

Policyweekly

New Elections Technology and Approach to Electoral Violence

Looking Forward to the Forthcoming Ekiti and Osun States Elections



Policy Recommendations

- 1** The BVAS machine should be updated with a camera and a geographical location feature.
- 2** There is a need to consider widening the powers of INEC to reject elections that are patently flawed due to violence against poll workers.
- 3** There is a need to increase public awareness of the dangers of electoral violence.

The recently developed Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) has prompted election riggers to evolve a new pattern of electoral violence to circumvent the effectiveness of the BVAS. The machine and its operators are captured and forced to vote and prepare results for the political interests represented by the captors. Two imminent elections to watch and prepare for these emerging patterns of violence include Ekiti and Osun states. The two states do not have a fair page on electoral violence and malpractices. The bye-election for [Ekiti East constituency 1](#) that would have been held in March 2022 was suspended as three persons were killed in electoral violence during the exercise. Also, there were reports of bloody violence in Osun state during the [2018 gubernatorial election](#). These incidences of violence were efforts to create an atmosphere of fear by political thugs to gain an advantage over other contestants in the election.

As the technology of elections improves, the patterns of electoral violence also continue to change. Accordingly, there are good grounds to fear that media reports of what happened in Imo state in her recent 2022 election at Ngor Okpala constituency are

capable of playing out in these two states if measures to prevent them are not considered expeditiously and embedded in the election management system besides adequate security preparations. Thus, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly reflects the evolving technologies of election management and the possible hindrances based on the few instances in which they have been tried.

Emerging Trends in Electoral Violence

As old avenues of election rigging are closing due to technological innovations in election management, newer forms of violent electoral malpractices are emerging to circumvent the technologies. Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) technology has a facility for recognising each registered voter's iris, fingerprints, and unique facial features. In other words, the BVAS is a digital register of voters with biometric features. Besides, the BVAS machine can also upload Polling Unit level results to the Independent National Electoral Commission - INEC results viewing (IREV) portal. It contains both the particulars of voters at the polling units' level and would record the exact number of accredited voters for the particular election.

Since it was introduced, BVAS was deployed in Isoko South Constituency 1 Delta State Bye-election on 10th September 2021 and later in March 2022 at the Ngor Okpala elections in Imo state. Unfortunately, the exciting innovation of the machine and efforts to use it to bid a final farewell to election rigging and other malpractices confronted a major setback at the Ngor Okpala election. The form of electoral violence applied in that election was the violent invasion of the polling centres and the kidnap of poll workers together with the election materials. The Imo State election report shows that poll workers were kidnapped and taken to a location where they were compelled to thumbprint the voters' cards to reflect the number of accredited voters in the BVAS machines. The APC party accused of this violence was declared victorious by the election management body. This outcome is a failure of a significant litmus test and a source of concern for forthcoming elections in 2022.

Ekiti and Osun States: A View of Electoral Violence from Behind

The entire process of election management improvement aims to achieve free and credible elections. While it does so, it invariably reduces electoral violence. Nonetheless, electoral violence continues to find ways of resurging as a problem in the election management process. In each case, it tries to undermine the progress of the technology. The new track that opened in Imo state has the potential of being deployed in Ekiti and Osun states elections.

Before [the 2014 governorship election in Ekiti state](#), violence was a major worry expressed in a broad stakeholders meeting. The range of violence includes harassment, killings, ballot snatching, and other behaviours that detract from free and credible elections. In the following electoral cycle in [2018](#), the sitting governor accused the police of watching while thugs snatched ballot boxes during the governorship election. Also, in the same election, there were faulty card readers, [violent acts](#), such as the kidnapping of party agents, and the prevention of voters from peacefully casting their ballots by thugs hired by one

of the major political parties. More recently, there was a violent disruption of [Ekiti East constituency 1](#) bye-election on Saturday 20th March 2022. These developments create the atmosphere around which the coming governorship election would occur in the state during the year. The electoral environment of the state is fraught with fear and bears concern, especially as the Independent National Electoral Commission continues to enhance its election management technology to improve the credibility of elections.

Osun state governorship electoral cycle also matures again this year in a related vein. Events in the state's previous elections invite care in her coming polls. [The 2018 rerun governorship election](#) held on 22nd September 2018 was marred by thuggery and voter intimidation. Three persons were [injured](#) during the election. Even in [party primaries](#) of the All Progressives Congress party and People's Democratic Party ward Congress, there were fears of violence given the electoral antecedents of the state. Overall, and just like in Ekiti state, the persisting resort to the use of thuggery and violence in elections undermines the usefulness of the new technologies of election management in Nigeria.

In the light of the prevailing electoral atmosphere in Ekiti and Osun states and the emerging pattern of violence demonstrated recently in the Imo state elections, there are some further challenges for the technology developed so far for election administration as well as human factors essential to achieving a regime of peaceful elections in the country.

