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de 2019 du CODESRIA*

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On Resuscitating the Aborted National Project: A Retrospective and Prospective View (*Notes from my Last Conversation with Thandika Mkandawire*)

Text of the Inaugural Thandika Mkandawire Annual Memorial Lecture presented at the 3ʳᵈ edition of the Social Policy in Africa Conference convened virtually from 22–24 November 2021.

Fantu Cheru*

Opening Statement

First of all, let me thank my long-time friend, Professor Jimi Adesina, for inviting me to give this inaugural address. It is a tall order to try to give a talk on the intellectual contributions of Thandika Mkandawire to the social sciences. He covered so many timely and important topics in the field of development; his work was too cumulative and exhaustive for me to be able to summarise and discuss them in the time allotted to me.

I also want to thank Professor Jimi Adesina for carrying the 'transformative social policy' torch – a topic so close to the heart of our late colleague, Professor Thandika Mkandawire. This is a topic that Thandika theorised deeply and he subsequently built one of the most successful research programmes during his tenure as Director of UNRISD. He dedicated his time to grounding theoretically the transformative role of social policy. This particular theoretical journey into social policy came after his ground-breaking work on the harmful effects of structural adjustment programmes. While others, such as Sir Richard and his colleagues at UNICEF, had started to take a critical look into SAPs and introduced the idea of 'Adjustment with a Human Face', Thandika took theorising on the transformative role of social policy to the next level once he arrived at UNRISD in 2009.

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It is difficult to think of a scholar who is as driven as Thandika was on the imperatives of promoting development in Africa. Because of his lived experience and encounter with colonial rule, he was a fierce nationalist, pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist. Because of his demeanour and way of speaking, one would not suspect that he carries all these admirable labels. It was not only the radicals who always sought his wisdom and critical perspectives on any topic; but also, conservative academics and politicians who disagree with him on so many issues, and still seek his acquaintance. The more he provoked them; the more he demolishes their distorted worldview; the more they actually want to engage him in a debate. He was an amazing storyteller: he was a voracious reader and interested about everything under the sun. More importantly, he had a fine sense of humour and loved to have a good time with friends.

Context

My talk today is primarily centred around the many memorable conversations I have had over the past four years with Thandika Mkandawire on the topic of development and on the aborted nationalist project. The last of those lunch meetings took place on 6 December 2018. Little did I know then that, over the subsequent months, his health was to deteriorate badly.

The title of my talk, 'Resuscitating the "Aborted" Nationalist Project: A Retrospective and Prospective View', is a topic that Thandika has written and spoken about. I chose to use the term 'aborted' instead of 'unfinished' national project deliberately. My aim is to show the inter-connectedness between the notion of democracy, development, independence, and the centrality of the state in transformative politics under an overarching theme of the 'nationalist project'. These themes are rooted in Mkandawire's deep thinking on the nationalist project and its future. I purposely used the term 'aborted' to imply that our present politics is dis-embedded from our rich history – that is a history of resistance; a history of pan-Africanism; and a history of anti-imperialism. I sometimes feel that the current generation are completely disconnected from this rich legacy of the founding fathers.

To start off my lecture: we live in interesting times and how I wish Thandika was alive to deconstruct many of the contradictory tendencies in global politics. We are experiencing tectonic shifts on many fronts – political, economic, social and ecological. These contradictory shifts have a strong bearing on the trajectory of African development, and more particularly on the transformative and emancipatory national project. As a scholar–practitioner and critic, I am trying hard to unlearn what I had learned – which is a difficult thing to do. Given the complexity in global politics,

we need to break away from our own disciplinary ghettos and try to look at things differently! Thandika thought coherently; he rejected disciplinary boundaries. It is increasingly obvious that we need 'new politics' and 'new analytical narrative' in order to achieve structural change.

The old categories of First World, Second World and Third World do not make any sense anymore. The First World, whose development experience that we Africans are constantly told to emulate, is in deep crisis and the financial crisis has only helped expose the insanity of free market dogmatism. The Second World virtually does not exist anymore. What used to be the Third World has gone in different directions – while many countries are immersed in poverty, looting and self-destruction, the other half is making their own history, thus fundamentally shifting the balance of power in the world economy. What once used to be the 'periphery' now has a significant influence on what goes on in the 'core' countries. As Samir Amin once said to me, the past is dead, and the future is unknown. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? What one can say is that we are finally free from the tyranny of 'received ideas'. It is up to us to make new history.

For us Africans to embark on the task of writing a new history, we must go back and re-examine the past. We need both a retrospective and prospective view. For me personally, it means revisiting the visions and aspirations of the aborted nationalist project for self-determination and independence, underpinned by a broad-based quest for an African renaissance and unity of the African people. To quote Adebayo Adedeji, 'A society which forgets the instructive values of its past for its present and future cannot be self-confident and self-reliant and will therefore lack internally generated dynamism and stability'.[1]

Learning from our Past History: Remembering the National Project
What Were the Objectives of the 'Nationalist Project'?

In this context, let me start by recounting the objectives, achievements and shortcomings of the first 'nationalist project' of the late 1950s and early 1960s whose aim was to overcome the institutional legacies of colonialism.[2] Inspired by the political thinking of early nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Modibo Keita, Sékou Touré and Nnamdi Azikiwe, among others, African countries embarked upon programmes of nation-building and national development designed to bring the fruits of social and economic growth to all sections of the population.

For the early African nationalist leaders, self-determination was a precondition for realising all human rights, the right to development in

particular.[3] The national project was, therefore, a strategy for more equitable appropriation of the productive forces at local, continental and global levels.[4] It involved deliberate state intervention to strengthen national political capacity in the face of a polarising logic of the world order, which undermines such capacity.[5] Further, inspired by the spirits of the 1955 Bandung conference of non-aligned nations, the nationalist leaders, joined by other newly independent countries from Asia and Latin America, called for a New International Economic Order under the auspices of the United Nations. Though little progress has been made since 1975, African countries remain fully engaged in the struggle for reforming the global governance system.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, as a result of deliberate state actions, African economies registered impressive growth rates given the initial conditions at the time of independence. Physical infrastructures were greatly improved, particularly in areas of health, education and communication. New universities, agricultural research centres, national transport networks, and local government structures were established to facilitate the national development project.[6]

Since the early 1980s, however, this mood has been dispelled by increased levels of poverty, social disintegration, and political instability. The spectacular political and economic progress registered during the first decade and a half of independence is now a distant memory. Instead, the balance has turned once again and shifted in favour of the nations and social classes which are best placed to profit from the polarising logic of world order. In short, the politics of 'inclusion' that was central to the nationalist project has been overtaken by politics of 'exclusion'.

At this point, a word of caution is in order. Let me not over-glorify the 'nationalist project'! There were many contradictions in it, both in theory and practice. Among the many contradictions that Thandika points out, I will focus just on four.

First, the need to maintain national sovereignty and nation-building were high on the agenda, even if that meant dismissing the existence of deep cleavages based on ethnicity, gender, class and religion.[7] Ethnicity and tribalism were officially banished, while in practice these were the main criteria for distributing public resources in exchange for social groups' recognition of the authority of the power holders. Thandika referred to this practice as 'nationalist by day and tribalist by night'. The nationalist discourse denied ethnic claims; it denied sub-nationalism; it denied the existence of tribes.

Second, class analysis was never fully embraced by nationalist movements. Instead, the focus was on ending past forms of racial and horizontal

inequalities without transforming the old order. Thus, policies such as 'indigenisation', 'Africanisation' and 'Black Economic Empowerment' were applauded in the face of growing intra-group inequality.[8] Let me take a line from Thabo Mbeki who said in 1999: 'As part of our continuing struggle to wipe out the legacy of racism, we must work to ensure that there emerge a black bourgeoisie, whose presence within our economy and society will be part of the process of the deracialization of the economy and society'.[9] How perverse can one possibly be to equate the rising fortunes of Tito Mbwani, Tokyo Kiwale, Cyril Ramaphosa and a few thousand emerging black middle class with the upward mobility of all South Africans?

Third, the central assumptions of the African nationalist project of the 1950s and 1960s were centred around the idea that 'industrialisation by invitation' is possible and that its achievement is dependent upon the maintenance of intimate links with the former colonial powers.[10] The second assumption underpinning this approach was the belief that market forces would allow the benefits of growth to trickle down to benefit everyone. In other words, 'a rising tide will lift all the boats stranded on the sand'. This was, of course, a fundamental mistake that later spelt disaster across the continent.

