

Technology and Election Management: Assessing Application in Ad-Hoc Staff Recruitment during the 2023 General Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has made gradual and sustained progress in her electoral process from the introduction of the electronic register of voters between 2003 to 2007, to the introduction of the BVAS and IReV ahead of the 2023 general election. These technological advancements have revolutionized electoral processes in Nigeria in a bid to improve credibility. Yet, concerns persist concerning the credibility of the process as well as the integrity of electoral staff. Specifically, ad-hoc staff have been widely criticised as complicit parties to some malpractices perpetrated during elections. This study proposes the adoption of technology in the recruitment and deployment of ad-hoc staff to improve the recruitment of quality personnel and minimise, human interference and limit the possibility of political influence. The objective of the study was to assess practices in the application of technology in the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff in Nigeria's elections. Grounded in institutional theory, the research explored the institutional and societal constraints hindering full technological adoption in recruitment processes. Employing a descriptive survey research design, data from primary and secondary sources were analysed thematically, Findings showed that despite some advancements made such as the creation of INEC Portal for Recruitment of Electoral Staff (INEC PRES), the recruitment process remained largely manual and susceptible to manipulation. The use of technology was also found not to improve the recruitment of qualified personnel or obliterated human interference. This, as findings revealed, stemmed from challenges including training dependency, external influences, resource limitations and limits in legal and operational provisions for the use of technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment. Recommendations included fully automating recruitment processes and improving commitment to credible election by credible electoral staff through value reorientation.

Key words: *Technology, Institutional Theory, Electoral Staff, Qualified Ad-Hoc Staff, Ad-Hoc Staff Management, Human Interference and Recruitment of Electoral Staff.*

Background to the Study

Nigeria has increasingly turned to technology to improve the quality of elections. In the early 2000s, the Independent National Electoral Commission under the leadership of Abel Guobadia and Maurice Iwu highlighted the importance of shifting from a manual voters' register to a technology-based electronic register (Abodunrin, Oloye, & Alaba, 2018; Ayeni & Esan, 2018; Tobi, 2014). Under Professor Attahiru Jega, this turn to technology was taken a step further by introducing the Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) (Nwagwu, 2016; 2015; Nwangwu, Onah, & Otu, 2018). Following the end of Professor Jega's tenure in 2015, Professor Mahmood took over the reins of INEC and even exerted more efforts towards improving technological safeguards on the quality of the electoral process by introducing the Biometric Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) (Acheampong, 2023). The technological devices which came into full use during the 2023 general elections, gave Nigerians some degree of confidence in the process during the pre-election period, and served to check against some of the often-perpetrated malpractices in the Nigerian electoral processes (Acheampong, 2023).

Despite technological advances that were made over the years, there had been concerns about the limits of technology. It has been argued that the capacity of technology to safeguard electoral credibility was limited by the nature and character of the people who use and control the technology as well as the predominant value system of the broader population (Abodunrin, Oloye & Alaba, 2018; Acheampong, 2023). Where the users of the technology are unbothered about the credibility of the system and are out to thwart the process, technology may end up aiding in the destruction of the process rather than improving it. This concern holds much weight when viewed in relation to the key players and complexities surrounding Nigerian electoral processes. Beyond the 'cannot-be-bothered' attitude of many citizens in the country during elections as evident in the pervasiveness of vote-trading, electoral staff themselves often act in ways that undermine the credibility of the system. A notable example here is the case of the Adamawa Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Yunusa Hudu Ari, who, appropriated the powers of the Returning Officer and announced a result for the 2023 governorship election in the state while elections were still ongoing (Livinus, 2023). This is one of the many cases among the staff of the commission who are bound by oath and moral obligation to uphold the credibility of the system.

Beyond the actions of the staff of the commission, the activities of ad-hoc staff contribute significantly to determining the level of credibility of elections. Given the geographical scope of Nigeria and the number of personnel required for elections, INEC relies on ad-hoc staff recruitment from serving members of the National Youth Service Corps, academic staff and students in tertiary institutions, and sometimes, even from the general public to conduct elections. The country has 36 states, 774 local government areas, 8,809 wards or Registration Areas, and 176,846 Polling Units (PUs) (Guardian News, 2021). In each PU, at least 4 electoral personnel are required to conduct an election. These include the Presiding Officer, Assistant Presiding Officer I, Assistant Presiding Officer II, and Assistant Presiding Officer III. Taken together, the number of ad-hoc staff required is 707,834 personnel. The commission also engages the service of Supervising Presiding Officers (SPOs), Registration Area Technical

Support (RATECHs), Registration Area Supervisors, Returning Officers and Collation Officers, to aid in the conduct of elections. The Commission does not have the staff strength to provide this number of persons during elections, as such it recruits ad-hoc staff to provide this manpower needs.

It is trite to note that recruitment is one among other core activities in public administration. The core activities involved in public administration as identified by classic and contemporary administrative thinkers are planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting (Chalekian, 2013; Kerrigan, 1984; Kumari, 2021; Ugwulashi, 2012). For the election management body, ad-hoc staff recruitment is a part of staffing. This is a core administrative activity preceded only by planning and organising. Recognising the limits and important role played by electoral personnel in ensuring credibility of the process, it becomes necessary for the commission to take measures towards ensuring the recruitment of only credible, non-partisan staff that will uphold the quality of the process. This necessity intersects with the widespread recognition of the role of technology in preventing manipulations to inform this study's central argument that the use of technology can serve to improve the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. The study is, therefore, centred around interrogating the use of technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment, vis-à-vis its effectiveness and efficiency.

Statement of the Problem

Elections in Nigeria have been widely described as inherently flawed. Among the litany of issues plaguing the electoral process, ballot-box stuffing and the manipulation of results stand out as recurrent challenges (Abuza, 2020; Aliyu, Wakili, & Olukayode, 2020; Idowu, 2022). These malpractices often find complicity within the ranks of electoral staff, particularly ad-hoc personnel who wield significant influence at the PU level across the country (Okoye, 2021; Sule, Adamu, & Sambo, 2020). This complicity creates an urgent necessity for close attention to be paid to the recruitment of ad-hoc personnel toward prioritising the enlistment of credible and non-partisan persons as ad-hoc staff.

The practice of using NYSC ad-hoc staff during elections holds some potential for preventing partisanship and bias among personnel deployed to polling units. This is because, Corps' members are often (but not always) posted outside their home states and as such, they do not necessarily have a strong attachment to the indigenous politicians. However, with the country having just between 350,000 to 400,000 Corp members annually (Moses, 2023; Vanguard, 2023) and a total of almost one million persons required for electoral conduct, it is impossible for the NYSC to provide all the personnel required for electoral conduct. As such, the Commission opens up the process to allow students of tertiary institutions, and recent graduates to apply for the role. This allowance creates room for persons with party interests and affiliations to apply as ad-hoc staff. Even though the Commission's ad-hoc personnel are made to sign an oath of neutrality, practices have shown that these ad-hoc personnel are not always neutral. They are often influenced and co-opted to thwart the credibility of the process (Abuza, 2020). Technology may not offer a fool-proof mechanism for addressing partisanship, but it promises a reduction of human influence in the ad-hoc staff recruitment and posting process (Acheampong, 2023; Tobi, 2014). An effective tech-integrated ad-hoc staff recruitment process holds a few potential benefits. First, it ensures transparency in the process. Second, it

reduces the influence of political elements within and outside the commissions on the electoral duty personnel. INEC, thus, uses the online, non-personalised recruitment Portal for the Recruitment of Electoral Staff (INEC PRES) to recruit Presiding Officers (POs), Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs), and Registration Area Technicians (RA Tecs), among others. These culminate in improving the overall credibility of the process, improving public perception and limiting the extent of external influence on the process.

