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how and why electoral violence occurs, highlighting not just the reactive but also the calculated nature of aggression in Nigeria's electoral processes.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the causes of election-related violence during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State and to assess the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) in enhancing the credibility of the elections. Given the nature of the research questions, qualitative methods allowed for the exploration of complex social phenomena through personal experiences, opinions and insights, offering a richer understanding of the context and implications of these events.

The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The study locations were Ikono, Ibiono Ibom and Urue Offong/Oruko Local Government Areas, where election-related violence is common (Asuquo & Ekanem, 2023). There are 3,69 political wards, 4353 polling places and 2,357,418 registered voters in the state, according to the Akwa Ibom State Independent Electoral Commission [AKISIEC] (2024). It is estimated that 7,200,000 people live in the state. With Uyo serving as the State Capital, it comprises 31 LGAs. The state lies between latitudes 4o32" and 5o33" north and longitudes 7o35 and 8o25" east, respectively. Abia State, Rivers State, Cross River State and the Gulf of Guinea form its eastern, western, northern and southern borders, respectively. The primary economic activities include farming (mostly for upland residents), fishing (for those who live along rivers and the coast), trading, artisanship and white-collar services. Much of the state workforce is employed by a strong public sector.

The study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as primary data collection methods. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that key stakeholders, such as election officials, security personnel, political party representatives, voters, journalists and election observers, were included. These individuals were chosen based on their direct involvement or observations during the elections, providing first-hand accounts of the events and experiences related to election violence and the use of BVAS and IReV.

The interview questions and discussion guides were designed to explore the perceptions of the respondents regarding the factors contributing to election violence, its effects on voter turnout and the functionality of BVAS and IReV in ensuring a credible election process. These discussions were conducted in a flexible, open-ended manner to allow for in-depth responses and the emergence of themes that were important to the participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions. This approach allowed the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. Themes related to election-related violence, its causes and implications for voter turnout were identified, as well as themes related to the effectiveness of BVAS and IReV in enhancing electoral credibility. The analysis was conducted in several stages: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the final report.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality was maintained to protect the identity and responses of the participants. The research was designed to be sensitive to the political and security dynamics of the context, ensuring that no harm was done to the participants or their interests.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Causes of Election-Related Violence in the 2023 General Elections in Akwa Ibom State

The responses revealed that the causes of election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections were rooted in political struggles for dominance, with desperate politicians resorting to violent tactics, such as deploying thugs to disrupt voting, especially in opposition strongholds. This created an unsafe environment for voters, leading to intimidation and fear, which discouraged many from participating in the election. Technical issues, such as the malfunctioning of BVAS in some polling units, also exacerbated tensions, with accusations of electoral manipulation that led to further disruptions and a decline in voter turnout.

Logistical challenges, including delayed arrival of election materials and inadequate security in some areas, contributed to frustration and unrest. These conditions were exploited by political actors and their supporters, resulting in attacks on electoral officials and the snatching of ballot boxes. Security personnel, despite being deployed, often failed to respond effectively, or were perceived as biased,

which worsened the situation and caused more voters to stay away. Many individuals, particularly in areas known for political clashes, opted not to vote out of fear for their safety, further reducing voter turnout.

An INEC Official said: *"One of the major causes of election-related violence was the struggle for political dominance. Some party supporters and candidates saw the election as a do-or-die affair, leading to violent confrontations. This resulted in voter intimidation, discouraging many from coming out to vote"*. Another INEC Official added: *"The malfunctioning of BVAS in some polling units contributed to tensions that escalated into violence. Some voters and party agents accused INEC of deliberately manipulating the process, leading to disruptions. As a result, many voters left before accreditation, reducing turnout"*. Yet, another INEC Official said: *"Logistics challenges, such as late arrival of election materials and inadequate security presence in some areas, created an atmosphere of frustration. Some party thugs exploited this situation, attacking electoral officials and snatching ballot boxes. This violence scared away potential voters, affecting turnout"*.

The responses from the INEC officials indicated that election-related violence during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State was heavily influenced by political power struggles, with party supporters and candidates viewing the elections as a high-stakes contest. This perception led to violent confrontations and heightened tensions, especially where the election was considered a critical moment for political dominance. Such violence, including voter intimidation, discouraged many potential voters from participating, which ultimately resulted in a decreased voter turnout.

Furthermore, the malfunctioning of the BVAS in some polling units was identified as a key factor that exacerbated tensions. The technical issues with BVAS led to accusations of deliberate manipulation, especially from party agents and voters who saw the delays and disruptions as evidence of foul play. These technological failures contributed to a sense of distrust in the electoral process, prompting some voters to abandon the polling stations before accreditation was completed. This directly affected voter turnout, as the frustrations and loss of confidence caused many to leave without casting their votes.