Fourthly, social policy also took an instrumentalist approach in the nation-building project, with its heavy *productionist* emphasis. Little attention was given to its *redistributive role*.[11] The instrumentalist approach of constructing elaborate social subsidies and major social programmes in education, urban planning, health, etc. became the means for attacking emerging social problems that might subvert the nationalist project. This instrumental view did not prevent inter-group conflict; rather it helped exacerbate the problem.

What Really Contributed to the Premature Demise of the National Project?

To answer this question, we need to periodise the post-independence political order and locate at each phase the factors that contributed to the eventual demise of the nationalist project. The post-independence history of Africa is replete with examples of broken promises and unfulfilled dreams. Since the 1950s, Africa has gone through four different political and social experiences, all of them to the detriment of the vast majority of ordinary Africans. Broadly speaking the four phases include: (1) the independence struggle itself; (2) the post-independence experience with development and nation-building; (3) the post-1980 experience with market-oriented reform, dominated by the policy of structural adjustment; and (4) the post-1990 experience of liberal democracy.

During the first three phases, peasants and the urban poor saw their living conditions deteriorate and their democratic rights evaporate. Phase 4 – the experiment with multi-party democracy – which raised a lot of expectations, has so far failed to bring substantial economic and political changes to the majority.

Already halfway into the first decade of independence, many commentators were sounding the alarm bells that the politics of 'inclusion' was being overtaken by politics of 'exclusion'. Publications like Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart*; Basil Davidson's (1964) *Which Way Africa?*; René Dumont's (1965) *False Start in Africa*; Oginga Odinga's (1967) *Not Yet Uhuru*, and many others elaborated on how things were moving in the wrong direction. How else can you explain the fact that one African dictator after another extends their hold on power through the ballot box with increasing regularity!

However, the conventional wisdom about Africa is that the continent is marginalised because (1) it is not sufficiently integrated into the capitalist global economy; and (2) patrimonialism is rife and goes against entrepreneurship and capitalist accumulation. Both assumptions have been refuted by Mkandawire in many of his writings.

And to the contrary, I take the position that a proper understanding of Africa's marginalisation must focus on the theoretical assumptions and institutional structures which underpin the changing nature of North–South relations and, in particular, the aid, debt and trade regimes through which African development is regulated. In addition to the crisis of leadership at the national level, bad rules, unjust trade agreements, illegitimate debts, and bad policies imposed on Africa by the institutions of the world system have produced multiple 'black holes' of social exclusion, pockets of slums, and disabled nation states. If there is anything pervasive about 'the presence of the past', it is this lack of freedom to manoeuvre – the ever-shrinking policy space.

Claude Ake agrees with me on this. In his last writing before his tragic death, he argued: 'It is not that development has failed in Africa. It has never begun.' Because of exogeneity, 'Africa never had a development agenda – but a confusion of agendas.'[12] Ake argued that development theories tended to ignore the peculiarities of African countries and cultures. He then called upon all of us to 'challenge and subvert' the constraints of dominant and received disciplinary approaches and paradigms – a sentiment also shared by Mkandawire.

As Africa entered the 1970s, the national project was being threatened from within and without. Whether political independence was achieved through direct negotiation or the barrel of the gun, the nationalist leaders came to the world stage in a very unfavourable political and economic

environment and with little room for manoeuvre. Consequently, pragmatic accommodation to the inherited international system thus became a preferred solution to 'revolution' or delinking. Only a handful of African countries set out to transform their economies from external domination by promoting self-reliant strategies, but with limited success.

The nationalist project was undercut by poor political governance as unaccountable political elites, often supported by competing Western powers, let loose their predatory instincts and indulged in corruption, abuse of office, and repression.[13] As the African military emerged as the sole conductor of state politics in many parts of the continent from the 1970s onwards, the national project took a different direction. The new power holders became too preoccupied with short-term considerations over long-term ones: power over welfare, personal over institutional considerations, national unity over distributional justice, and security over development.[14] Policies came to be determined solely by concern with the means rather than the conditions of development. This gave rise to preoccupation with structures leading to centralisation and expansion of state bureaucracies and encouraged a top-down approach to the management of public affairs.[15]

More importantly, the post-independence international context was no more propitious than the colonial one. Africa became the prime battleground in East–West rivalry.[16] Conflicts between and within African states were intensified as a result. Each side backed their 'own' dictators, who abused their power to enrich themselves. As the African nationalist project came to be perceived by the Western powers as being synonymous with 'communism', leaders who expressed any desire to chart an independent development path (e.g., Lumumba; Nkrumah; Sékou Touré) were either assassinated or overthrown by Western-sponsored military coups.[17] In their place, neo-colonial regimes – both civilian and military juntas – were imposed and often sustained by foreign aid. Thus, barely halfway into the second decade of independence, the vision of an independent Africa had started to fall apart and the gulf between state and society widened considerably in the process.

As Africa entered the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, a 'new world order' has emerged that favoured powerful Western nations and giant firms that are best placed to profit from the polarising logic of world order. This is what Susan Strange once called the rise of 'business civilization'. Imperialism has changed its modus operandi. The operative logic of the post-1980 political order has been that market economies give birth to democratic rule and the latter in turn contributes to a well-functioning market and prosperity in general.[18] Following this logic, debt structures,

conditional aid flows, and unequal systems of trade became the main instruments for regulating Africa's development. African countries were forced to open up their markets, dismantle many aspects of the African state and institute minimal democratic procedures essential for the well-functioning of the market.[19] In the process, what was left of 'development welfarism' of the 1960s and 1970s was completely erased from the economic reform package.[20] So, policymaking, an important aspect of sovereignty, has been wrenched out of the hands of the African state.

Four decades later, the role of the state in Africa as the driver of development has been significantly curtailed, the dominance of market forces is set in place, and economies have been wide open to external competition. Yet, few African countries have achieved credibly in terms of any of the indicators that measure real, sustainable development. Instead, most have slid backwards into growing inequality, ecological degradation, de-industrialisation and poverty. By imposing particular policy choices on poor countries, creditors take away governments' sovereignty and accountability to their own people, and instead make them answerable to unaccountable external institutions for their choice of economic policies, their level of spending on public services, and other crucial political decisions. This is *recolonization*, not development.

Resuscitating the National Project: The Way Forward

Africa's marginal position in the new global hierarchy provides us with a compelling occasion to set in motion a *transformative* and *emancipatory* national development project that will create the necessary policy space. A transformative and emancipatory project will entail the need to adopt key reforms at national and regional levels, with greater emphasis on 'strategic integration' of the national economy into the international economy.

I do believe that transformational change that will move societies forward to a different level and quality of life requires the simultaneous, significant participation of the three major elements of society: the private sector, the development state, and civil society. Without the full engagement of these three engines of change, the end result will be an extrapolation of existing conditions or at best an incremental improvement, which fails to give society a new sense of itself as just, open and fair.

Key Questions that we must Interrogate

What is the future of the national project? How and who should resuscitate and drive the new national project that is emancipatory?

What is the line-up of the balance of social forces that are capable of contributing to the construction of the new emancipatory national project? Civil society? Peasants? Intellectuals? Who?

Is an African-owned and African-led development agenda possible in an environment of a high level of aid dependency, endless 'conditionality' and shrinking policy space that characterises the donor–recipient relationship?

What are the objective conditions today that will permit a transformative national project to emerge? I am not sure if I will be able to answer all of them, but I will try.

What are the Pre-requisites for a Transformative/Emancipatory National Project?

While the aborted national project of the 1960s operated within the confines of the inherited colonial order, the new 'transformative national project' is essentially a strategy for more equitable appropriation of the productive forces at local, continental and global levels. It involves deliberate intervention to strengthen national political capacity in the face of a polarising logic of the world order, which undermines such capacity.

Renewing Democracy and Improving Governance

Notwithstanding remarkable progress in democratisation since 1989, democracy in Africa is still in profound trouble and has not moved beyond the holding of multiparty elections. Entrenched and repressive structures continue to frustrate the process. This is partly because democratic institutions including legislatures, local governments, electoral bodies, political parties, the judiciary, the media, and civil society remain weak and are therefore unable to act as countervailing forces to an often-powerful executive branch of government. Mkandawire refer to this outcome as '*choiceless democracy*'.