The literature indicates that while technology has been widely studied for its role in streamlining recruitment processes and enhancing electoral management (Oksanen, 2018; Abdul, Wang, & Li, 2020; Singh & Finn, 2003), there is limited research specifically addressing the unique challenges of recruiting ad-hoc electoral staff in Nigeria (Sultan, 2022). Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2018) caution against the uncritical adoption of digital technologies in elections, emphasizing the need for rigorous assessment. Meanwhile, Loeber (2020) highlights the importance of independent Election Management Bodies in maintaining control and ensuring integrity.

This study however, finds a gap in the literature as there is a dearth of scholarly studies on the application of technology in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment, especially with reference to the 2023 general election. This study, thus, aims to fill that gap by assessing the adoption of technology and its effectiveness in enhancing the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. In recognition of the literature gap and the subsisting challenge with electoral credibility in Nigeria, -this study attempts to assess the functionality and effectiveness of this technology-driven recruitment of ad-hoc personnel by responding to the following research questions:

- i. Has the application of technology in electoral staff recruitment by INEC enhanced recruitment of qualified ad-hoc personnel for election duties during the 2023 General Elections?
- ii. Has the use of staff recruitment technology by INEC lessened human influence and interference in the recruitment of ad-hoc staff during the 2023 General Elections?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the application of technology in election management by assessing INEC's Technology-Driven Recruitment of Ad-hoc Staff in the 2023 General Elections. This broad aim informs the following specific objectives:

- i. To ascertain if the application of technology in electoral staff recruitment by INEC enhanced recruitment of qualified ad-hoc personnel for election duties during the 2023 General Elections.
- ii. To examine if the use of staff recruitment technology by INEC lessened human influence and interference in the recruitment of ad-hoc staff during the 2023 General Elections.

Significance of the Study

There are theoretical and practical dimensions to the significance of this study. The theoretical significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the burgeoning literature on the intersection of technology and electoral processes, particularly within the context of ad-hoc staff recruitment. It will therefore serve as a source of research materials for scholars who may embark on further or related studies in technology and election management and in Nigeria, and other countries.

By empirically examining the effectiveness and efficiency of online, technology-driven recruitment mechanisms devoid of human influence and interference, the study seeks to shed light on the viability of technological solutions in bolstering the integrity and transparency of electoral practices. Furthermore, by identifying the inherent limitations of technology in this domain and proposing actionable recommendations, the study holds practical significance for electoral management bodies like INEC, policymakers (i.e. governments), and stakeholders (e.g. CSOs, politicians, political parties, election observers, funding institutions, etc.) tasked with safeguarding the credibility and fairness of democratic processes. Ultimately, the findings of this research have the potential to drive evidence-based reforms aimed at enhancing the inclusivity, efficiency, and integrity of electoral processes in Nigeria and around the globe.

Operational Definition of Terms

Here, the major terms that reoccur throughout this study are operationalized to ease readability and comprehension. Operationalised terms include: Technology, Electoral Ad-hoc Staff, qualified ad-hoc staff, as well as human influence and interference.

Technology: Refers to the tools and systems used to streamline and enhance the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. In this context, it includes online platforms like the INEC Portal for Recruitment of Electoral Staff (INEC PRES), which automates and digitizes the application and selection process. The INEC PRES includes both a website and a mobile application designed to collect detailed information from eligible prospective applicants and facilitate their registration through a structured and straightforward process.

Electoral Ad-Hoc Staff: These are temporary personnel recruited to support election operations. They include roles such as Presiding Officers (POs), Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs), Supervising Presiding Officers (SPOs), and Registration Area Technicians (RATECHs). These staff are critical for conducting elections across polling units and ensuring the electoral process's integrity.

Qualified Ad-Hoc Staff: Personnel who meet the established criteria for selection, such as being non-partisan, having no criminal records, and possessing the necessary skills and qualifications as outlined by INEC. The criteria for different positions vary. For SPOs, only INEC staff or staff of government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) are eligible for POs and APOs, serving and former corps members of the NYSC, penultimate students of federal and state tertiary institutions, and staff of MDAs.

Human Influence and Interference: Refers to the potential biases, manipulations, and external pressures from individuals or groups, including contesting candidate and political parties as well as stakeholders in government who ought to stay non-partisan, that could affect the impartiality of the recruitment process. This includes political influence or favoritism in selecting ad-hoc staff. The use of the INEC PRES aims to reduce such influences by implementing an online, non-personalized recruitment process that ensures transparency and fairness.

Literature Review

As technology has continued to gain increased prominence globally, so have concerns about its influence on diverse aspects of life. The role of technology in elections has, therefore, been widely studied due to its influence on the recruitment processes. This literature review proceeds to provide a panoramic overview of a sample of the broader literature on the subject and point out the unique contribution of this work to the literature.

Technology and the Recruitment of Qualified Electoral Ad-Hoc Staff

Oksanen's (2018) assessed the transformative potential of big data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) on recruitment practices, particularly within the context of Finnish recruitment professionals. Through qualitative interviews with eight professionals, the study uncovers a spectrum of perspectives on the adoption and impact of technology in recruitment processes. AI, in particular, is identified as a tool with applications in practical organization, pre-screening applications, and candidate communication. While interviewees recognize the benefits of technology, such as streamlining processes and increasing objectivity, they also raise concerns about potential risks, including discrimination and privacy invasion. Overall, the research sheds light on the evolving landscape of recruitment methods, offering insights into both the opportunities and challenges presented by technology-driven innovations in the field.

Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2018) critically examine the implications of the increasing use of digital technologies in elections globally. While some proponents argue that these technologies offer a pathway to cleaner and more credible elections, the authors caution against the fetishization of technology without rigorous assessment of its effectiveness. They highlight how the adoption of digital solutions may inadvertently create opportunities for corruption, undermining their intended impact. Moreover, the article underscores the significant opportunity costs associated with digital election systems, particularly in diverting attention from traditional safeguards and exacerbating vulnerabilities to electoral manipulation. Despite recognizing the inevitability of technological advancement in elections, the authors emphasize the need for careful scrutiny and planning to mitigate the unintended consequences and maximize the benefits of digitization in electoral processes.

Abdul, Wang, and Li (2020) studied the recruitment processes under the influence of technology, surveying HR professionals across industries to elucidate their perceptions. Their findings underscore the widespread adoption of recruitment technologies despite variances in popularity across sectors. Moreover, the research reveals a consensus among professionals

regarding the positive impact of technology on the recruitment process, particularly in streamlining tasks such as candidate sourcing and screening. While technological influence is more pronounced in the early stages of recruitment, advancements such as artificial intelligence are poised to reshape later stages as well. Importantly, the study highlights the ease of mastering recruitment technology, signaling its accessibility to practitioners. Looking ahead, the authors anticipate further enhancements driven by artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies, suggesting a promising trajectory for the future of recruitment processes.