The implication for the study is that the election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State was not only caused by direct confrontations among political actors and their supporters but was also exacerbated by systemic issues such as technological failures and perceptions of electoral manipulation. These factors compounded the overall atmosphere of fear and distrust, which discouraged voter participation. The study must therefore consider both the social dynamics of political rivalry and the technological and logistical challenges that contributed to the violence. These elements played a significant role in undermining the credibility of the election and diminishing voter turnout, which is crucial in understanding the broader implications of electoral violence on the democratic process in Nigeria. Further responses from election observers revealed thus:

An observer 1 said: *"From our observations, vote buying and party clashes were among the key triggers of election violence. Supporters of different candidates engaged in fights over control of polling units, leading to an unsafe voting environment that discouraged participation"*. Observer 2 added: *"Some voters were afraid to come out due to the fear of violence, especially in areas known for political clashes. Even though security personnel were deployed, their response to violence was sometimes slow, making the situation worse and reducing voter turnout"*.

The observations from the election observers identified two significant factors contributing to election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections. First, vote-buying and party clashes emerged as key triggers for violence, as supporters from different parties fought over control of polling units. This created an unsafe environment for voters, discouraging many from participating in the election. The violence not only disrupted the peaceful conduct of the election but also undermined the trust in the electoral process, as voters were deterred by the fear of confrontation and harm. Second, despite the deployment of security personnel, the slow response to violence in certain areas exacerbated the situation. This inefficiency in handling security concerns heightened the fear among potential voters, particularly in areas known for political clashes, leading them to refrain from voting. The failure of security forces to effectively maintain peace in some locations contributed to a growing sense of insecurity, which directly impacted voter turnout.

The implication for the study is that the occurrence of election-related violence, driven by vote-buying and party conflicts, significantly affected voter turnout in Akwa Ibom State. The unsafe environment created by these violent clashes, coupled with the perceived failure of security forces to intervene in a timely manner, fostered an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. This, in turn, discouraged many voters from coming out to cast their votes, thus reducing overall participation. For the study, it is crucial to examine how these forms of violence and the associated failures in maintaining security played a central role in undermining voter confidence and participation in the electoral process.

More so, an APC Candidate said: *"The violence was orchestrated by desperate politicians who saw losing as a threat to their political careers. Some of them sponsored thugs to disrupt voting in areas where they felt they would lose. This reduced turnout, especially in opposition strongholds"*. LP Candidate added: *"There were instances where security agents seemed to take sides, allowing violence to occur without proper intervention. Many voters who witnessed such bias felt unsafe and chose to leave without casting their votes. This significantly affected turnout in those areas"*.

The responses from the party candidates provided insights into the political dynamics fuelling election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections. According to the All-Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, the violence was largely orchestrated by desperate politicians who viewed the possibility of losing as a sig-

nificant threat to their political careers. To prevent this outcome, these politicians allegedly sponsored thugs to disrupt the electoral process, particularly in areas where they feared defeat, thus reducing voter turnout, especially in opposition strongholds. This claim suggests that political elites resorted to violence as a strategic tool to suppress voter participation in regions where they were less popular, in an effort to manipulate the election results to their advantage. On the other hand, the Labour Party (LP) candidate highlighted the role of security agents, pointing out instances where they seemed to take sides, either through inaction or bias. This perception of security personnel being partial in handling electoral violence led to a sense of insecurity among voters, who, witnessing the lack of proper intervention, chose not to cast their votes. This again resulted in decreased voter turnout, particularly in areas where voters felt that the security forces were not providing a neutral and effective presence to ensure their safety.

4.2. Implications of Election-Related Violence on Voters' Turnout in 2023 General Elections in Akwa Ibom State

Findings revealed that election-related violence during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State significantly contributed to low voter turnout. The spread of violent incidents through social media and news platforms instilled fear among the populace, discouraging many from participating in the electoral process. Additionally, misinformation and rumours about planned attacks heightened public anxiety, further fuelling voter apathy. Consequently, a large number of eligible voters chose to remain at home rather than risk their safety. A voter submitted thus: *"I arrived at my polling unit early, but as soon as violence broke out between party supporters, I left immediately. I was afraid for my life and decided not to vote. Many others left as well".* Another voter added: *"I saw ballot boxes being snatched and security personnel did nothing. It was discouraging because I felt my vote would not count. Some of my friends also stayed home because of similar fears".* Yet, another voter said: *"I had planned to vote, but when I heard about violence in nearby polling units, I decided to stay indoors. Many people in my area did the same because they did not want to risk their safety".*

The responses from the voters highlighted the direct and significant impact of election-related violence on voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The first voter expressed fear for their safety when violence erupted between party supporters at the polling unit, prompting them to leave and refrain from voting. This suggests that the presence of violent confrontations created an unsafe environment, which discouraged not only this voter but many others from participating. The second voter's account emphasised the perceived ineffectiveness of security personnel, as they witnessed ballot box snatching without any intervention. The lack of action by security forces further disillusioned voters, leading to a sense of futility and a belief that their votes would not count. This was also echoed

by the third voter, who chose not to vote after hearing about violence in neighbouring polling units, suggesting that rumours and fear of violence spread quickly, contributing to a broader atmosphere of insecurity that kept many potential voters away from the polls.