For democracy to succeed in the African context there must be significant social reform and a reduction of inequalities as well as the decentralisation of political power and decision-making. By enlarging visions and raising consciousness, citizens can undermine the vicious circle of mass exclusion and marginalisation. This will in turn increase the legitimacy of the state as the people will possess major decisions and feel involved in decision-making. The most reliable way of getting the citizens behind the national development agenda is through democratic structures and the empowerment of people at the grassroots.

Building a Democratic Developmental State

Central to Africa's renewal is the development of a strong, democratic and activist state that would assert its development role within the context of a common national vision. Successful development demands a greater role of the state in the economy than neoclassical theory has assumed.[21] A competent state has a vital role to play in guiding national development, ensuring egalitarian distribution of resources, linking urban and rural production, and investing in human capital formation to provide equal opportunity and upward mobility for all.

Indeed, the lessons of the recent and distant past teach us that those countries that experienced faster rates of growth are not those who indiscriminately open up their economies to foreign trade and investment but, rather, those who first develop their domestic markets adequately enough to compete in the world economy. Such is the case of China, India and Vietnam – three important countries which violated virtually all the rules in the neoliberal guidebook even while moving in a more market-oriented direction. These countries actually grew faster under protective barriers, and only later did they begin to liberalise. In other words, if the market is to function effectively, it requires elaborate state guidance.

Constructing a Viable Social Contract, Underpinned by a Strong Social Protection System

In order for democracy to succeed, there must be significant social reform and a reduction of inequalities. Political freedom and participation cannot be divorced from hunger, ignorance and diseases. In every political system, there must be a bargain in being a member of that political community. A social bargain is the glue that keeps a political community together. It is within the social bargain that every citizen seeks to exert accountability.

Revitalizing Agricultural Production and Empowering the Peasantry

The disappointing economic performance of the continent over the past three decades has been caused, to a large extent, by the failure of African governments to create the proper conditions for an agricultural revolution to take place, which would, in turn, propel the process of industrialisation and social development. Instead, since independence, many governments have pursued policies that are essentially 'anti-peasant' and anti-poor. *Citizen and Subject*, a title coined by Mamdani, perfectly describes the pathetic condition of the African peasantry. Of course, the priority task of

an African agricultural revolution, that will remain for several decades to come, is obviously complex and multi-faceted. At the minimum, it requires the presence of a strong and effective 'enabling state' with the capacity to respond to the demands of rural producers.

Investing in African Education and Basic Research

Africa cannot flourish unless the intellectual capital of the continent is developed and maintained. Education is a cornerstone of human development in every society. Through education, people become aware of their environment and the social and economic options available to them. At the present moment, however, the state of education in Africa is pathetic. Despite the tremendous gains made since the 1960s in increasing access to education, greater challenges lie ahead. Fiscal crisis, poor student participation, high dropout and repetition levels, and low academic achievements are widespread destructive trends throughout the system. The only way to narrow the knowledge gap is by investing in education, basic research, and development. Investment in education and basic research should emphasise the need to scale-up the technological ladder and tap into the global system of information and knowledge. Intellectual marginalisation will occur unless Africa raises its educational levels and standards.

Giving Real Meaning to the Ideal of Pan-Africanism Through Regional Cooperation

Regional integration and cooperation are important aspects of 'strategic integration'. The emergence of three powerful trading blocs – NAFTA, the EU and APECC – over the past twenty-five years poses great challenge to the African continent. Africa will find itself ever more vulnerable and isolated if it chooses to remain a collection of fifty small, competing exporters, dependent on these regional giants to purchase its output and supply its needs. To accelerate the continent's economic integration, governments must create the desired conducive environment. This includes the need to invest heavily in regional infrastructure; simplify procedures for promoting intra-regional trade and investment; build a strong financial sector to support intra-Africa trade and investment; and address the coordination and harmonisation gaps at national and regional levels. Such policies should support the goal of increased international competitiveness, for example by promoting regional production chains, and also nurture the development of regional markets in order to reduce demand-side constraint on growth.

Business–government Strategic Alliance

Transformational change that will move African countries forward to a different level and quality of life requires the simultaneous engagement of the three major elements of society: the private sector, the development state, and civil society. One key factor that contributed to the spectacular economic transformation of the East Asian NICs (Newly Industrialising Countries) has been the strong business–government strategic alliance under the guidance of an activist developmental state. Policies are implemented through private initiatives rather than public ownership, and through the market mechanism rather than administrative control. In this regard, economic policies are formulated by a capable and pragmatic economic bureaucracy, which through formal and informal ties with the private sector develops a common vision of development objectives and targets, and a common understanding of how these can be achieved.

Securing Policy Space by Pursuing 'Heterodox' Economic Policies

Developing countries need policy space to exercise institutional innovations that depart from the now discredited conventional orthodoxies of the IMF and World Bank. The key to Africa in today's world is to try to weave through the parameters set by the world economy and maintain as much independence (or policy space) as possible. The lessons from China and East Asia certainly demonstrate the importance of pursuing 'heterodox' national policies that support strategic industries, develop internal infrastructure, invest in human capital formation to provide equal opportunity and upward mobility for all, and control financial markets. They were able to succeed for two reasons: (1) because governments had the freedom to control basic economic policy; and (2) the state had the administrative, legal and regulatory capacity to guide the market in a way favourable to national development. Therefore, an effective state is a prerequisite for a well-functioning market.

What nation states do in regard to domestic wage levels, foreign investment, public services, and economic diversification can help determine, to a considerable extent, whether a country develops or not. Although these powers are not always simple or easy to exercise, they have by no means completely disappeared from the national arena.

Conclusion

The current African development crisis provides us with new openings for activism, social pacts, and public policy debates on a number of key issues aimed at reintegrating 'the economy' and 'the social' through democratic politics. Structural change requires the reconfiguration of the balance of social forces – i.e., social movements; labour movements; peasant movements; consumer movements – in order to create genuinely redistributive structures and institutions at local and global levels. In short, I am calling for a new politics of liberation. We need a major paradigm shift; a new analytical narrative on what is to be done. Of course, resistance will take many forms and the outcome will depend on the capacity of the forces of civil society to gain sufficient influence to qualify as a genuine counter-project.

A strategy of recovery should centre on transforming the production system; transforming 'social relations'; and transforming 'democratic governance' at global and local levels. Central to this endeavour is the need to employ 'social policy' as an instrument of recovery. The social question cannot be dis-embedded from the economy; and the economy cannot be separated from the 'social question'. To repeat, we need new politics; and new analytical narratives on what is to be done.

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Digital Technologies and Election Management in Africa's Democratisation Process: More Technocratic than Democratic?

Okechukwu Obinna Ibeanu*

Introduction

It has been about three decades since strikes and mass demonstrations in the streets of Benin Republic signalled a continent-wide trajectory in Africa that led to the serial toppling of authoritarian and military regimes. Those events have been described as 'a historic shift in the political landscape of postcolonial Africa'.[1] But perhaps more appropriately, they unleashed Africa's third democratic movement. The first movement took the form of anticolonial struggles, followed by the 'second independence movement' in the immediate post-independence era; both failed to meet the aspirations of Africa's peoples.[2] However, the limits of this third democratic movement in Africa were, like those before it, fixed as 'orthodox liberal democracy'.[3] Within a few years, many African countries ended authoritarian or military rule and began to conduct regular elections. Thus, while in the early 1990s we could count only a few countries that had elected governments, today we can count only a few that have not.

Essentially, this shift was a quantitative one. Observers focused interest principally on the number of African countries that were conducting elections. As the number of elections multiplied, there was a great euphoria and sense of expectation about them, propelling more and more countries to follow suit. But early on, interest began to shift to whether elections would become regular, rather than one-off episodes riding on the crest of the wave across the continent. Thus, the question of the universalisation of elections as the sole legitimate means of changing government, the so-called democratic consolidation, became the focus for many observers. Since then, however, concerns about the real democratic content of elections,

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especially worries about whether their outcomes reflect the true wishes of the electorate, have grown.[4] In addition, the rising number of visibly flawed electoral processes, the seemingly permanent dominance of ruling parties and concerns about the impartiality of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) have been sources of apprehension among scholars and citizens. Consequently, observers began to focus less on the number of countries holding elections and the frequency of their occurrence and more on the democratic content of these elections. In other words, interest shifted from the quantity of elections in Africa to their quality.[5]

Two issues have been at the heart of the debate about the quality of elections in Africa, namely, the impartiality and the efficiency of election management agencies. The first revolves around the level of human intervention in determining the outcome of elections. Essentially, the question has been one of trust in the election managers – that they will respect the rules, that citizens can participate in elections and make their choices unencumbered, that there will be a level playing field for all candidates and political parties, that outcomes will truly reflect the choices of citizens based on extant rules, and that grievances will be heard fairly. The level of trust of citizens in African elections has progressively declined since the 1990s, with virtually every outcome being hotly contested. The neutrality of EMBs, the judiciary and security agencies in electoral matters has been routinely questioned.