Loeber (2020) sought to understand the role of technology governance in electoral processes, drawing on insights from an international survey of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across 72 countries. The article sheds light on the ownership and control of election technology, revealing substantial variations between countries in the types and extent of technological integration in elections. Despite widespread adoption of election technology, particularly for voting, the use of voting computers or Internet voting remains relatively uncommon. Notably, the study finds that independent EMBs exhibit greater control over election technology, with a more decisive role in decision-making and ownership of the technology. This suggests that the introduction of technology does not compromise the independence of EMBs; rather, it reinforces their autonomy and ensures they remain detached from other actors in the electoral process, such as governmental agencies and vendors. These findings underscore the importance of understanding the dynamics of technology governance in safeguarding the integrity and independence of electoral management.

Suleiman, Gambo, and Izah (2021) examined the transformative role of technology in election management, drawing insights from five democracies, including Nigeria. They highlight how technological innovations streamline complex electoral processes, making them more efficient and manageable. Beyond simplifying logistics, technology serves as a potent tool for error reduction, enhancing the credibility and transparency of elections. Despite encountering unique challenges, such as technological vulnerabilities, these democracies persist in leveraging technology due to its indispensable contributions in reducing electoral malfeasance, minimizing stress on electoral management bodies, and bolstering the overall integrity of the electoral process. Through their examination of technology's multifaceted impact, the authors underscore its essential role as a cornerstone of modern election administration, driving improvements in both efficiency and accountability.

Sultan (2022) sought to study the recruitment processes of ad hoc election supervisors, identify existing challenges and develop strategies for enhancing human resource quality in electoral roles through technology. The research identifies a significant gap in the quality of election supervisors, primarily due to a lack of public interest and insufficient candidate pools, which often necessitate extensions in the recruitment process. This scarcity of applicants limits the ability to select optimal candidates, thereby compromising the quality of human resources. The study utilizes a qualitative approach, incorporating interviews with six informants, direct observations, and an analysis of documents from previous regional elections spanning from the 2015 Regent and Deputy Regent elections to the 2020 Pilkada. Through this methodology, the research offers insights into the evolving recruitment landscape and underscores the need for more effective strategies to engage potential candidates and enhance recruitment outcomes.

The research highlights improvements in the recruitment process, driven by increased socialization and coordination with local stakeholders, particularly within sub-district areas. These efforts have significantly improved the dissemination of recruitment information, broadening the reach and appeal of election supervisory roles. By enhancing communication channels and fostering local partnerships, the recruitment process has become more transparent and accessible, thus addressing some of the identified deficiencies. However, the study implies that further measures are necessary to boost the attractiveness of these positions and to ensure a robust selection process. The findings suggest that ongoing adjustments and innovative approaches in recruitment strategies are essential to cultivating a pool of qualified and committed election supervisors, ultimately contributing to the integrity and effectiveness of electoral processes.

Cavaliere et al. (2021) investigates the role of e-recruitment and AI tools in enhancing human resource (HR) effectiveness within high schools. Human Resource Management (HRM) encompasses key functions such as preparation, recruitment, workforce relations, and organizational growth, emphasizing the critical role of recruitment in acquiring valuable personnel. The research highlights the transformation of traditional recruitment methods, which were often time-consuming and paperwork-intensive, into more streamlined and efficient processes through e-recruitment practices. This evolution is attributed to technological advancements, which have allowed HRM to optimize hiring phases, thus improving organizational performance.

The study employs a mixed-method approach, utilizing both interviews and questionnaires to gather data from respondents in high schools. The research methodology was adapted to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, with surveys distributed via Google Forms and interviews conducted through Zoom meetings. The findings reveal a direct positive correlation between the adoption of e-recruitment technologies and improved employee performance. This suggests that integrating digital tools in the recruitment process not only enhances efficiency but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of HR functions in educational settings.

Technology and Human Influence in Recruitment Processes

In Nigeria, political recruitment processes is significantly influenced by political parties, often prioritizing loyalty over merit. Political figures frequently interfere, recommending candidates who align with their interests, leading to biased hiring practices (Adeosun, 2020). This patronage system can result in appointments that favor political agendas rather than addressing community needs, compromising the quality and effectiveness of local governance (Ibrahim, 2019). The influence of political parties is pervasive, affecting both selection criteria and the performance of recruited officials, creating challenges in achieving transparent and accountable governance.

Government officials also play a critical role in local recruitment processes. They may exert influence by dictating hiring practices or imposing preferred candidates (Nwosu, 2021). This interference can undermine local autonomy, preventing the development of a truly representative and competent workforce. Human influence in recruitment often leads to the homogenization of political views, limiting diversity in local administrations and stifling

innovation (Ojo, 2022). Such interventions can prevent elected representatives from effectively responding to the unique needs of their communities.

The combined influence of political parties and human influence creates a complex dynamic that challenges the integrity of recruitment processes. These human influences can lead to inefficiencies and a lack of accountability in local governance structures. Addressing these issues requires reforms focused on enhancing transparency and reducing political interference to ensure that recruitment is based on merit and aligned with community interests (Adetula, 2023). In view of these, scholars have extensively examined issues surrounding interference in recruitment processes, and the place of technology.

The political recruitment process within Nigeria system faces numerous challenges, primarily stemming from pervasive human interference. One significant issue is political patronage, where recruitment decisions are often influenced by political affiliations rather than merit (Adeosun, 2020). This practice prioritizes loyalty to political figures or parties, leading to the appointment of individuals who may lack the necessary qualifications or experience for effective governance. The emphasis on political loyalty over competence results in a workforce that is ill-equipped to address the needs of the community, thereby hindering the overall effectiveness and efficiency of local government operations.

Political interference also perpetuates a cycle of corruption and inefficiency. When political parties or influential figures control recruitment, they often expect appointees to reciprocate with favors, such as granting contracts or other benefits (Ibrahim, 2019). This quid pro quo arrangement entrenches corrupt practices and diminishes public trust in local government institutions. It creates an environment where decisions are made based on personal gain rather than the public good, leading to the misallocation of resources and poor service delivery. The long-term implications are detrimental, as they undermine the credibility and legitimacy of local government structures, making it difficult to implement effective policies that benefit the populace.

State governments also play a critical role in exacerbating recruitment challenges. Their interference often involves imposing candidates on local councils, which undermines the autonomy of these bodies and restricts their ability to recruit based on merit (Nwosu, 2021). Such actions stifle innovation and limit the diversity of perspectives within local administrations, as positions are filled with individuals who may not be best suited for the roles. This top-down approach to recruitment hampers the ability of local governments to respond effectively to the unique challenges faced by their communities, as it prioritizes conformity over creativity and problem-solving capabilities. Moreover, it creates a culture of dependency where local governments are unable to function independently and are constantly subject to the whims of state authorities.

The adverse implications of human interference in political recruitment extend beyond governance issues, affecting social cohesion and development. When recruitment processes are perceived as biased or unfair, it can lead to a sense of disenfranchisement among qualified individuals who are overlooked due to lack of political connections (Ojo, 2022). This exclusion fosters resentment and undermines the potential for community engagement and participation in local governance. Additionally, the absence of a transparent and merit-based recruitment

system can discourage talented individuals from pursuing careers in public service, resulting in a brain drain that further weakens local institutions. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms focused on enhancing transparency and accountability, ensuring that recruitment is based on competence and aligned with the needs of the community (Adetula, 2023).