The implication for the study is clear: the presence of violence and the failure of security forces to act decisively significantly reduced voter turnout in Akwa Ibom State. The fear of violence, compounded by the perception that the electoral process was not being protected effectively, led to voter apathy and withdrawal. This highlights the importance of not only addressing the root causes of violence but also ensuring that security forces provide a visible and effective presence to safeguard voters and the integrity of the election. The failure to do so results in the disenfranchisement of citizens and undermines the legitimacy of the electoral process, making it imperative for future elections to include stronger preventive measures and better security protocols to protect voters and encourage higher turnout.

Journalist made a significant contribution in the study. For instance, the first journalist said: *"I covered several polling units and saw first-hand how violence erupted due to disagreements over vote counting. In some places, thugs attacked voters and INEC officials, causing many to flee. This drastically reduced voter turnout".* Another journalist added: *"Reports of violence spreading across different parts of the state created panic. Some voters who initially intended to vote decided against it after seeing social media posts and news updates about violent incidents".*

The responses from the journalists provided an insightful perspective on how election-related violence contributed to the decline in voter turnout during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The first journalist's first-hand account of violence at polling units, particularly due to disagreements over vote counting, underscores the volatility and intimidation that unfolded during the elections. The attack on voters and INEC officials not only disrupted the electoral process but also created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, prompting many people to flee the polling units. This direct observation reinforces the idea that violent incidents not only deter voters from participating but also have a ripple effect on the broader electoral environment, drastically reducing voter turnout. The second journalist's perspective adds another layer to this issue by highlighting the role of media in amplifying the fear surrounding election-related violence. Reports of violence spreading across the state, particularly via social media and news updates, created widespread panic. Potential voters, who may have initially planned to participate, were dissuaded from voting as they absorbed these reports. This suggests that information-whether factual or exaggerated-circulated rapidly, exacerbating public fear and further discouraging voter participation.

The implication of these findings for the study is significant. It illustrates how election-related violence, both in physical confrontations at polling units and through the media coverage of such incidents, directly impacted voter turn-

out. The fear induced by violence and the subsequent media amplification of these events created a climate of insecurity, where many voters chose to stay home rather than risk their safety. This highlights the need for robust security measures, as well as timely and accurate media reporting, to mitigate the impact of violence and ensure that voters feel confident and safe in participating in elections. The study underscores the critical role that both physical security and the management of public perception play in safeguarding voter turnout and the overall credibility of the electoral process.

Security agents who were critical stakeholders in the 2023 general elections made some contributions in the study. For instance, the first security agent said: *"In some cases, political thugs attacked polling units before security reinforcements could arrive. This led to voter apathy as people were too scared to come out and vote".* The second security agent added: *"The presence of armed gangs in certain areas made it difficult for voters to freely exercise their rights. The fear of being caught in the violence discouraged many from participating in the election".* Another security agent said: *"Misinformation and propaganda about planned violence also played a role. Even in areas where voting was peaceful, some voters stayed away because they feared violence would break out at any moment".* Yet, another security agent said: *"Some violent incidents were premeditated by political actors who wanted to suppress votes in certain areas. Unfortunately, this created a climate of fear, significantly reducing voter turnout".*

The responses from the security agents provided crucial insights into the dynamics of election-related violence and its direct impact on voter turnout in the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The presence of violence, the delayed response of security forces and the spread of misinformation emerged as significant contributors to voter apathy. The first security agent highlighted that political thug attacked polling units before security reinforcements arrived, creating an atmosphere of insecurity. This delay in security intervention allowed the violence to escalate, causing potential voters to fear for their safety. The lack of immediate protection discouraged people from coming out to vote, resulting in reduced voter participation. This demonstrates how the failure to secure polling units adequately can lead to diminished confidence in the electoral process and lower voter turnout. Similarly, the second security agent's statement about armed gangs controlling certain areas further points to the chilling effect of visible violence. Armed groups present a significant deterrent to voters who, fearing violence, choose to stay away from polling units. This fear-based avoidance further exacerbated the issue of voter turnout, particularly in areas where the presence of violence was more pronounced.

The response from third security agent also highlighted the role of misinformation. Even in areas where the election was relatively peaceful, rumours about impending violence spread through media channels, causing voters to hesitate or abstain from voting. Misinformation can create a pervasive climate of fear that ultimately contributes to voter disenfran-

chisement, especially when the truth about the safety of voting locations is unclear. Finally, the fourth security agent shaded light on the role of premeditated violence, where certain political actors strategically planned violent actions to suppress voting in specific areas. This shows a deliberate effort to undermine the electoral process, using fear and violence to alter the outcome of the elections. This strategic violence played a key role in dissuading voters from participating, particularly in areas where political actors felt vulnerable.