The second issue deals with the efficacy of election managers in delivering quality elections. Elections appear to be poorly planned, the procurement and delivery of materials are slow, the casting of ballots and the tabulation of results are archaic and the declaration of outcomes is tardy and inefficient.

It is not surprising, then, that digital technologies have been promoted widely as the inevitable solution to the problem of election quality in Africa. They are seen as the natural fixes for the two perceived central problems of election quality – human interference and inefficiency. The belief in digital technologies as the panacea for questionable elections in Africa is so pervasive that it is becoming difficult to imagine elections on the continent without them. 'Digital democracy', 'election technology' and 'digital elections' are now commonly used concepts. Indeed, the application of digital technologies in African elections has grown in leaps and bounds in the last two decades. Since South Africa used a centralised electronic election results centre in 1994, and subsequently the 'zip- zip' voter registration device, election technologies have come to form an essential part of election management. They are now used in all activities of the electoral management cycle, including the registration of voters, preparation of election plans, procurement, logistics and, in some cases, voting. In addition, digital technologies have become an essential tool

of political participation for voters. Election-related information is shared by EMBs, candidates and the media, using digital technology. Indeed, social media has become one of the most powerful tools of citizen mobilisation and engagement in Africa during elections, especially with an estimated 30 million cellphones on the continent.

It is against this backdrop that the 2019 CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from 15 July to 2 August 2019. The theme of the Institute was 'Digital Technologies and Election Management in Africa's Democratisation Process'. This theme was chosen:

> 'to give academics and policymakers involved in academic research and management of elections and the democratisation process in the continent a chance to reflect on the broad questions regarding the implications the increased adoption of digital technologies in the conduct and management of elections has on the quality of election process and outcomes, and ultimately the quality of the democratic process itself. The choice of the theme is also informed by current trends on the continent with respect to the conduct and management of elections as a critical component of democratic evolution.'[6]

This article presents an overview, appraisal and a summary of the outcomes of the Institute, focusing on its organisation and academic programme. The organisational aspects cover the laureates and resource persons, the format of the academic work, as well as the content of the programme. The academic programme covered the lectures, the presentations of the laureates and the core discussions and debates that took place. The article concludes by looking at the future of the study and application of digital technologies in African elections and the prospects of building a community of young academics and practitioners who will drive that future.

Overview of Issues[7]

Several issues around digital technologies and election management in Africa's democratisation were explored at the Institute. However, a few stood out as cardinal to the study of digital technologies and election management in Africa's contemporary democratisation.

The Quality of Elections and the Rise of Digital Technologies in Election Administration

A starting point in unpacking the theme of the Institute was the link between the quality of elections and the rise in the application of digital technologies in the electoral process in Africa. The quality of elections is by and large shaped by a number of requirements. First, rules governing elections, which

include legislation, regulations and guidelines, must be set in advance and in good time. They should also be made public, and all individuals and agencies must adhere to them. Elections are largely dependent on formal rules, and the precedent determinacy of such rules, which usually includes provisions that guarantee the prior indeterminacy of outcomes, is essential to quality elections. Second, citizens who are entitled to vote must be able to make their choices secretly, unencumbered and unhindered. Third, all voters, political parties and candidates should be treated equally. In other words, there must be a level playing field for all participants, parties and candidates, such that all are treated fairly. Fourth, the choices of voters must be the sole determinant of the outcome, based on extant rules. In other words, there must be the highest fidelity of resonance between the choices made by voters and the electoral outcomes. And fifth, there must be ample and genuine opportunities for grievances to be redressed.[8]

It seems that in Africa's contemporary elections these requirements are in decline, arising from three sources, namely, weak institutions, weak infrastructure and weak citizen engagement. In the first place, the weakness of the institutions that manage the electoral process is clear in the instability of rules, poor compliance with them, and an even lower level of trust that electoral institutions will act neutrally and that those who implement the rules will do so fairly, discounting their personal and sectional interests. A widespread perception in African countries – that those who organise elections will use their positions to promote self and sectional interests – has undermined trust in electoral management institutions and therefore weakened them. This lack of trust seems to afflict not just electoral management institutions, but also public institutions at large. A common plausible explanation roots it in the history of these institutions as part of a colonial state that functioned to conquer and control the people and brazenly promote the interests of the colonisers. Alienated from the colonised, this state never earned their trust and so could not evolve as an autonomous force that unified the people-nation. Instead, to date, it has continued to be a ruthless force that acts without consultation and essentially promotes the sectional interests of its controllers – political parties, religious groups, ethnic and other communal groups. The lack of trust in electoral institutions is worsened by their low functional capacity, which includes an absence of the requisite administrative skills, the preponderance of powerful individuals within them who override rules, as well as overall low accountability to citizens.

Apart from weak institutions, the infrastructure for conducting and managing elections is also inadequate. A major source of the operational weakness of African EMBs is the poor national infrastructure. Most parts

of Africa are still very remote with poor communication facilities. But even in the cities, transportation, electricity and telecommunications are in a parlous state, making the organisation of elections extremely tedious and tardy. According to the Global Infrastructure Hub, Africa is underinvesting in all major infrastructure compared to other parts of the world (see Table 1). Yet, population growth in Africa outpaces many other parts of the world. This combination of a rapidly growing population and underinvestment in infrastructure epitomises the weakness of electoral infrastructure in Africa.

The third source of the decline in quality of elections in Africa is weak civic engagement. To be sure, the role of civil society in the electoral process in Africa has been increasing, especially regarding support for election administration, voter education and electoral accountability. In the first instance, civic groups in Africa are becoming a major source of knowledge for EMBs on diverse issues of election administration. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have expertise in voter registration, the application of ICT to elections, legal issues and constituency delimitation, among other factors. Indeed, electoral commissions across the continent are leveraging this pool of knowledge to improve the quality of elections. CSOs provide one other type of support to EMBs – they serve as a line of defence against undue pressure from government, political parties and other vested interests. Civil society organisations have used aggressive advocacy to protect EMBs, enabling them to retain the independence necessary to conduct free, fair and credible elections. Secondly, civic groups have been very active in educating voters and ensuring a higher turnout at elections. Certainly, voter education is a very important part of the election work by CSOs in Africa. Above all, CSOs have been vital in what broadly may be called electoral accountability, especially as entrenched in election observation or monitoring.

Table 1: 2019-Global Infrastructure Investment (USD billions)

Sector	World	Africa	Asia	Diff. World & Africa (%)	Diff. Asia & Africa (%)
Airports	2,100	60	841	97.1	92.9
Energy	26,000	1,600	15,000	93.8	89.3
Rail	10,000	118	7,200	98.8	98.4
Road	26,000	775	16,000	97.0	95.2
Telecom	7,800	747	3,500	90.4	78.7

Source: Global Infrastructure Hub [https://outlook.gihub.org – Accessed 12 July 2019]

Despite this activity, civic engagement has been very modest across the continent when the vast population is considered. Moreover, the civic space has seen several strictures imposed on it by government. To illustrate, current data from CIVICUS on the state of civil society in forty-eight African countries shows that civil society in about 19 per cent of the countries is 'closed', 31 per cent is 'repressed', about 42 per cent is 'obstructed' and 8 per cent is 'narrowed'. It is instructive that not a single African country is categorised as 'open', and 90 per cent of civil society in Africa is characterised by CIVICUS as closed, repressed or obstructed.[9]

Given these challenges, two stylised solutions have been offered to African elections. One extreme, which we may call the 'Pebbles Extreme', argues that Africa is ill prepared for the complex election management system of the developed world. Therefore, the solution is to return to the simplest election techniques that would be found in the 'typical' African situation. These must be simple, easily understood and transparent. In 1990s Nigeria, for instance, the military government, as part of its transition to a democracy programme, introduced the 'open ballot system' where people lined up behind their preferred candidates or their photographs and the people in the queues were counted and recorded. The 1993 presidential election was partly based on this approach and is touted to have produced the most transparent elections in Nigeria. In Gambia, pebbles replaced ballot papers in this stylised African solution to an African problem. Kenya's 1988 elections, dubbed *mlolongo*, were similar to the Nigerian example above, but with a twist of outcome in that the longest queues lost and the shortest won.