Sultan (2022) addressed the challenges inherent in the recruitment process of ad hoc election supervisors and proposes strategies to enhance the quality of human resources in this role. Recognizing the prevailing inadequacy in the quality of election supervisors, the study aims to identify key issues in recruitment implementation and devise effective solutions. Through a qualitative approach involving interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, the research examines recruitment processes spanning multiple election cycles, including those of 2015, 2018, and 2020. Findings reveal shortcomings in recruitment procedures, often leading to suboptimal choices due to a lack of qualified candidates. However, improvements are noted, attributed to enhanced socialization and coordination efforts with local stakeholders, resulting in a more transparent and inclusive information dissemination process. This study contributes valuable insights into refining the recruitment mechanisms for ad hoc election supervisors, ultimately aiming to elevate the quality of human resources in this crucial electoral role.

Singh and Finn (2003) explored how information technology (IT) revolutionizes recruitment processes, offering insights applicable to the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. The article highlights several benefits of using IT, such as broader access to candidates, targeted recruitment, cost efficiency, and speed. These advantages mirror the potential improvements in recruiting ad-hoc electoral staff through technological means. In the context of elections, IT systems like the INEC Portal for Recruitment of Electoral Staff (INEC PRES) can enhance recruitment efficiency. By automating the collection and processing of applicant data, these systems ensure faster and more accurate matching of candidates to specific roles based on qualifications and experience. For example, using AI to parse applications can help identify the most suitable candidates for positions like Presiding Officers or Assistant Presiding Officers. The study underscores the importance of IT in reducing intermediaries, which can be particularly beneficial in maintaining neutrality and transparency in electoral staff recruitment. By minimizing human influence, technology-driven recruitment platforms can mitigate biases and political interference, thus enhancing the credibility of the election process.

Gap in the Literature

The literature on technology and recruitment highlights the transformative role of digital tools in enhancing the recruitment of qualified electoral ad-hoc staff. Oksanen (2018) explores the potential of big data and AI in recruitment processes, noting benefits such as streamlined procedures and increased objectivity, while also warning of risks like discrimination and privacy invasion. Similarly, Abdul, Wang, and Li (2020) find widespread adoption of recruitment technologies, which streamline candidate sourcing and screening, suggesting future enhancements with AI and blockchain. Sultan (2022) specifically addresses the challenges in recruiting ad hoc election supervisors, emphasizing the need for more effective strategies to attract qualified candidates and enhance recruitment outcomes. Singh and Finn (2003) underline the advantages of IT in recruitment, including broader access to candidates

and cost efficiency, which are mirrored in electoral staff recruitment improvements through technology.

Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2018) caution against the uncritical adoption of digital technologies in elections, emphasizing the need for rigorous assessment to avoid corruption opportunities and focus on traditional safeguards. Loeber (2020) examines technology governance in electoral processes, highlighting the importance of independent Election Management Bodies in maintaining control and ensuring the integrity of elections. Suleiman, Gambo, and Izah (2021) demonstrate how technology enhances electoral management by streamlining processes, reducing errors, and improving transparency. The integration of IT, such as the INEC Portal for Recruitment of Electoral Staff, illustrates the potential for technology to increase recruitment efficiency, minimize human biases, and improve the overall credibility of election processes.

It can be gleaned from the above that there have been studies assessing the impact of technology on recruitment as well as election management. However, there is a dearth of specific scholarship into the peculiarities of ad-hoc staff recruitment in Nigeria and the place of technology. This dearth is identified as the gap which justifies this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts institutional theory as the theoretical basis for explaining the relationship between the two variables under investigation. North (1990, 2000) is widely credited as the major proponent of this theory (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Nureev, 2011). The institutional theory posits that organizations are influenced by broader institutional forces, including norms, values, and regulatory frameworks, which shape their structures, behaviours, and decision-making processes. These institutional pressures can manifest in various forms, such as mimetic, coercive, or normative isomorphic processes, wherein organizations mimic others, comply with external mandates, or adhere to professional standards, respectively (Willmott, 2015). Within the context of technology adoption in recruitment, institutional theory suggests that organizations like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) may face pressures to conform to prevailing norms and practices within the electoral management domain.

The relevance of institutional theory to the limitations in the adoption of technology in recruiting ad-hoc staff lies in the institutional inertia and resistance to change often observed within bureaucratic institutions like INEC. Despite the potential benefits of technology in streamlining recruitment processes, ensuring transparency, and enhancing the quality of human resources, the entrenched norms, routines, and bureaucratic structures within INEC may impede the adoption of innovative technological solutions. Moreover, the coercive pressures stemming from regulatory constraints or resource constraints may further hinder technological advancements in recruitment, leading to a reliance on traditional, manual processes.

These limitations in the adoption of technology in the recruitment of ad-hoc staff can have significant implications for the performance of INEC as an institution. Firstly, inefficiencies in recruitment processes due to outdated technology or manual methods may result in delays, errors, and inconsistencies in the selection of ad-hoc staff, potentially compromising the integrity and credibility of electoral operations. Secondly, the failure to embrace technological

innovations may erode public trust in INEC's ability to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections, particularly in an era where digital advancements are expected to enhance accountability and efficiency in governance processes.

Furthermore, the reluctance to adopt technology in recruitment may hinder INEC's capacity to attract and retain skilled personnel, as tech-savvy individuals may be deterred by outdated practices and preferential treatment in other sectors. This talent drain could further exacerbate performance gaps within the institution, hampering its ability to fulfill its mandate effectively. Overall, the limitations in technology adoption underscore the need for INEC to navigate institutional pressures, invest in capacity-building, and foster a culture of innovation to modernize its recruitment practices and uphold its role as a credible electoral management body in Nigeria.

Application of the Theory

Institutional theory is the most appropriate framework for this study because it provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the complexities of technological adoption within bureaucratic institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The theory's emphasis on the influence of institutional forces—norms, values, and regulatory frameworks—aligns closely with the challenges faced by INEC in modernizing its recruitment processes. This theoretical approach offers significant explanatory value by highlighting how entrenched institutional norms and routines can hinder innovation and adaptation, despite the clear advantages of technological advancements in improving efficiency, transparency, and overall organizational performance.

Moreover, the analytical utility of institutional theory is evident in its ability to dissect the multi-faceted barriers to technology adoption in the context of INEC's recruitment processes. The theory not only elucidates the internal institutional inertia but also accounts for external regulatory and resource constraints that shape INEC's decision-making at various levels. By applying this framework, the study can systematically explore how these institutional pressures contribute to the persistence of manual recruitment methods, ultimately affecting the integrity and credibility of electoral operations. This application underscores the necessity for INEC to address institutional barriers and foster a culture of innovation, thereby enhancing its capacity to attract skilled personnel and maintain public trust in its electoral management capabilities. In essence, institutional theory serves as a robust analytical tool that justifies its selection by providing a nuanced understanding of the limitations and potential pathways for technology adoption within INEC.