The implications for the study are significant. The findings emphasised that election-related violence, whether spontaneous or planned, creates an environment of fear that discourages voter turnout. Moreover, the slow response of security forces and the spread of false information further contributed to the problem. For future elections to be more credible and participatory, addressing these issues, such as improving security at polling units, preventing misinformation and ensuring swift action against electoral violence will be crucial. Without these interventions, violence will continue to be a major deterrent to voter participation, undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the electoral process.

4.3. Effectiveness of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State

The responses revealed that while the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) played a crucial role in reducing multiple voting and impersonation, its effectiveness was hindered by technical malfunctions, poor network connectivity and inconsistent implementation across polling units. The INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal was intended to enhance electoral transparency, but delays in real-time result uploads raised suspicions of manipulation and eroded public trust in the process. Election observers noted that while BVAS improved voter accreditation, authentication delays in some areas led to frustration and disenfranchisement. Party candidates acknowledged the positive impact of BVAS in curbing electoral fraud but criticised the IReV portal's inefficiency, particularly the delayed uploads, which fuelled doubts about the credibility of the elections.

Voters shared mixed experiences-some found BVAS effective, while others were unable to vote due to device failures and many questioned the transparency of the IReV portal when results were not accessible in real-time. Journalists emphasised that although these technologies were steps toward electoral reform, technical failures and logistical challenges undermined their credibility. Security agents also noted that while BVAS reduced fraud, its operational weaknesses allowed political actors to manipulate the system, while the inefficiency of IReV made it difficult to monitor election results and respond to security threats effectively. Overall, while the introduction of BVAS and IReV was a significant electoral innovation, their shortcomings, particularly regarding real-time functionality and reliability, limited their effectiveness in fully ensuring the credibility of the 2023 general elections.

In support of the above, an INEC Official said: *"The BVAS improved the accreditation process by reducing incidents of multiple voting and impersonation. However, challenges such as device malfunction and network issues in some areas affected the seamlessness of the process".* Another INEC Official added: *"While BVAS was effective in authenticating voters, the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal faced challenges in real-time upload of results. This raised concerns among stakeholders, as delayed uploads led to suspicions of electoral malpractice".* Yet, another INEC Official said: *"The introduction of BVAS was a step forward in ensuring voter credibility, as it prevented overvoting. However, discrepancies in results between polling units and those uploaded to IReV in some areas led to allegations of result manipulation, affecting public trust".*

The responses from the INEC officials provided critical insights into the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. While both systems were designed to improve the electoral process, their implementation faced several challenges that affected their overall effectiveness. The first INEC Official acknowledged that the BVAS significantly contributed to reducing electoral malpractices, particularly multiple voting and impersonation. However, the challenges with device malfunctions and network issues in some areas disrupted the process, affecting the system's reliability. This highlights a fundamental issue-while BVAS holds the potential to enhance the integrity of the accreditation process, technical glitches hindered its seamless operation. The inconsistency in the functioning of the system in different areas may have undermined voter confidence and eroded the perceived credibility of the process.

The second INEC Official pointed out the challenge with the IReV portal, which was intended to facilitate real-time result uploads and enhance transparency. The delay in uploading results on the IReV portal created concerns among stakeholders, who questioned the integrity of the election results. This delay fueled suspicions of electoral malpractice and diminished the public's trust in the overall election process. The implication here is that while the IReV portal was designed to provide transparency, its failure to operate in real-time raised questions about the transparency and credibility of the electoral process, particularly in a highly scrutinised environment. The third INEC Official's observation about discrepancies between polling unit results and those uploaded to the IReV portal further compounded the concerns regarding the credibility of the election. The allegations of result manipulation and the inconsistency in result reporting affected public trust, suggesting that while BVAS was effective in preventing certain electoral frauds, the IReV portal's operational shortcomings jeopardised its role in enhancing the election's credibility.

The implications of these findings for the study indicate that while the BVAS system helped to authenticate voters and reduce fraud, its effectiveness was limited by technical failures. Similarly, the IReV portal, which was expected to foster transparency, failed to do so consistently due to delays and discrepancies. These issues suggest that for future elections to be more credible, addressing the technological shortcomings of both systems will be crucial. Improving the reliability of the BVAS, ensuring real-time result uploads on IReV and addressing discrepancies between results at the polling unit level and those uploaded online are essential steps in enhancing the transparency and credibility of Nigeria's electoral process.

More so, election observers contributed to the study. For instance, the first Observer said: *"BVAS improved the voter accreditation process, making it harder for unregistered individuals to vote. However, in some loctions, delays in authentication caused frustration among voters and officials, leading to disenfranchisement".* Similarly, another Observer said: *"The IReV portal was meant to improve transparency, but technical glitches and delays in result uploads in some locations made the system vulnerable to criticisms. This affected its overall credibility in ensuring a free and fair election".*

The responses from the observers highlight both the successes and challenges associated with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The first observer noted that the BVAS system had a positive impact on the voter accreditation process by making it more difficult for unregistered individuals to vote. This helped in reducing cases of voter impersonation and multiple voting, which are common concerns in many electoral systems. However, the observer also pointed out that delays in the authentication process in some areas caused frustration among voters and election officials, leading to instances of disenfranchisement. This suggests that while the BVAS system was effective in enhancing the integrity of the election, its implementation was marred by technical issues that affected its reliability and accessibility, particularly in locations with slower authentication processes.