The second extreme may be characterised as the 'Machine Extreme'. Simply put, since in Africa the level of trust is low and election managers are inefficient, technology is the only solution for making elections honest, impersonal and efficient. At face value, it is this claim – that digital technology will solve the problem of election quality – that ostensibly drives the rash of digital technologies applied in Africa, which are accepted despite the mixed record election technology has in Africa.[10]

Digital Technologies as a Terrain of Power

A major point that resonated throughout the three weeks of the Institute was that digital technologies generally, and particularly as applied to election management, are a terrain of global power in which Africa is disadvantaged. This is so because Africa is essentially a consumer of digital technologies produced elsewhere. There is a clear global division of labour in digital technologies. First, the raw materials for most of the hardware come from Africa. Second, the hardware is produced outside Africa, particularly in

Europe, North America and China. Finally, the software that drives the critical hardware comes principally from Europe, North America and Asia. Consequently, Africa is seriously underprivileged and vulnerable in the global power of digital technologies. Although many software production initiatives, especially focusing on small applications, are increasing across Africa, still the big players in terms of election technology are not African.

Election technologies have therefore become a major component of foreign aid and trade for Africa. Aid for elections in many African countries has a ma jor digital technology component, particularly to facilitate voter registration and the tabulation and transmission of results. Incidentally, financial support for the purchase of digital election technology still returns to the producing countries outside Africa. Many times, the terms of financial engagement for that aid are way out of proportion to the needs served, to the point of defeating the very idea of 'aid'. Digital election technology is purchased at exorbitant prices from producing countries. The cost is increased by unfavourable exchange rates and corruption. Ironically, the essential raw materials needed to produce these technologies, including aluminium for Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screens, lithium for batter ies, copper, silver and gold for electrical units, and coltan ores for micro capacitors are sourced from Africa. For instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the world's largest producer of coltan, and in 2013, Rwanda was the world's largest exporter, exporting 2.4 million tonnes of coltan ore.

At the same time, African EMBs have fallen into a technology peonage as a result of the use (or abuse) of election technologies. Experts and consultants come from abroad to set up the systems, costing Africa huge sums of money. Subse- quently, malfunctions and problems require the same experts to be flown in to solve even the most minimal issues. Licensing costs for software continue to rise geometrically and the rapid rate of obsolescence of the technologies means that ever more funds must be allocated for upgrades. The participants in the Institute therefore wondered if election technology was not the new imperialism.

Antinomies of Election Technology

Inherent in the use of digital technologies in election management in Africa are several antinomic and paradoxical manifestations. First is what may be described as a paradox of trust. The Institute's participants recognised this paradox as a constant manifestation of election technologies in Africa. Essentially, digital tech nologies are applied to elections to increase the level of trust in electoral processes and outcomes. Paradoxically, however,

it appears that the more technology is applied, the more contentious the elections on the continent have become and the greater the desire for the 'Pebbles Extreme' cited above. From the registration of voters to the announcement of results, disputations and violence have continued, irrespective of the use of technology. In Kenya's 2017 elections, despite the far-reaching application of technology in results management, the opposition vigorously contested the election outcome. In fact, issues around the application and management of the technology featured prominently, including the unexplained death of the head of ICT at the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. In Nigeria's 2019 general elections, the issue of result servers of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) became central in the case brought before the elections tribunal by the loser of the presidential election. The same controversies arose after the 2018 elections in the DRC over the use of voting machines. Consequently, the judiciary is becoming more central in electoral outcomes than the ballot box.

Secondly, there is the contradiction between integrity and inclusion. On one hand, this has to do principally with the technology divides in Africa between young and old, urban and rural, rich and poor and between men and women. Consequently, the use of digital election technology could lead to the exclusion of citizens who may feel 'intimidated' by it, may not have the skills to use it, may not live in areas that have access to it, or may not have the resources to acquire it. Therefore, in the quest to use digital technology to increase electoral integrity, African elections may be excluding more and more citizens. On the other hand, it seems that integrity is privileged over inclusion in Africa's electoral process, unlike developed countries, where inclusion is obviously privileged. The desire to digitise integrity speaks very much to the trust deficit in Africa's electoral and indeed governance processes. The excessive emphasis, in African elections, on stringent, technology-based identification of voters in order to eliminate electoral fraud seems not to be the case in the so-called advanced democracies where any form of identification, if at all, is adequate to allow a voter to vote. Also, votes can be cast through mail, sometimes from abroad, with minimal interest in whether they have been cast by the registered voters. But in African elections, special identifica tion sometimes backed by biometric technology is required for voters. The excuse is the elimination of fraud. Yet, there is no scientific basis to argue that voters are more fraudulent in Africa than elsewhere.

A third paradox of digital election technologies, which participants identified, is that, globally, it seems that technologically advanced countries

increasingly are not going all out to apply such technologies, unlike African countries, which can hardly afford them but clamour for their application. Electronic voting is now widely canvassed as the way to go in Africa. Yet, global data does not suggest that countries elsewhere are falling over themselves to adopt electronic voting. Indeed, only twenty-five countries across the globe currently use or have tried electronic voting. Some commenced and subsequently abandoned it, including some of the most technologically advanced countries, like Germany.

The fourth paradox of the application of digital technologies in election management is its janiform character. Indeed, digital technology in election administration appears to always present two contradictory faces:

- Digital technologies have improved the integrity of elections, but they have also been a source of vulnerability. The activities of organisations such as Cambridge Analytica in elections worldwide have brought the pernicious use of digital technologies in elections into very bold relief.
- Digital technologies have been very important sources of information for the electorate, but they have also been sources of massive disinformation. This is exemplified by the increasing role of fake news in elections.
- Digital technologies have improved citizen participation, but they have also excluded citizens by creating a series of technology divides based on rural-urban, gender and age differences.
- Digital technologies have made election administration more efficient, but they have also supported waste and corruption.
- Overall, digital technologies have helped democratisation and the expansion of participation in governance, but they have also helped to narrow the governance base by putting more and more power in the hands of technocrats and those who have a better understanding of technology. This is clearly shown in the prominence of ICT professionals in the running of elections and the rising notion of e-governance. Consequently, digital technologies could make the electoral process more technocratic than democratic.

The Cost of Elections

Elections are becoming too expensive for African countries and digital technology is only driving up the cost. Election technologies form part of the so-called integrity cost of elections, which is presumed to be justifiably high in Africa because of electoral fraud. In Nigeria, the 2019 general elections cost over NGN 189 billion (about USD 525,000,000) in core electoral costs alone, reaching USD 660 million when other costs such as security for the elections are added. In Liberia, the 2017 elections cost USD 38,286,525, which was almost 1.8 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that year.[11]

Participants in the Institute went beyond the monetary costs of elections, however, to look at the long-term social and developmental costs of election technologies to Africa. The concern remains whether Africa is getting value for money from its investments in elections, including investments in election technology. Are elected governments performing well enough to justify such investments? Would these resources not be better used for many of the developmental challenges that confront African countries, including meeting basic needs in health, education and agriculture? Are investments in election technologies stimulating any substantial knowledge and skills transfers to Africa?

Social Media and Election Management

The role of social media in the application of digital technologies in election management in Africa attracted extensive attention in the Institute. Several important points were made during the discussions, including the following:

- Social media are powerful in mobilising popular participation in the electoral process. Therefore, they are a vital tool for candidates, political parties and other stakeholders.
- Social media are useful to EMBs in managing elections, for deployment, dealing with challenges during elections, reporting abuses and for information dissemination, among other purposes.
- Social media have increased youth participation in the electoral process, since young people are the major users of social networking. The voices of the young are now more relevant as a result of social media, which has opened up opportunities for more serious political participation.
- Social media carry fake news and hate speech, which are very damaging to the electoral process. The role of social media in promoting electoral violence is widely reported in many African countries.
- The digital divide between the old and young, urban and rural, male and female and rich and poor also means that access to social media is unequal and skewed. Therefore, the increasing use of social media in the electoral process could alienate some segments of the population.