Hypotheses

This study is founded on the following research hypotheses:

1. The application of technology in electoral staff recruitment by INEC has enhanced recruitment of qualified ad-hoc personnel for election duties during the 2023 General Elections.

2. The use of staff recruitment technology by INEC has lessened human influence and interference in the recruitment of ad-hoc staff during the 2023 General Elections.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design as its research design. A descriptive survey research design is a method used to gather information from a sample of individuals in order to describe the characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, or opinions of a population (Creswell, 2014). It involves collecting quantitative data through structured questionnaires or interviews, which are then analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among variables. This type of design is particularly useful for obtaining a broad overview of a phenomenon and for making generalizations about the population being studied (Groves et al., 2009). The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because it allows for the systematic collection of data regarding the current practices, challenges, and perspectives related to technology adoption in the recruitment of ad-hoc staff by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). By employing this design, the study can capture a wide range of responses from various stakeholders, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing technology adoption

Population of the Study

From the topic, “Technology and Election Management: Assessing Application in Ad-Hoc Staff Recruitment during the 2023 General Election in Nigeria,” it follows that the population of this study would entail the entire population of Nigeria, covering the entire 36 states, and 774 local government areas in which elections were held in 2023. However, considering the population of the country which is 229,285,126 as estimated by the World Population Review (2024) as of July 2024, the assemblage of evidence was restricted to Bayelsa State. The estimated population of Bayelsa state according to Zhujiworld (2024) is 2,355,162.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Considering the study’s focus on ad-hoc staff management, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique to incorporate participants based on his judgment that they would enable him meet the objectives of the study. Following the researcher’s judgment that staff of INEC involved in the recruitment and management of electoral ad-hoc staff, as well as, ad-hoc personnel (who are managed) would provide insight for understanding the role of technology, these categories were incorporated as subjects for the research. A total subset of 30 participants were, thus, incorporated for the study.

The sample size of 30 stemmed from scholarly publications on the ideal sample size for interviews as well as established by scholars such as Vasileiou *et al.* (2018), among others who posit that the ideal sample size for in-depth interviews is between 20 and 30 respondents. Also, the total of 30 respondents allowed the researcher reach saturation. The sample distribution included 20 former ad-hoc personnel, and 10 INEC staff.

Instruments of Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility and depth in data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed for exploration of specific areas of interest. The interview contained six (6) questions carefully crafted to elicit response on the issue under investigation. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Faculty Research and Ethical Committee. Interviews were conducted both in person and via telephone (using audio calls, Whatsapp audio, or Whatsapp video), depending on participant availability and location, to maximize participation and data quality. Informed consents were obtained, participants were assured of their anonymity, and interviewees were recorded for subsequent coding and analysis. For Interview Guide see Appendix.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The validity of the interview instruments was ensured through expert review and pilot testing for face and content validity. Experts in political science and electoral studies reviewed the interview guide, providing feedback to refine the questions for clarity and relevance. Pilot interviews were conducted with a small sample to test the effectiveness of the guide and make necessary adjustments. This process ensures that the instruments accurately capture the intended data and are appropriate for the study's objectives.

Reliability was ensured through several rigorous procedures designed to maintain consistency and accuracy in the data collection process. The primary strategy involved the consistent application of the interview guide, which was adhered to across all interviews to minimize variability in the administration of the questions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). In this study, the TR method was employed to assess the stability and consistency of the responses over time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This procedure involved administering interviews to a subset of respondents on two separate occasions. The responses were then compared using Spearman's Correlation Coefficient (SCC) to evaluate the consistency of the data provided by the participants. Spearman's Correlation Coefficient for the test-retest data yielded a score of 0.80, indicating a high level of consistency between the responses at the two different time points. This high SCC value affirms the reliability of the instrument used in the study.

Additionally, all interviews were recorded, with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. Multiple researchers independently reviewed the transcripts to identify and resolve discrepancies, ensuring consistent interpretation of the data.

Methods of Data Collection

This is a qualitative study that relied on a combination of primary and secondary sources of data by combining documented evidence (as contained in newspaper publications, reports and other relevant documents) with key informant interviews (KII). The study drew from a diverse array of reputable sources, encompassing academic articles, media reports, and publications from INEC. Academic articles contribute in-depth analyses and scholarly perspectives, offering a theoretical foundation and insights into the dynamics of corruption, governance, and threats to democracy. Governmental reports and newspaper publications provide valuable information, often reflecting official stances and policies, while publications from international

organisations offer a broader contextual understanding and comparative insights. By incorporating these sources, the study ensured a comprehensive and multi-faceted exploration of the subject matter, enhancing the depth and reliability of the findings. Further depth in understanding of the subject matter was pursued by complementing the data gathered from documented (secondary) evidence with primary data generated from interviews with key INEC Staff involved in the ad-hoc staff recruitment exercise.

Methods of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis served as the method of data analysis. Empirical evidence assembled in the study was systematically scrutinized to uncover patterns and trends in the practice of electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment in Nigeria. These patterns and trends were presented under relevant themes, which the researcher made sense of using a mix of textual description, tables, and charts where appropriate. Beyond the presentation of data, deductive and inductive techniques of reasoning were applied where appropriate to make sense of the data. By employing thematic analysis to make sense of data gathered from both primary and secondary sources, the study unearthed not only surface-level insights but also the deeper, latent factors associated with the application of technology for ad-hoc staff recruitment in Nigeria.

Empirical Verification

Here, specific data on the application of, and effectiveness of technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment is presented and analysed. These pieces of evidence are presented in themes, to provide an overall picture that is related to the issues set out to be investigated in the introductory section of this paper. It, therefore, provides evidence-backed insight into the limitations of technology use in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment in addition to the overall practice as conducted during the recruitment process.

Technology and the Recruitment of Qualified Electoral Ad-Hoc Staff

Evidence shows that the Independent National Electoral Commission has been committed to incremental improvements in the deployment of technology towards election management over the years. The table below shows that this has touched practically all aspects of election administration over a number of electoral cycles.

Table 1: Technology Employed for Election Management in Nigeria

S/N	Technology	Explanation	Date Introduced
1	Biometric registration	Use of biometric technology in identifying voters. Initially only fingerprints were used, but in 2021 facial recognition was introduced.	2011 and 2021

S/N	Technology	Explanation	Date Introduced
2	Computer-based registration of voters	Direct Data Capture Machines (DDCM) is a laptop computer-based registration equipment introduced in 2007, but fully deployed in 2011. It was replaced in 2021 by a tablet-type device, the INEC Voter Enrolment Device (IVED).	2007, 2011 and 2021
3	Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) with chip	A chip-based voters card introduced in 2015 which made it possible to use an electronic device to positively identify a voter using fingerprints.	2015
4	Online pre-registration of voters (2021).	A dedicated portal to enable registrants and other voters with issues concerning their registration to commence the process online and complete in person at a registration centre.	2021
5	Smart Card Reader (SCR)	An electronic device that reads the PVC and the fingerprint of voters to authenticate them before voting	2015
6	Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)	BVAS was introduced in 2021 to replace the SCR. It is capable of not only reading fingerprints, but also facial recognition. It is also much faster than the SCR. This has vastly increased the positive identification of voters during accreditation.	2021
7	INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV)	This is a dedicated portal for the public to view images of Polling Unit results as soon as they are ready. Once a person registered and is verified, he/she can view Polling Unit results by logging in to the results viewing portal. This has increased transparency in the process	2021
8	Uploading of results in real time using the BVAS	The BVAS doubles as an accreditation device and a photographic device to capture the picture of results and upload to the IREV.	2021