The second observer raised concerns about the effectiveness of the IReV portal in enhancing electoral transparency. The portal was designed to improve the credibility of the election by providing real-time access to result uploads. However, the observer pointed out that technical glitches and delays in result uploads in some locations led to criticisms of the system, undermining its intended role of ensuring transparency. The failure of the IReV portal to consistently function as planned raised doubts about the overall credibility of the election results, as it fueled suspicions of manipulation or malpractice.

The implication of these findings for the study is clear: while both BVAS and IReV were introduced as key technological innovations to enhance the credibility of the 2023 general elections, their effectiveness was limited by technical failures. BVAS contributed positively to voter accreditation by reducing fraud, but delays in authentication led to disenfranchisement in some areas, which affected its overall impact. The IReV portal, while intended to improve

transparency, faced challenges such as delays and glitches that undermined its credibility. These issues underscore the importance of addressing the technical reliability of both systems to ensure that future elections are perceived as free, fair and transparent. For the 2023 elections, the failures of these systems suggest that further investment in technology, as well as training for election officials, is essential to guarantee that technological tools can live up to their potential in enhancing electoral credibility.

Candidates of political parties formed part of the participants. A PDP Candidate said: *"The introduction of BVAS reduced cases of multiple voting and underage voting, but its efficiency varied across different polling units. Inconsistent application of the technology created doubts about its overall effectiveness"*. LP Candidate added: *"The IReV portal was a great initiative, but its credibility was questioned due to the late uploading of results in some areas. This delay created room for speculation and raised concerns about possible result manipulation"*. APC Candidate said: *"While BVAS helped in preventing certain electoral frauds, the failure of IReV to upload results in real time reduced the trust voters and candidates had in the process. INEC should have ensured a more reliable system before full deployment"*.

The responses from the political candidates reveal a range of perspectives on the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, with a focus on the strengths and weaknesses of these technologies in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The PDP candidate acknowledged that while the BVAS system played a crucial role in reducing cases of multiple voting and underage voting, its efficiency was inconsistent across different polling units. This inconsistency raised doubts about the overall effectiveness of BVAS. The implication of this observation is that, despite the potential of BVAS to improve voter accreditation and curb electoral fraud, its uneven implementation across various locations highlighted the need for more thorough training and technical support to ensure uniform functionality across the country. Inconsistent application could undermine the trust in the system, making it difficult for stakeholders to fully embrace its role in ensuring electoral credibility.

The LP candidate expressed support for the IReV portal as a great initiative, but raised concerns about the credibility of the system due to delays in the uploading of results in some areas. This delay fuelled speculation and concerns about potential result manipulation, thereby diminishing the transparency that IReV was intended to provide. The implication for the study is that while the IReV portal had the potential to enhance electoral transparency by making results more accessible in real time, its failure to consistently deliver results on time had the opposite effect, leading to doubts about the integrity of the election process. These concerns highlight the need for technological improvements to ensure that results are uploaded accurately and promptly, as delays can erode public confidence in the entire electoral system.

The APC candidate similarly recognised the role of BVAS in preventing certain forms of electoral fraud but pointed out the significant problem of IReV's failure to upload results in real time. The resulting loss of trust among voters and candidates was cited as a key issue, suggesting that the credibility of the entire election process was undermined by the technical shortcomings of IReV. The candidate also emphasised that INEC should have ensured a more reliable system before fully deploying it. This feedback further emphasises the need for INEC to prioritise the reliability and performance of its technological systems before their deployment on such a large scale, as any failure to do so could compromise the credibility of the election.

Overall, the responses highlight that while both BVAS and IReV were seen as crucial steps forward in enhancing the credibility of the election process, technical shortcomings, including inconsistent application of BVAS and delays in IReV result uploads, undermined their effectiveness. The implications for the study are clear: the effectiveness of these technological innovations was compromised by operational failures that led to doubts about the integrity and transparency of the elections. To ensure the credibility of future elections, addressing these technical issues, including improving the consistency of BVAS application and the reliability of the IReV portal, will be essential.

From the voters' perspective, one of them said: *"BVAS worked well in my polling unit and it made accreditation faster. However, some voters were unable to vote because the device failed to recognise their fingerprints or facial identity"*. Another voter added: *"IREv was supposed to help people track election results, but I could not access some polling unit results even after several hours. This made me question the transparency of the process"*. Yet, another voter said: *"The idea behind BVAS and IReV was good, but the challenges with real-time uploads and device failures in some areas reduced public confidence in the elections. Many people felt their votes did not count"*.