The Role of Political Parties

The Institute sought to situate political parties in the context of digital technologies in Africa's democratisation. Political parties form a critical part of electoral democracy and many aspects of their functioning are affected by the application of digital technologies in the electoral process, including their internal organisation, membership recruitment, selection of candidates

and campaigns. Clearly, the application of digital technologies has impacted profoundly on the character of political parties:

- First, it has eroded some of the traditional power of the leadership of political parties and increasingly empowered the rank and file membership. By making information readily available, particularly through digital social networks and online sources, the participation of ordinary members has increased, authority has become more diffuse and ordinary members are now more able to demand accountability from party leaders.

- Second, digital technologies have changed how political parties recruit their mem bers. Political parties in Africa can now cast their nets wide, crowdsourcing membership. This large 'virtual membership' contributes not only financially but also to policy debates and campaigns using digital technologies.

- Third, the application of digital technologies has affected the organisational struc ture of political parties. They are increasingly becoming less vertical and more horizontal, which has enhanced internal party democracy and given more voice to the rank and file.

- Fourth, digital technologies are conducive to the rise of independent candidates, thus challenging the traditional role of parties in political recruitment.

- Fifth, the traditional strategies of fundraising by political parties have been profoundly reshaped by digital technologies, making funding nimbler and more 'tech-driven'. This has enabled parties and candidates to raise money quickly and from diverse sources, leading to positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, more members can make financial contributions to political parties and their candidates, which has strengthened, even if tangentially, their voice in party policies and in holding party leaders and candidates accountable. Conversely, however, the use of digital technologies, including online platforms, for fundraising has led to faceless donations, sometimes from questionable sources. The risk of money laundering through party fundraising has become very high as a result.

- Sixth, digital technologies have enabled political parties to improve internal organisation, particularly recordkeeping, planning and accounting.

- Seventh, digital technologies have increased the level of youth involvement in political parties and this is good considering that Africa is a 'young continent'.

- Eighth, and finally, the proliferation of political parties is fast becoming a hallmark of electoral democracy in Africa. Although this may not be caused directly by the use of digital technologies, these have made it easier for new parties to form and mobilise. With limited opportunities for independent candidature in several African countries, political parties have tended to mushroom. This has been the case even in single-member constituency (SMC), simple-plurality (first-past-the-post) electoral systems.

Large numbers of political parties tend to be sustained by a proportional representation system because of the allocation of seats based on votes won. While this is not necessarily bad for electoral democracy, it points to structural issues in African political parties. For one thing, the proliferation of political parties, driven by communal factors and buoyed by digital technologies, has encouraged the polarisation of society along ethnoreligious lines. For another thing, it accounts in part for kinetic propensies among politicians, that is, their tendency to change from one party to another or to form new parties at the slightest intraparty disagreement.[12] It is often suggested that this is as a result of absence of party ideology and therefore commitment to clear programmes. But, to the contrary, it seems that political parties in Africa are steeped in petty bourgeois ideology, characterised by instability, opportunism and individualism.

How political parties respond to these changes wrought by digital technologies will define their survivability. It seems that African political parties have responded in three ways. Some have adapted and embraced digital technologies, while others have resisted technology and risk becoming extinct or are so already. Yet others have been able to retain a greater part of their traditional organisation while gradually adapting to the inevitable impact of digital technologies. The more contemporary political parties appear to have adapted better than the older parties from the independence and immediate post-independence eras.

A Need for Strong Africanist Knowledge Production

What is the place of research and scholarship in this changing environment? This was the overriding question asked by participants at the Institute. The answer entails an understanding of the study of digital technologies in elections management from an African perspective. Three components of this *problematique* were identified: the subject matter of this study, the study methodology, and the social commitment of African scholars and researchers in this area.

Subject Matter

Several issues were identified as central to the study of digital technology and election management in Africa. To start with, understanding Africa's democratisation process from a historical perspective is key. What type of democracy is on offer in Africa today? What has been Africa's experience with this democracy over the past thirty years? What does this democracy mean for diverse social forces in Africa? Is democratisation the same and moving at the same pace all over Africa? What have been the continuities

and discontinuities in Africa's current democratisation process? Is there a Pan-African organising storyline, with relevant concepts that can be used to theoretically enrich this discussion?

A historical perspective of Africa's current democratisation would show that, at the beginning of the 1990s, when it was gathering pace, the type of democracy that was on offer was a major question. To the first of Africa's democratic movements, the struggle against colonialism ended largely with the enthronement of liberal, multiparty electoral democracy. In the immediate post-independence period, especially in the 1960s, it became clear that this form of democracy fell far short of meeting the democratic aspirations of Africa's peoples, which led to repeated calls for a second independence.[13] The democratic project embodied by the second independence movement never actualised because an epidemic of military coups and authoritarian regimes stifled it. In this yet unfolding third phase, it has been expected that a central part of the struggle would be waged for the type of democracy that would finally meet the hopes of Africa's people. Calls for a return to the second independence movement have been rife, particularly in the National Conference models that appear to be taking root.

However, this struggle for the essence of the third democratisation movement in Africa has been by no means unanimous because the terrain is replete with several supporters and pseudo-supporters of democracy, each with its own agenda. Claude Ake rightly captures this medley of interests:

> The movement has many components: out of power politicians for whom democratization is less a commitment than a strategy for power; ethnic, national and communal groups who are obliged to wage struggles for democratic incorporation because a manipulative leadership has seized state power in the name of an ethnic or national group; ordinary people who are calling for a second independence having concluded that the politics of the present leadership, far from offering any prospect of relief from underdevelopment, has deepened it immensely; international human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are only just beginning to perceive the relation between human rights and democracy; international financial institutions, especially International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for whom democracy provides the political requirements for the operation of market forces; and Western governments who support democracy in Africa as the process through which the universalizing of the Western model of society can take place.[14]

Indeed, these interests have variously informed the academic debates on Africa's transition to democracy. Some of them, and the several academic positions they have fostered, have variously helped to either elucidate the meaning of democracy or to demean it. It was in fact the powerful forces that

dominated the terrain and their demeaning of democracy that shepherded Africa's democracy movement into the path of orthodox liberal, electoral democracy. Claude Ake described this simply as the democratisation of disempowerment.

For several Western scholars, democracy meant the diffusion of democratic institutions from the West to other parts of the world, including Africa. From this diffusionist perspective, the world at the time was experiencing a 'third wave of democracy', as Huntington saw it,[15] or the third democratic transformation, for Dahl,[16] representing a 'process by which democracy spreads across the world'.[17] Democratisation emerged with the modernisation of the 1990s, a process by which non-Western societies unfamiliar with democracy were sucked into its irresistible and universal vortex.[18] Consequently, Modelski argues, 'for societies unfamiliar with such practices, democracy is indeed a bundle of innovations'[19] and a technique of collective choice, which is spread by diffusion, like other types of technology. It is not difficult to see that in this reincarnation of modernisation,[20] 'developing areas' like Africa are 'unfamiliar' with democratic practices, which will inevitably diffuse to them through association. This is the connection between democracy and globalisation.

However, while it is partly true that global events, such as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet bloc and the end of the sphere-of-influence syndrome among the superpowers, had an effect on democratisation in Africa, they served only as a fillip to the popular discontent that was arising from economic stagnation, social decay and political repression. Ironically, in several cases, these factors were sustained by the policies of Western governments in specific African countries.

To be sure, democratisation in Africa has its own internal logic quite apart from the thaw in East-West relations. But, sadly, the limits of Africa's third democracy movement were prematurely fixed by prevalent orthodoxy at a liberal, multiparty democracy level. Thus, orthodox liberal democracy guillotined the mass ferment and political struggles in which Africa's current democratisation was initially being shaped. Thus, fewer and fewer African countries chose the Sovereign National Conference, and instead allowed authoritarian regimes to hand down Constitutions and even depart as heroes.

