

Chapter 6

Voters' Perception of the Adequacy and Suitability of e-Voting in the Nigeria Polity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the perception of academics regarding the suitability and adequacy of e-Voting in the Nigeria polity. A qualitative approach using interviews as the data collection instruments was employed. Five research questions were developed and used in the interviews. The population of the study comprised academic staff in the South West Nigerian universities. From this population, 250 academic staff were purposely selected from five universities. This represents the sample for the study. Five research questions were developed and used in the interviews. The results demonstrated that Nigerians are aware of e-Voting systems, the advantages of e-Voting revealed include ease of voting, ease of counting, electoral vote fraud prevention, and cost reduction. To a great extent, Nigeria is e-Voting ready, and the e-Voting system is relevant to the Nigeria electoral system. Respondents find electronic voting desirable in Nigeria given reasons such as saving time/cost, queuing reduction, and Nigeria being technologically advanced enough to carry out a fast voting process. Hindrances to e-Voting and recommendations for the effective adoption of e-Voting in the Nigeria polity were highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

E-Voting, or electronic voting, refers to any voting process where an electronic means is used for vote casting and vote counting. E-Voting methods

include optical-scan voting systems, specialized voting systems like Direct Recording Electronic systems (DRE) punch cards, national IDs, the Internet, computer networks, and telephony systems (Stonestreet, 2010). It is a form of electronic voting that utilises computer networks to allow for the casting of a vote remotely from the place

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0324-0.ch006

of tabulation. Electronic voting can be undertaken in either closed or open networks, depending on the nature of the electorate. Electronic voting has many advantages over the traditional way of voting. Some of these advantages are lesser cost, faster tabulation of results, improved accessibility, greater accuracy, and lower risk of human and mechanical errors. Many countries however have expressed concern over the possibility that electronic voting can lead to massive electoral malpractices (Schneier, 2007). However, others have argued that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

According to the Ace Project Organization (2009), e-Voting is practiced in countries such as Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Europe, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, and The United States of America. A few countries such as Nigeria in Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa are working towards having electronic voting and studies are still under consideration to find out if e-Voting is necessary, and consideration is being given on how it will be carried out to accommodate both literate and illiterate voters. As observed by some Nigerians, electronic voting suits large, developed countries, but Nigeria is a developing country with a large population but low technological advancement, thus not ready to adopt electronic voting (Umobong, 2006; ARC News Online, 2007).

According to a news report of Daily Trust (Abuja), posted on the 19th November 2008, entitled "Nigeria: Election Chief Wants E-Voting for 2011," Nigeria has been urged to begin to educate citizens on the need to adopt the electronic voting method. On this note, there have been various formats of voting system in Nigeria but none of these has yielded positive results. It is in the light of this that this study was designed to look into the voters' perception regarding the suitability and adequacy of e-Voting in the Nigerian polity.

Some of the questions answered by the study include whether or not the e-Voting system is adequate or suitable for conducting elections in Nigeria; Whether or not Nigeria is e-Voting ready; and Whether or not e-Voting is relevant to the Nigerian electoral system, considering the fact that many voters are yet to be ICT literate? Studies of this kind have not been conducted before in the Nigerian context. Similarly, Nigeria has considered the option of adopting e-Voting in the conduct of its previous elections, but this has never worked out. Conducting this study will help in bringing to the fore the adequacy or otherwise of Nigeria in adopting e-Voting systems in elections. It was expected that the outcome of the study would provide a basis on whether or not Nigeria could adopt e-Voting in elections. Furthermore, the outcome would provide justification for supporters to agitate for the adoption of e-Voting in elections.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study was to examine the voters' perception regarding the suitability and adequacy of e-Voting in the Nigerian polity.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the Nigerians' awareness of e-Voting.
2. Determine the perception of voters about the adequacy of the e-Voting system in Nigeria
3. Find out whether or not Nigeria is e-Voting ready.
4. Examine the relevance of e-Voting to the Nigerian electoral system.
5. Investigate the reasons for desiring or not desiring e-Voting.
6. Identify factors that can hinder the adoption of e-Voting in Nigeria.

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