The responses from voters offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in the 2023 general elections and highlight both their potential and the challenges they faced. The fist voter highlighted that BVAS worked effectively in their polling unit, speeding up the accreditation process. However, the failure of the device to recognise fingerprints or facial identities in some instances led to voter disenfranchisement. This points to the reliability issues with BVAS, as its performance was not consistent across different polling units. Although BVAS contributed to the speed and efficiency of voter accreditation, these failures in biometric recognition caused frustration and limited its ability to fully serve its purpose. The implication of this is that BVAS, while beneficial in theory, must undergo improvements in its biometric recognition system to ensure all eligible voters can be accredited, regardless of device limitations or technical malfunctions.

The second voter's response regarding the IReV portal indicates that while the system was meant to improve trans-

parency by allowing voters to track election results, the delays and inaccessibility of results in certain areas raised doubts about the system's reliability. This delayed access to information led to questions about the transparency of the election process, as voters were unable to verify results in real time. The lack of timely result uploads on IReV diminishes the perceived credibility of the election, as voters may assume that the delays were indicative of manipulation or inefficiency. The implication here is that IReV's intended role in providing transparent and accessible election results was hindered by technical glitches and delays, which may have eroded public trust" in the process.

The third voter provided a broader perspective, stating that while the ideas behind BVAS and IReV were sound, the real-time upload challenges and device failures led to a loss of public confidence. Many voters felt that their participation in the electoral process was undermined when these technologies failed to function as expected. This sentiment reflects a widespread disillusionment among voters, as technical problems like these made people feel their votes did not count. The implication of this response is that while BVAS and IReV were innovations aimed at improving election credibility, their technical failures in practice resulted in disenchantment with the electoral process. This underscores the importance of ensuring robust, reliable technology systems that are tested and proven before being fully implemented on such a critical scale.

In summary, the voters' experiences suggest that both BVAS and IReV had the potential to enhance election credibility, but the technical challenges they faced-such as device malfunctions and delays in result uploads-undermined their effectiveness. These failures led to voter frustration, disenchantment and a diminished sense of confidence in the overall electoral process, highlighting the need for improvements in both systems to restore public trust in future elections.

From the perspective of the journalists, one of them said: *"BVAS helped reduce electoral fraud by ensuring that only accredited voters could vote. However, technical failures in some areas created delays and tensions, affecting voter confidence".* Another journalist added: *"The IReV portal was expected to enhance transparency, but many polling unit results were not uploaded immediately. This delay led to suspicions of result manipulation, undermining the credibility of the process".* Yet, another journalist added: *"While the technological innovations were steps in the right direction, their effectiveness was compromised by logistical issues. Some voters lost trust in the process due to inconsistencies in the use of IReV".*

The responses from the journalists offered valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, highlighting both successes and significant challenges. The first Journalist acknowledged that BVAS played an important role in reducing electoral fraud by ensuring that only accredited voters participated in the

election. However, the technical failures in some areas led to delays, which created tension and undermined voter confidence. The implication here is that while BVAS contributed to the integrity of voter accreditation, the system's failures in certain areas could have had a negative impact on voter trust and, ultimately, voter turnout. These technical challenges point to the necessity of strengthening BVAS technology and ensuring that issues such as delays and malfunctions are addressed in future elections.

The second Journalist raised concerns about the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, noting that while it was intended to enhance transparency, many polling unit results were not uploaded immediately. The delay in uploading results sparked suspicions of result manipulation, thereby undermining the credibility of the electoral process. The delay in result uploads contributed to a perception that the system was unreliable, leading to doubts about the accuracy and fairness of the election outcomes. This suggests that while IReV was designed to improve transparency, its operational failures, such as delays in uploading results, had the opposite effect, eroding public confidence in the electoral process. The third Journalist emphasised that while the technological innovations represented a step in the right direction, logistical issues compromised their effectiveness. Inconsistent use of IReV and other system-related problems contributed to a loss of trust among voters, diminishing the perceived effectiveness of these technologies. This highlights the importance of not only introducing new technological systems but also ensuring that they are supported by effective logistics, training and a seamless implementation process. The combination of technical and logistical failures points to the need for a comprehensive review and improvement of both the BVAS and IReV systems to ensure that they can function reliably in future elections.

In summary, while both BVAS and IReV were seen as important innovations aimed at enhancing the credibility of the election process, their effectiveness was compromised by technical failures, delays and logistical challenges. These issues led to a loss of trust among voters and journalists, suggesting that future elections must focus on addressing these technical and operational shortcomings to ensure the credibility and transparency of the electoral process. The findings underscore the importance of robust systems, comprehensive testing and logistical support to ensure the successful implementation of technological innovations in elections.