S/N	Technology	Explanation	Date Introduced
9	Collation Support and Results Verification System (CSRVS)	CSRVS provides support to Collation and Returning Officers during the compilation and announcement of results. Using carefully prepared Excel sheets and files, CSRVS helps to confirm figures from manual collation and speed up the process of results management.	2011
10	Online portals for candidates, observers and political party agents	Dedicated portals for management of candidates, media, observers and party agents. This was informed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but they have also increased the efficiency of managing these activities.	2020
11	Election Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC)	Election Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC) uses computer applications and dashboards to monitor and support election day activities.	2015
12	Compliance and Threat Data Acquisition and Sharing System (CT-DASS)	Compliance and Threat Data Acquisition and Sharing System (CT-DASS) uses real time electronic data gathering to monitor and solve challenges during elections.	2019
13	Compliance and Threat Data Acquisition and Sharing System (CT-DASS)	INEC Security Alert and Notification System (SANS) uses an Android application and web dashboard to monitor and respond to physical threats to INEC activities and facilities.	2021
14	Basic Security in Election Duty (BaSED)	Basic Security in Election Duty (BaSED) is an electronic security training and certification module for election duty staff.	2015

S/N	Technology	Explanation	Date Introduced
15	Election Risk Management Tool (ERM)	Election Risk Management Tool (ERM) is a specialized tool for tracking election risks and managing them.	2015
16	Social media	There are several INEC social media platforms as well as the INEC Citizens Contact Centre which uses technology to receive and respond to public requests for information.	2015 - 2019
17	Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EVMAT)	Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EVMAT) is an electronic data gathering tool used by the Electoral Institute (TEI) for research on election violence.	2015
18	TEI Virtual Library	Fully equipped digital library at the Electoral Institute to support research and institutional memory	2012
19	Logistics Management System	Logistics Management System uses an Android application and web dashboard to track election materials from procurement to delivery.	2021
20	INEC Portal for Recruitment of Election Staff (INEC PRES)	INEC Portal for Recruitment of Election Staff (INEC PRES) is an online election staff recruitment and deployment system. It also has an Android application to provide multiple access to potential election staff.	2019

Source: Author's Compilation

As can be gleaned from the table above, Nigeria's 24 years of democracy from 1999 has witnessed the introduction of 20 different technological innovations towards improving the quality and integrity of elections. It is worth noting that of the innovative measures adopted to improve the quality of elections, only the INEC Portal for Recruitment of Electoral Staff (INEC PRES) is focused on ad-hoc staff recruitment and it was introduced in 2019.

INEC PRES serves as the electronic portal for ad-hoc staff recruitment. The portal has both a website version and a mobile application. It is essentially designed to collect the details of prospective persons that are qualified for electoral conduct. The site specifies application requirement and provides a straight-forward procedure for qualified persons to apply. The application requirements and procedure for the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) Portal Registration for Election Staff (PRES) are designed to ensure that applicants are well-prepared and eligible for the positions available. Before registering, applicants need to have a functional email address, a working mobile phone number, a personal bank account number, a recent passport photograph with a white background, contact details of two referees, and relevant identification documents. For former and current National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, specific NYSC Callup Numbers are required. Additionally, applicants must have their highest qualification document in .pdf format and a means of identification in .jpg or .jpeg format. These requirements aim to verify the identity and qualifications of the applicants, ensuring that only eligible and adequately prepared individuals apply.

The procedure for application is straightforward and structured to facilitate a smooth registration process. Applicants must first review the requirements for the available positions to determine their eligibility. They then register on the portal, create a password, and fill out an application form segmented into personal information, contact information, and bank details. Attention to detail is crucial, as applicants are instructed to ensure the accuracy of their information, which cannot be edited after submission. Following the completion of the form, applicants upload their passport photograph and provide referee details. They must also check the attestation box, confirming the validity of the provided information. Finally, after submitting the application, applicants are advised to print their acknowledgment slip. The figures below shows the homepage of the INEC PRES on both the website and mobile application.

The site also details the eligibility criteria for different categories of electoral ad-hoc staff. For Supervising Presiding Officers, only INEC Staff or Staff of Government MDAs are considered eligible. For Registration Area Technicians (RATECHs), only INEC Staff are qualified to apply. For Presiding Officers (PO) and their assistants (APOs), serving and former corps members of the NYSC, penultimate students of federal and state tertiary institutions, and staff of MDAs are eligible to apply. Figures below are snipes from the portal (both website and mobile app) as taken ahead of the 2024 Edo and Ondo States governorship elections.

Figure 1: INEC PRES Website Homepage

The screenshot displays the INEC Press website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for REGISTER, LOGIN, HOME, HOW TO APPLY, ELIGIBILITY, FAQs, DOWNLOAD MOBILE APP, and CONTACT US. A green banner at the top right contains the text: "The Adhoc Staff Engagement for the 2024 Edo and Ondo State Governorship Election is still ongoing and the closing date for the application is *Aug 19, 2024*".

The main content area features a "Login" section on the left with the following fields and instructions:

- Email Address:** A text input field with the placeholder "Your registered email address." and the instruction "Enter the email address you registered on this platform."
- Password:** A password input field with the instruction "Input your registered password."
- Remember Me**
- Log Me In** button

On the right side, there are three informational boxes:

- How To Apply:** "CLICK HERE to find out how you can apply."
- New Applicants:** "To register for the 2024 Edo and Ondo State Governorship Election engagement. CLICK HERE to get started."
- Have a Question?:** "If you are facing any challenge or have a question then CLICK HERE to contact us."

The footer contains the text: "2024. © Copyright INEC . ALL Rights Reserved."

Figure 2: INEC Press Application Interface (Website)