Ways forward

Two factors that emerge from the issue of election administration related to emerging technologies suggest that technology is inevitable to have dependable elections in contemporary times. But technology in itself depends on human skills and, above all, support and commitment to the aims of producing the machines. Hence, the way forward would be tied to solutions that target the technology and the electoral behaviour of the people, both as ordinary citizens, contestants in elections, and party supporters. On that note, we suggest the following:

1. The BVAS machine is an integrated package with a voter register that can accredit and retain figures of accredited voters. It also has features for biometric and facial recognition and the capacity to transmit election results to INEC Results Viewing centres. Nextier SPD suggests two essential security features for inclusion in the machine by improving the machine. The first feature is the attachment of security cameras on the device to record what happens within its perimeters. This would provide easy lead to thugs who invade polling centres to snatch voting materials since the cameras would capture and transmit their images. The second security feature that may be considered for the machine is the geographical location feature. This feature would help to track the location and movements of the device so that even if poll workers are kidnapped and moved out of the polling units, the location feature and movements track would be the basis to explore why the machine must be located outside the polling centres when it should be in use for election. If it is possible to integrate these features prior to the coming elections in Ekiti

and Osun states, the outcomes are likely better than in previous experiences. The GIS can be configured so that every machine is tied to a particular polling station and cannot work outside that polling station.

2. INEC does not seem independent enough if it cannot reject the result of an election in the face of an apparent breach of electoral processes reported by its workers. For example, in the election at Ngor Okpala, Imo state, victory was still declared in favour of the party which INEC workers had identified to have used violence. Thus, there is a need to consider widening the powers of INEC to reject elections that are patently flawed due to violence against poll workers.
3. It appears that electoral or voter education has concentrated its efforts on voting procedures and not enough on educating the public on the dangers of electoral violence. This area of training must be made widespread to include contestants in elections, political parties, security men, etc.

Conclusion

The recent innovations in election technology, beginning with digitalised permanent voters' cards, smart card reader, Z pad, and the BVAS, are sure signs of commitment to progress in our elections. However, the human factor related to desperate efforts by politicians to win victory continues to challenge each stage of this improvement towards a better election. This suggests that technology is only one of the necessities but not a sufficient condition for achieving credible elections. Therefore, building on the technological progress of our elections so far and civic education are important directions for a better electoral regime

Authors:

Dr. Ben Nwosu is an Associate Consultant at Nextier SPD and a Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria Enugu Campus, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Nsukka Campus.

Dr Ndu Nwokolo is a Managing Partner and Chief Executive at Nextier SPD and an Honourary Research Fellow, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham, UK.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.nextierspd.com) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

Weekly Update



Towards a Decentralised Electricity Market – The Lagos State Electricity Policy

Nextier Sample Publications



Jihadist Violence and Military Resurgence: The Crisis of Fragile Democratisation in Africa

In just over six months in 2021, coups made a rude comeback in Sudan, Mali, Chad, and Guinea.



Conflicts and the Dilemma of Traditional Rulers: Examining Nigeria's North-Central Region

The North-Central Zone has been in the eye of the storm of Nigeria's multiple conflicts for several years.



A Resource Conflict Perspective: Questioning the Lingerin Zamfara Crises

The conflict in Zamfara is one instance of the festering conflicts in the North West of Nigeria with its peculiar grisly tales and very dim prospects of resolution in the near future.



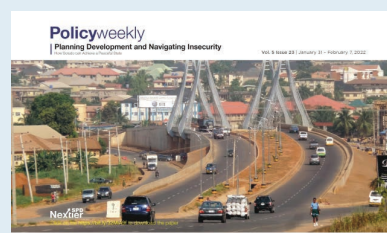
Beyond Farmers and Herders: Natural Resource Conflicts in the North-Central

Resource conflicts have remained intractable in the North-Central Zone of Nigeria.



Bloodletting Gold in Zamfara State: Reflecting on Illicit Mining and Violence

Zamfara State has gained infamy for bloodletting connected to illicit gold mining activities.



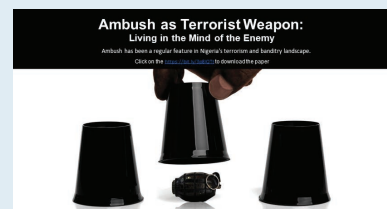
Planning Development and Navigating Insecurity: How Soludo can Achieve a Peaceful State

As Anambra State Governor-elect Prof Charles Soludo prepares to take the mantle of leadership on March 17, 2022, a flurry of dreams and great expectations reverberates across the State and beyond.



The Sit-at-home Protest: Its Impact on Education

Ultimately, educational standards are likely to suffer a decline.



Ambush as Terrorist Weapon: Living in the Mind of the Enemy

Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.