Security agents contributed as well to the study. For instance, a Police Officer said: *"BVAS contributed to reducing election-related fraud, but some politicians and their supporters exploited its technical failures to disrupt the process in certain areas".* NSCDC personnel added: *"The IReV portal had the potential to improve electoral transparency, but the delays in result uploads in some polling units made it difficult for security agencies to assess real-time developments and respond to threats appropriately".*

The responses from the security agents provide additional perspectives on the effectiveness of the Bimodal

Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the 2023 general elections. Both systems were seen to contribute positively to the election process, but their effectiveness was impacted by certain limitations that affected the overall security and transparency of the elections. The Police Offer noted that BVAS played a key role in reducing election-related fraud, particularly by curbing issues like multiple voting and impersonation. However, the agent also highlighted that some politicians and their supporters exploited the system's technical failures to disrupt the process in certain areas. This observation suggests that while BVAS helped improve voter accreditation, its technical challenges were also used as an opportunity for electoral malpractice. The exploitation of these issues indicates that despite the system's potential to reduce fraud, its vulnerabilities allowed for manipulation, which could have compromised the integrity of the election process in some regions. This emphasises the need for stronger safeguards and more reliable technology to prevent such exploitation in future elections.

The NSCDC Personnel pointed out that the IReV portal had the potential to improve electoral transparency by enabling real-time result viewing, but delays in result uploads hindered the ability of security agencies to assess developments and respond to threats promptly. The delay in uploading results not only affected the transparency of the election process but also created a challenge for security personnel in maintaining law and order. The implication here is that the delays in result uploads reduced the ability of security agents to monitor and control the situation effectively, which may have contributed to a sense of instability and insecurity in certain areas. This further exacerbated concerns over the credibility of the election, as the inability to quickly verify results left room for speculation and allegations of foul play.

Overall, the responses from the security agents indicated that while BVAS and IReV were designed to enhance the credibility and transparency of the electoral process, their effectiveness was undermined by technical failures and delays. These issues not only compromised public trust in the election outcomes but also made it more difficult for security agencies to maintain order and address potential threats in real time. The findings suggest that to improve the credibility of future elections, there needs to be a focus on enhancing the reliability of both BVAS and IReV, addressing their technical challenges and ensuring that results are uploaded in a timely manner to support transparency and effective security operations.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings from the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State reveals a complex and multifaceted picture of election-related violence and its consequences on voter turnout, particularly in light of technological innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal. The

interplay between political rivalry, operational shortcomings, media influence and technological constraints collectively shaped the electoral experience in the state, echoing concerns raised in the broader literature on Nigeria's electoral landscape.

Political violence during the elections in Akwa Ibom State was largely driven by intense struggles for political dominance, where parties and candidates viewed the election as a decisive opportunity to secure control. This perception led to widespread use of party loyalists and hired thugs to intimidate voters and disrupt electoral activities. As a result, a climate of fear pervaded many communities, discouraging voter participation. These findings aligned with the work of Moliki and Oluwatobi (2023), who identified factors such as political entitlement, ethnic tension and excessive monetisation of politics as key drivers of violence during the 2023 elections in Lagos State. The consequences of such violence, as seen both in Lagos and Akwa Ibom States, were detrimental to democratic participation and national cohesion, fostering division, distrust and voter apathy.

The fear generated by clashes between supporters of different political parties, reports of armed attacks and the perceived bias or inefficiency of security forces led many voters to question the safety and integrity of the electoral process. These dynamics align with the findings of Ola (2018), who linked electoral violence to the proliferation of small arms and highlighted its role in undermining public confidence in elections. Similarly, Ogbonna (2024) noted that fears of violence, along with mistrust in political leaders and electoral bodies, significantly contributed to low voter turnout during the presidential election in the Bwari Area Council, despite a large number of registered voters.

Logistical inefficiencies also played a significant role in facilitating violence and hampering voter participation in Akwa Ibom State. Delays in the delivery of election materials, inadequate security presence and technical issues with the BVAS devices created a fertile ground for unrest and voter frustration. These operational flaws aligned with the findings of Kassem and Osasona (2021), who observed that technical difficulties with the smart card reader during elections slowed the accreditation process and disenfranchised voters due to network failures and verification challenges.

While BVAS was introduced to enhance transparency and prevent electoral fraud through biometric verification, its inconsistent deployment and frequent malfunctions limited its effectiveness. This uneven experience, with some voters benefiting from seamless accreditation and others facing exclusion due to faulty devices, fostered dissatisfaction. These findings are supported by Ofomiyoan and Ikenga (2023), who, despite acknowledging the success of BVAS in Anambra State's 2021 election, also emphasised the importance of public awareness and proper deployment to ensure the system's credibility.

Likewise, the IReV portal, intended to enhance transparency by providing real-time access to election results,

failed to meet expectations in Akwa Ibom State. Delays in result uploads raised suspicions of manipulation and weakened public trust. This mirrored nationwide frustrations as voters and candidates alike questioned the reliability of the system. Journalists struggled to report timely and accurate updates and security agents faced difficulties responding to incidents due to delayed or unclear data, a concern that further exposed the fragility of the election management infrastructure.