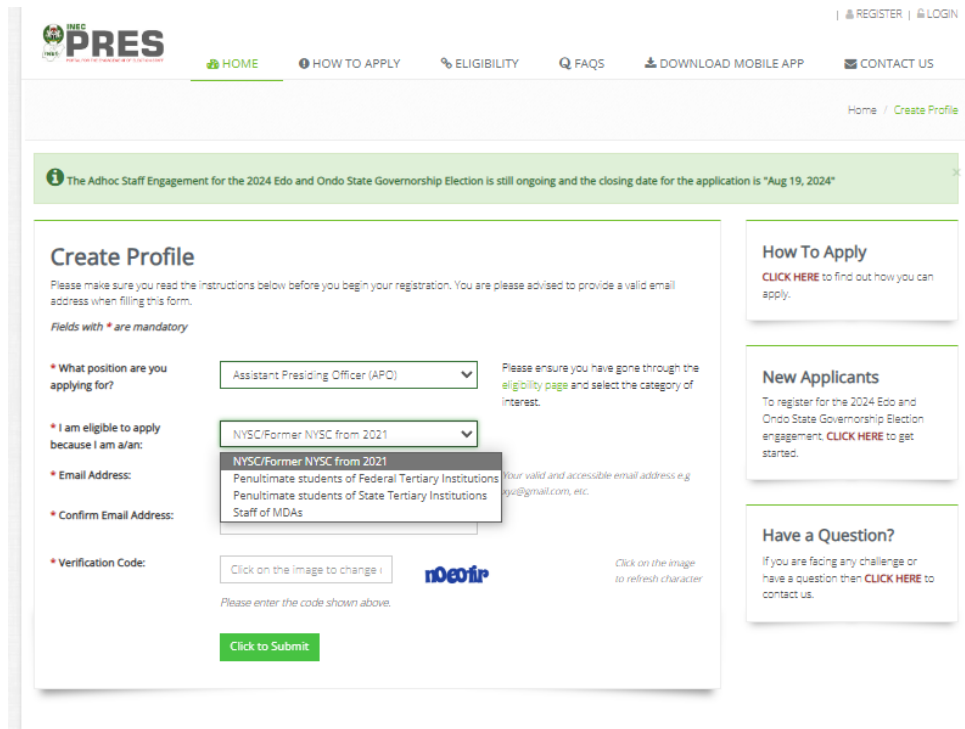
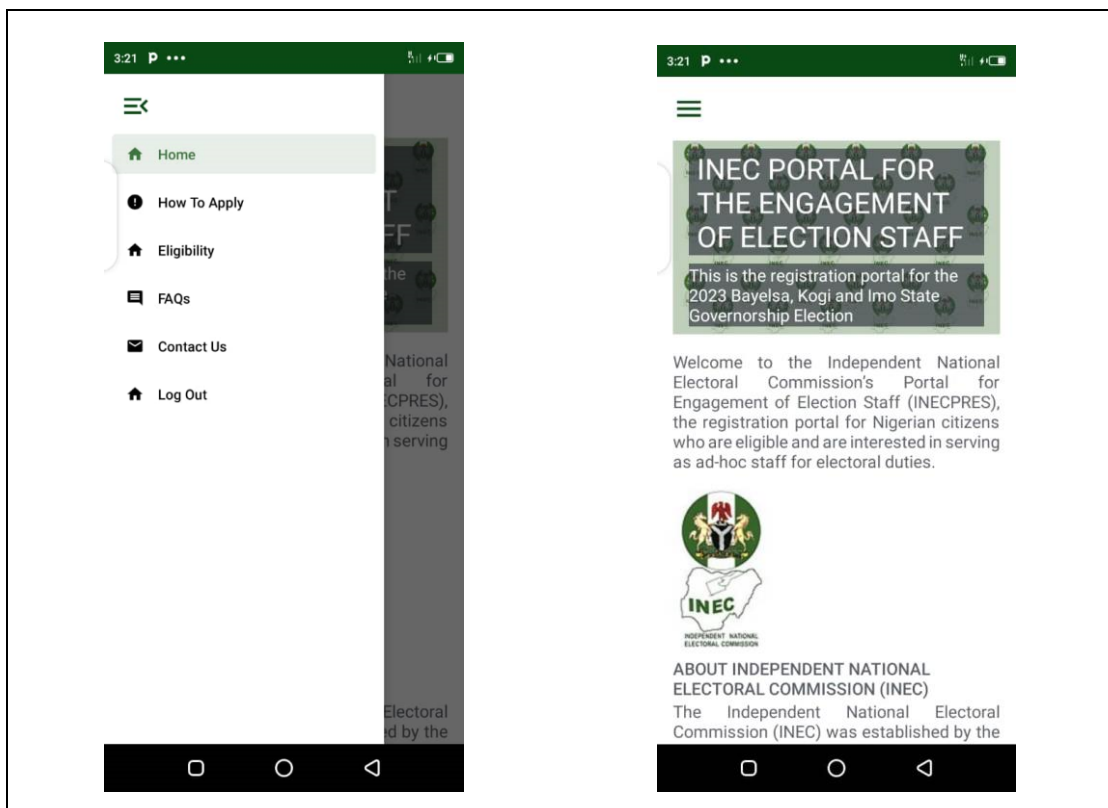


Figure 3: INEC PRES Mobile App Interface



The integration of technology in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment, exemplified by the INEC PRES portal, represents a significant advancement in Nigeria's electoral process. This platform offers aspiring election staff a straightforward and accessible means to register and apply online, overcoming logistical barriers that may have previously hindered participation. With its user-friendly interface, the portal facilitates the submission of detailed information, ensuring that candidates' qualifications and preferences are accurately captured, thus streamlining the application process. This point was made by a key interviewee who partook as an electoral ad-hoc staff during the 2023 general election thus:

From my own experience, I applied for the ad-hoc staff job online. At the time I applied, I was still serving. The application portal was easy to navigate and it requested all the necessary details which I provided. As of when posting of staff for the election was done, I had already finished my service year but was still deployed for election work because my details had already been captured.

Moreover, the INECPRES portal serves as a valuable resource hub, providing candidates with essential information and resources to prepare for their roles in Nigeria's electoral proceedings. Detailed job descriptions for various positions, including Supervisory Presiding Officers and Registration Area Technicians, equip applicants with a clear understanding of their responsibilities, fostering a sense of readiness and competence among potential election staff. This technological integration not only enhances the quality of the workforce but also empowers individuals with the knowledge needed to uphold the integrity of Nigeria's electoral system. While as of the time of writing this paper, the portal (pres.inecnigeria.org) was not operational, INEC provided some details on the portal in its public launch. A part of the details provided reads thus:

The INECPRES is for registration of ad-hoc staff (Supervisory Presiding Officers (SPOs)/ Presiding Officers (POs)/ Assistant Presiding Officers (APO)/Registration Area Technicians (RATECHs) and RAC Managers for the 2023 General Elections (INEC, 2022).

By registering and securing a role through the platform, applicants become essential participants in organizing and executing elections, embodying the principles of civic engagement and participation.

It is, however, worth noting that on close examination, the requirement by the portal that applicants select the category of their interest does not imply the presence of a mechanism to ensure that only qualified personnel apply. There is also no built-in mechanism for authenticating the details of applicants and ascertaining their authenticity. This leaves a room for unqualified persons to apply, and potentially get recruited as staff for electoral conduct.

Technology and Human Interference in Political Recruitment

Despite the deployment use of INEC PRES to recruit electoral staff, the actual completion of the recruitment process is done manually, by Electoral Officers (that is, INEC election staff in charge of local government areas), during the posting exercise. The practice, as was found during the research is that applicants to the INEC PRES are invited to attend trainings organised

for electoral ad-hoc staff. These trainings are typically held for 3 days. Following this training, the recruitment process is completed by posting persons who attend the training to local polling units across their local government area. Posting of ad-hoc personnel is overseen by the Electoral Officer (EO). This point was clearly expressed by an INEC staff interviewed in the study when she stated thus:

The application process is done online but after applying, INEC takes steps to ensure that persons sent for election work actually know what they are doing. A 3-day training is done for applicants. During these trainings, some persons who did not apply attend and some who applied do not attend. To ensure that staff deployed do not go and fumble, we post persons who attend the training (KII/Female/INEC Staff).