As most forcefully argued by Schumpeter, liberal democratic theory was foisted on Africa's third democracy movement. The essence of this democracy, as Schumpeter stated some seventy years ago, is to make the power of 'the people' in deciding political issues secondary to the 'election of men who are to do the deciding'. For him, 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire

power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.[21] To be sure, this perspective precedes Schumpeter. In fact, if we were to excavate a little we would find the Federalist papers. And if we dug even further, we would unearth David Ricardo, who wanted suffrage for only those who would not abolish private property, and Hegel, whose 'universal class' is fitted by property and training to rule. The democratic content of these formulations should not be taken for granted. As Ake has perceptively noted, 'liberal democracy has significant affinities to democracy but it is markedly different'. Instead of the collectivity, liberal democracy focuses on the individual and substitutes government by the people with government by the consent of the people. In place of sovereignty of the people it offers sovereignty of the law. Above all, liberal democracy completely repudiates the notion of popular power.[22]

Surely, after the post-independence disappointments, the mass of Africa's peoples were expecting more than quadrennial rituals of selecting men to do the deciding on their behalf, which is what elections represent. Indeed, they were not just looking for elections, they were looking for improved economic conditions, welfare and dignity that would not be blighted by poverty or brazen power. But again, powerful global forces and their intellectuals found a way to demean these unique demands of African democracy, by linking economic reform to market-oriented structural adjustments and political liberalisation.[23] International financial institutions and Western governments made aid and credits dependent on the so-called political conditionality they demanded from Africa's authoritarian regimes. Thus, between 1990 and 1992, the United States suspended military and/or other aid to some of its abiding friends in Africa, like Mobutu, Moi and Doe, over the question of political liberalisation.

Indeed, during the early days of Africa's current democracy movement, the link between democracy and economic wellbeing was viewed in a number of distinct ways. Authoritarian regimes saw political liberalisation and economic development as separate and to be pursued consecutively, with the former coming only after economic development. The position of some African scholars was that the two are separate and should take place consecutively, but in the reverse order. Thus, Anyang' Nyong'o argued that 'political liberties and the accountability of the state to the people (in particular the popular classes) is a precondition for material progress'.[24] For the IMF, the World Bank, Western governments and many liberal social scientists, economic reforms epitomised by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were separate from political liberalisation but were to be pursued concurrently.

Subsequently, evidence clearly indicated a strong link between SAPs and political repression in many countries. In response, the donors argued that SAPs are not necessarily antagonistic to democratisation; they may give rise to social and political tension, but that does not mean they must result in political repression or undermine the democratic transition process. The farthest the donors went was to acknowledge later that economic reform is a burden on democratisation.

Then there was the position of Africa's masses on democracy, which they had expressed in their struggles against the economic exploitation and political repression of the colonial state, and had maintained in their struggles against the postcolonial state. This position is clear and consistent: material wellbeing and political freedom express an organic unity; they cannot be separated in either a consecutive or concurrent sense. As has since become clear, the issue is not whether SAPs can cohabit with political opening – they can. Instead the issue is whether SAPs is the path to popular economic wellbeing – they are not! Therefore, the people's struggle for democracy was also a struggle against SAPs.

The bottom line is that economic conditions have always been a cardinal component of Africa's democratic struggles. In fact, during the anticolonial struggles and in the immediate postcolonial period, ordinary people in Africa were clear about the organic relationship between democracy and better economic conditions. Popular demands on the colonial and postcolonial governments in Africa were not only about votes and political voice, but also even more emphatically about improved economic conditions. Such demands were at the core of the first independence struggles, against the colonial state, and the 'second independence' struggles, against the postcolonial state in most parts of Africa.[25] Not surprisingly, across the continent the land question became the rallying point for mass political struggles. It remains so to date. In short, the people's demands and object of struggle were clear: that there should be an organic unity between economic wellbeing and democracy. The struggle for one is the struggle for the other. And this is where their position diverged from that of the petty bourgeoisie, their allies in the first independence struggle. The latter had admonished the need to seek first the kingdom of political independence and everything else would come thereafter. But when this did not materialise, the people declared the first independence struggle a failure. Writing on Zaire, Nzongola-Ntalaja perceptively observes:

> For the people, independence was meaningless without a better standard of living, greater civil liberties, and the promise of a better life for their children. Instead of making these promised benefits available to the masses,

the politicians who inherited state power from the Belgians lived in much greater luxury than most of their European predecessors and used violence and arbitrary force against the people. For the latter, the first or nominal independence had failed. Their discontent with the neo-colonial state served as a basis for an aspiration towards a new and genuine independence, one that the 1964 insurrections were to incarnate.[26]

In the end, however, Africa's democracy movement lost the second independence and was left with the next best alternative – multiparty electoral democracy. Ake correctly notes that in the face of the powerful international and local forces it had to confront, it was unlikely that Africa's democracy movement would avoid settling for 'the line of least resistance, that is, for orthodox liberal democracy'.[27] Indeed, he concluded: 'any deviation from orthodox liberal democracy, any distrust of the market, will invoke retribution'.[28]

Beyond the content of the democracy that is currently on offer in Africa, a central part of the subject matter is an understanding of the place of elections in Africa's democratisation process. As already argued, Africa's democratisation has been characterised by liberal democracy, defined essentially by multipartyism and periodic elections. This outward form of democracy continues to underprivilege the real content of democracy, which is mass participation and popular welfare. How digital technologies are helping to transcend liberal democracy, guiding us to what should be the real content of democracy, or how they are sustaining and deepening it are interesting issues for study.

Election management and the electoral cycle are also important aspects of the subject matter. Election management is the use of human beings and materials by an election management body throughout the electoral cycle – in the pre-voting, voting and post-voting periods – to improve its internal organisation, strengthen external engagements and conduct better elections. How digital technologies impact on these activities is another important area of study. There have been three phases in the evolution of election management in Africa. In the first phase, the organisation of elections was perceived as routine administration, framed as an aspect of the work of civil servants. Its roots lay in colonial administration when elections were run by civil servants. The weaknesses of this system were all too obvious. Civil servants were known to be beholden to their political masters and there were concerns about their capacity to conduct affairs that required political neutrality. It was important to insulate the civil service from political meddlesomeness in a highly politicised activity like an election.

In the second phase, which in many countries corresponded to the immediate post-independence period, the organisation of elections inevitably passed to specialised permanent bodies that were expected to manage the entire electoral process throughout the electoral cycle, unlike the episodic administration of elections by civil servants. Increasingly, the role of election management bodies expanded to embrace not only the actual conduct of elections but also the registration of voters, the registration and regulation of political parties, the handling of electoral boundaries and even the prosecution of electoral offenders. Of paramount importance in this phase of development of election administration was the independence of the EMB, which was perceived to be lacking in the preceding period. Also, EMBs were expected to show higher levels of efficiency, professionalism and accountability, as well as increased engagement with citizens.

The third phase of this evolution may be characterised as citizen-led electoral governance. It emerged out of the rising interest of citizens and their organisations in pushing for better institutional frameworks, rules and procedures to govern the entire ecosystem of elections. It is widely characterised by demands for the broad participation of citizens in the formulation and functioning of the institutional frameworks for elections. Indeed, citizens are taking elections more seriously, supported greatly by digital technologies. Social media have become an indispensable part of citizen-led election management that no EMB can ignore. Attempts by governments to impose regulatory regimes have not been successful and election management is inevitably adjusting to the realities of social media. Obviously, digital technologies are central to the emergence and development of this third phase of election management.

Electoral governance addresses the broadest 'regimes' that govern elections and their institutional expressions, rather than the mere administration of elections as events or management of the electoral cycles. This phase is in turn situated in an increasingly global movement for electoral reforms and best practice, which include diverse forms of electoral support, multilateral mechanisms and observer missions. These partly have been the harbingers of increasing use of digital technologies in election management in Africa. A critical evaluation of the net effect of this global movement, structures and mechanisms on election administration is an exciting area of study.

Methodology

What should be the methodology for the study of digital technologies in election management in Africa's democratisation? By methodology is meant the three tools of study and research, namely, conceptual tools, research tools

and ideological/ epistemic tools. Conceptual tools deal with concepts, variables and theoretical/ conceptual frameworks. Clarity in the definition of concepts, reliability operationalisation of variables, precision in the construction of measurement scales and fecundity of theories as measured by the number of testable hypotheses they can yield, are all central issues in constructing the methodology for the study of the subject matter. Research tools, on the other hand, refer to the research design, testing of propositions, data gathering and data analysis. Finally, the ideological/epistemic tools recognise that social research is always an ideological category and therefore its subject matter, its concepts and its tools of research always express openly or covertly certain ideological positions and dispositions. These positions and dispositions are expressed in the social commitment of the specific group of scholars.

Social Commitment

What should be the social commitment and characteristics of African scholarship on digital technologies and election management under the aegis of CODESRIA? First, its ultimate social and political goal is the emancipation of Africa's peoples from the throes of poverty and brazen abuse of power. In a nutshell, it is the democratic development of Africa. Second, this scholarship must reject orthodoxy and scrutinise received knowledge. Third, it must depict a profundity of original thinking in order to transcend orthodoxy. Fourth, subscribers to this scholarship may work within national boundaries, but must remain profoundly Pan Africanist. This scholarship must not exhaust itself in sub-national, national or sub-regional consciousness. Fifth, it must be practical and socially relevant, always seeking to unify theory and practice in social action. And sixth, it must be humanistic.