These technological and logistical setbacks, despite their intended purpose of fostering credibility, ultimately undermined public confidence. Okundia (2022) similarly found in Edo State that while the adoption of ICT tools improved transparency and reflected the electorate's desires, their effectiveness depended on consistent implementation and technical reliability. The case of Akwa Ibom illustrates the importance of not only adopting technology but also ensuring its functionality and accessibility across diverse polling units.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that while innovations such as BVAS and IReV represent significant steps toward electoral reform in Nigeria, their effectiveness is contingent upon proper deployment, infrastructure support and stakeholder trust. The persistent challenge of political violence, logistical inefficiencies and technological failures created an electoral environment marked by fear, exclusion and disillusionment in Akwa Ibom State. These realities echo broader national trends identified in the literature, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reforms that address both human and technological aspects of election management. Without such reforms, the democratic promise of transparency, participation and accountability will remain elusive.

6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the role of electoral technology in managing election-related violence in Nigeria, with a specific focus on its application during the 2023 general elections. Specific attention was given to the causes of election-related violence during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, the implications of the violence and the effectiveness of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal in enhancing the credibility of the election process. The study found that election-related violence in Akwa Ibom State was primarily fuelled by intense political rivalries, logistical challenges and security lapses. Politicians, in their desperation to secure victory, resorted to violent tactics, including the use of thugs to intimidate voters, disrupt voting processes and manipulate results. The presence of such violence significantly impacted voter turnout, as many potential voters felt unsafe and chose to stay away from the polls.

Additionally, the malfunctioning of BVAS in certain areas and the delayed upload of results to the IReV portal created doubts about the transparency and credibility of the

electoral process. These challenges were further compounded by the lack of timely security responses to election-related violence, which fueled voter apathy and contributed to the perceived lack of fairness in the election.

The findings underscored the critical need for improved security measures and better coordination during elections to prevent violence and ensure voter safety. Furthermore, the technical issues with BVAS and IReV point to the need for enhancing the reliability of these systems to guarantee that the elections are not only free and fair but also transparent. The findings also suggest that the credibility of the electoral process hinges not only on technological innovations but also on their consistent and equitable application across all polling units, accompanied by prompt and effective intervention from relevant authorities in the event of disturbances.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on electoral integrity and technology by highlighting both the successes and limitations of BVAS and IReV in the 2023 elections. It offers valuable insights into how the implementation of these systems can be further optimised to foster greater transparency, reduce electoral fraud and enhance public trust in the electoral process. The study also provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of election-related violence and its impact on voter behaviour, especially in areas that are prone to electoral manipulation and intimidation.

For future research, there is a need to explore the long-term effects of election-related violence on voter engagement and confidence in the electoral system. Additionally, further studies could investigate how to improve the technical infrastructure behind BVAS and IReV to prevent malfunctions and delays, ensuring smoother and more reliable electoral processes. It would also be valuable to examine the role of media and misinformation in shaping public perceptions of electoral fairness and the impact of such perceptions on voter turnout. Lastly, further research could focus on the effectiveness of security measures in preventing violence during elections and ensuring the safety of voters, particularly in politically volatile regions.

In conclusion, while the 2023 general elections marked an important step towards improving Nigeria's electoral process through technological innovations like BVAS and IReV, the study revealed significant challenges in their implementation. These challenges, combined with election-related violence, highlighted the need for continued reforms to ensure that future elections are not only technologically advanced but also secure, transparent and conducive to full voter participation.

6.1. Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, the following practical recommendations are proposed to enhance the credibility of future elections in Nigeria, particularly in reducing election-related violence and improving the effectiveness of electoral technologies like BVAS and IReV:

i. Strengthen Security and Law Enforcement Measures: There is an urgent need to improve security during elections to ensure the safety of voters and electoral officials. Adequate deployment of security personnel in conflict-prone areas, timely response to violence and the establishment of rapid-response units in areas with a history of electoral violence could reduce voter intimidation and unrest. Additionally, ensuring that security agencies are impartial and well-trained to handle election-related crises will help to maintain public trust in the electoral process. The Federal Government, through INEC and the National Assembly should establish an independent Electoral Offences Commission with full prosecutorial powers.

ii. Enhance the Reliability of BVAS and IReV: To address the technical challenges that arose with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV), INEC should invest in regular maintenance and testing of the systems ahead of elections. Ensuring that there are sufficient backup devices and infrastructure to handle high volumes of accreditation and result uploads is crucial. Moreover, it is important to establish a system for real-time troubleshooting and support to prevent delays and ensure that the systems perform optimally throughout the election process.

iii. Improve Voter Education and Awareness: Public awareness campaigns should be strengthened to educate voters about the election process, the functionality of BVAS and how to track election results via IReV. This will not only empower voters to better navigate the technology but also reduce confusion and frustration that may lead to disenfranchisement. Additionally, providing clear and accessible communication about the steps taken to improve election security and transparency will help rebuild trust in the electoral system.

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