In posting and deploying electoral ad-hoc staff, the Electoral Officer (EO) typically types out the list of ad-hoc personnel and allots the same to polling units across the local government areas under their jurisdiction. Names of persons posted during the elections are, as noted by the earlier quoted interviewee, from the list of attendees of the training. However, another dimension which is quite unsettling was revealed by a male interviewee who noted that sometimes, persons who attend training are not even enough to cover all polling units. The interviewee also pointed out that to ensure that personnel are recruited for, and deployed to all polling units, electoral staff in charge of posting sometimes have to reach out to persons who have earlier worked as ad-hoc staff and request for their details. As such, sometimes, persons who did not go through the online application process and who did not attend training are also engaged as ad-hoc staff and deployed for electoral duties.

As can be gleaned from the above, although technology is used for the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff, its use is limited by certain constraints that necessitates 'human involvement' in the recruitment process. Although the recruitment process for electoral ad-hoc staff begins with technology, it is later opened up to human influence. Human involvement and potential external manipulation, even by the political class, who as an interviewee noted, sometimes present list of persons for ad-hoc staff duty and go as far as attempting to determine where the persons they recommend for recruitment should be posted to. In view of these limitations, the study sought to understand, from the stakeholder's perspective, what factors limit the use of technology. Responses reiterated the issues already mentioned in the preceding section but also offered further insight:

The problem with online recruitment of ad-hoc staff is that persons who apply for ad-hoc staff work are not trained and tested online. The INEC PRES is an application portal that allows people to show interest in various positions such as POs and APOs but after they have applied, they have to be trained and be found ready in terms of knowledge to be deployed for election duty. This is why the whole process is not online yet. Maybe, if in the future, there is a way people are trained online and made to take online mandatory tests, maybe, just maybe, the whole thing can be online.

Another interviewee provided further insight by calling attention to efforts by the political class to always influence the electoral process and the need for the commission to pay more attention to the use of technology. He stated thus:

We need to understand that the political class is always in the mode of politicking and they are always trying to manipulate the electoral process. Do you think it is only election results that they manipulate? They do everything within their power to influence the staff of INEC in their state from the REC to the Collation Officers and ad-hoc staff at the Polling Units. They even try to make sure their persons are used as ad-hoc staff during elections. Addressing political influence is key if we hope to improve our electoral process, including the recruitment of ad-hoc staff.

From the views and perspectives assembled from the field, three major challenges have been identified as limitations on the use of technology for electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment. These factors, including training dependency, external influence, and limited attention to the use of technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment by INEC have been briefly explained below:

- **Training Dependency:** Training is conducted, and only persons trained are deployed for electoral duties. This serves to ensure that only individuals with adequate knowledge of the technicalities and modalities involved in elections are actually deployed for election duty. However, this reliance on training reduces the reliance on technology, as it emphasizes human expertise over automated processes.
- **External Influences:** Between the time of application and deployment for electoral duty, external variables may influence the availability and willingness of persons who applied to partake in electoral duty. Factors such as changes in personal circumstances, political pressures, or security concerns can impact applicants' readiness to participate, necessitating efforts to continually engage and motivate potential election staff.
- **Lack of attention on the application of Technology in Recruitment:** In addition to the preceding, there appears to be a dearth of attention on the application of technology for ad-hoc staff recruitment within the Commission. While the provision of the INEC PRES is a laudable step, the efforts towards automating the recruitment process seem to take a backstage when compared to technological advances made in other aspects of the electoral process.

Conclusion

From the data presented thus far, it is evident that while technology offers promising solutions for improving the credibility of elections generally as well as smoothening the electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment process. However, the effectiveness of technology in ensuring the recruitment of qualified personnel for electoral duties without human influence and interference is severely limited in the Nigerian context. Although INEC has exerted efforts at mainstreaming technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment via the INEC PRES, a bulk of the process is still human-driven, leaving room for the persistence of some of the ills that are associated with influences and biases. The manual handling of the recruitment process post-application introduces vulnerabilities to human influence and external manipulation, potentially undermining the transparency and integrity initially afforded by technology.

The application of technology has, thus, failed to enhance the recruitment of qualified ad-hoc personnel for electoral conduct. It has also not lessened human influence and interference in the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. Taken from the institutional perspective, these issues

stem from the partial implementation of the use of technology for the recruitment which occurs due to limits in the institutional provisions by INEC on technological use for electoral recruitment. Viewing institutions, as North (1992) did, as the restrictions we place on ourselves, we infer that the electoral management body has not placed sufficient safeguards to allow for the full adoption of technology in ad-hoc staff recruitment. This could be attributed to logistical and other reasons related to considerations over training of ad-hoc staff and proximity of staff to Registration Area Centers and or PUs but it ultimately raises questions on the commitment of the commission to the full-scale adoption of technology in the recruitment aspect of the election. This question is even further emphasised considering that the application of technology for ad-hoc staff recruitment only became an area of interest in 2019 whereas, advances have been made in other areas since the early to mid-2000s.

Recommendations

Premised on the above, and following our interest in the application of technology for electoral recruitment to enhance the recruitment of qualified personnel and eliminate human interference toward promoting electoral credibility, we recommend as follows:

- 1) Efforts be made by the electoral management body to put modalities (legal and operational) in place toward ensuring the full automation of the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff. This can be done in phases from the application phase as is currently done via INEC PRES to the post-training phase, in posting. From the application phase, a second layer should be introduced to authenticate the qualification of applicants as well as the authenticity of documents. Applicants could also be required to select their preferred polling unit by proximity to their location (to address logistical concerns) and the posting could be automated. The following are other associated specific recommendations.
- 2) To obliterate the perennial threat of human interference in ad-hoc staff recruitment processes with its nepotistic and potentially destructive impacts on electoral credibility, there is need for a thorough, all encompassing value reorientation campaigns to reposition both staffs of the commission and political actors on the need to uphold the sanctity of the electoral process and uphold global standards of ethical conduct.

By implementing these recommendations, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) can enhance the effectiveness and integrity of technology-enabled recruitment processes for electoral ad-hoc staff in Nigeria. These measures will contribute to promoting transparency, fairness, and public confidence in the electoral system, ultimately strengthening democratic governance and electoral credibility in the country.

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Appendix **Interview Guide**

Introduction: This is to kindly invite you to participate in research aimed at understanding the use and effectiveness of technology in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment in the 2023 general elections. Your experiences, insights, and opinions are vital to the success of this research, which seeks to shed light on the experiences, successes and challenges encountered with the use of technology in the recruitment of electoral ad-hoc staff, including Presiding Officers (POs), Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs), Supervisory Presiding Officers (SPOs) and Registration Area Technical Support (RATECHs). By participating, you contribute to improving our understanding of the peculiarities and experiences associated with our electoral processes. Your input will be treated with utmost confidentiality and your honest response will be held with utmost value. Thank you for your time.

1. Please tell me about yourself and your role in the 2023 general election.
2. Is technology used in the electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment process? If yes, provide details about how it is used. If no, why is it not used?
3. Does the use of technology improve the efficiency of the electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment process?
4. What are the specific challenges with technology use in electoral-ad-hoc staff recruitment?
5. Do you think the use of technology in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment can help improve their performance?
6. How can the challenges associated with technology use in electoral ad-hoc staff recruitment be addressed?

Thank you for participating.