Contribution to Knowledge

What are the academic significance and contributions of the 2019 CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute? To be sure, the use of digital technology in elections has been appreciably studied and critiqued. Cheeseman et al. provide a useful summary of the important work already done, by authors such as Michael Yard in assessing the benefits and shortcomings of election technology, Evrensel on voter registration, as well as Barkan on Kenyan elections. Cheeseman et al. further provide a critique of the application of digital technologies to elections, pointing out its 'significant opportunity costs'. Most importantly, they question the current rush for election technologies without rigorous assessment of their effectiveness. They surmise that digital technologies in elections may well be generating negative effects even in making procedural improvements.[29]

The work conducted by the 2019 CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute sought to go beyond these critiques. First, it looked at how certain structural characteristics in Africa and the introduction of liberal electoral democracy invariably exaggerated the problem of trust in election management and therefore increased faith in solutions that are perceived to wrest control from human beings. This explains the enthusiasm for digital technologies in elections despite their not too glowing record.

Second, the Institute addressed the paradox that despite popular clamour for the use of digital technologies in elections in Africa, the outcomes of the elections in which they are used still end up being seriously disputed, leading to even more demand for technology. In fact, the type of technology, its specific application, who controls it and the level of openness of its application have become contentious issues in African elections. In many cases, there are rising concerns that technology will be used to manipulate the process. This paradox suggests that the answer may not lie in technology, but in rebuilding trust in public institutions, which continue to be seen in the light of their origins in colonial authoritarianism as tools of repression, exclusion and the pursuit of sectional interests.

Third, the Institute raised the issue of the ethnocentric undertones of Western interests that promote election technologies in Africa. Particularly, these interests promote the logic that the integrity of elections in Africa is the paramount quest and must be pursued even to the detriment of inclusiveness. This privileging of integrity over inclusion is contrary to the experience in Western countries, where standards for voter identification are lower. In Africa, voter identification, including biometric registration, has become a fetish, and in the context of poor infrastructure and poverty has led to the unwarranted exclusion of people who are not able to meet certain requirements of personal identification.

Fourth, the focus of the Institute went beyond digital election technologies, and looked at technology more broadly in the electoral process, especially the wide-ranging involvement of social networks/media. With the rising role of social media, elections in Africa are moving beyond EMBs. There is a transition from election management to election governance. Related to this, one significant issue raised by the Institute was how technology is giving more political voice to less advantaged constituencies, such as ethnic minorities and young people, in the political process. These voices have become stronger in policy debates, political mobilisation and in political recruitment, particularly enabled by the impersonality and networking afforded by social media.

Fifth, the Institute emphasised the question of election technologies being part of a global digital political economy in which Africa is disadvantaged. The prevalent global digital division of labour puts Africa in the classic role of providing raw materials for hardware but being a net consumer of election technologies produced elsewhere. The promoters of election technologies in Africa are not interested in building knowledge capacities in Africa. Instead, Africa exists in a technology peonage to big hardware and software companies and vendors.

Finally, a major contribution of the Institute to knowledge was rich case studies of the foregoing issues from across Africa – from Kenya, Zimbabwe, the DRC, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Burundi, among other countries – adding to existing theories with empirical data and comparative perspectives. Moreover, by bringing together young scholars, professionals and members of election management bodies from across the continent, the Institute provided that necessary nexus between theory and practice that greatly enriches knowledge production.

Epilogue

In final reflection, a number of key lessons about elections in Africa and the role of digital technologies in them can be drawn from the three-week 2019 CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute. These include:

1. Current democratisation in Africa was defined *ab initio* as 'orthodox, liberal electoral democracy', as Ake describes it. This means that discourses on it must be framed within those terms, which are not only ideological, but also practical. As an expression of popular will, this form of democracy has its limits, in that popular will is expressed in the election of people who will exercise the popular will during a specific period. Consequently, an essential part of this type of democracy is the conduct of the elections, and any evaluation of the role of technology in it can only make sense within the limits framed by this type of democracy.

2. A persistent trust deficit afflicts the institutions and officials that conduct elections in Africa. Secondary analysis reveals that this deficit is associated with weak institution-building, weak infrastructure and weak civic engagement. However, a more fundamental, structural level of analysis locates the source of the trust deficit in the liberal state and its origins in colonialism. The history and character of this state has left people suspicious and in awe of its power. The fact remains that this state is seen as a force that brazenly serves the interest of those who control it. Consequently, its institutions and agencies, including those that manage elections, are seen as partial and incapable of acting above personal and sectional interests.

3. Digital technologies generally, and particularly as applied to election management, are a terrain of global power in which Africa is disadvantaged. This is so because Africa is a consumer of digital technologies produced elsewhere. There is a clear global division of labour in digital technologies. First, much of the raw materials for digital hardware comes from Africa. Second, the hardware is produced in specific countries outside Africa, particularly in Europe, North America and China. Finally, the software that drives the critical hardware comes principally from Europe, North America and Asia. Consequently, Africa is seriously underprivileged and vulnerable in the global powerplay of digital technologies. This drives up the cost of elections, leading African countries into technology peonage, and exposes elections in the continent to the pernicious use of technology to undermine them. Ironically, election technology that is supposed to increase confidence in the process has itself become a bone of contention after every election. Strong administrative systems and social values, including trust, are probably more important than technology in determining the quality of elections in Africa. Also, the sensible and measured adoption of new technologies, strict attention to issues of security and cost-effectiveness should be paramount in the choice of election technologies. African EMBs and governments must demand that election technology transfer be included in the contracts to use digital technologies in elections.

4. The quality of elections cannot be divorced from the state of infrastructure, structure and culture of the country in which they are conducted. It is the same roads that are replete with potholes, the same airlines that run late and the same erratic public power supply that EMBs must use to run elections in Africa. There is no Election Transport Company or Election Airlines or Election Electricity Company. At the same time, elections are held within the same conflict structure and insecure environment, the same passive political culture among citizens, the same repressed civil society and the same environment of weak citizen engagement that characterise African countries. All these things impact negatively on the quality of elections.

5. Social media have become important technologies in elections and election management. They have greatly increased the participation of hitherto marginal groups, like young people and minorities. However, some other groups, such as the rural populace and the poor, may not have access to social media as an election tool. Social media have also had some negative impacts on election, particularly the dissemination of false information and hate speech.

6. Digital technologies are having a far-reaching impact on political parties in the mobilisation of voters, recruitment of new members, fundraising, campaign messaging and their internal management. When properly employed, digital technologies have improved the workings of political parties, as well as the level of accountability to members. However, parties have differed in their acceptance of digital technologies. It seems that the survival of political parties will be influenced by their acceptance of new technologies.

7. The cost of elections is increasing across Africa, both in absolute and relative terms. From one election cycle to another, these costs are mounting, and the use of digital technologies is a major part of this increasing cost. This is indeed where Africa is in a bind. Paradoxically, Africa is poor, but its elections are becoming excessively expensive, with countries like Liberia spending as much as 2 per cent of GDP on elections. African countries must find new creative ways of funding elections in a timely manner, without jeopardising the development needs of their people.

8. In the main, the promoters of digital technology in African elections privilege integrity over inclusiveness. A sign of the quality of elections is their inclusiveness, partly measured by the degree to which the majority of citizens can vote with limited hindrance. In many African countries, there is an excessive emphasis on using digital technologies for voter identification, which is not only expensive, but sometimes also ends up excluding voters. This is usually done in the name of integrity and combatting electoral fraud. However, the right balance must be struck between integrity and inclusiveness. In many countries of the West, any identification is enough for a citizen to vote. Sometimes, no photo identification is required at all. African governments must invest more in strengthening the civic identification infrastructure.

9. There is a need for increased peer learning and co-operation among African EMBs on the application of digital technologies in elections. The leadership of EMBs must build their own capacities to understand the rudiments of digital technologies to avoid being taken advantage of. Sharing IT resources among EMBs wherever possible will help to address the skills gap, enable cost-sharing and address common security issues. Perhaps, regional associations of EMBs, such as ECONEC, the umbrella association of EMBs in West Africa, should consider projects that lead to sharing digital technology resources.

10. Finally, as African scholars working in this area, the participants in the 2019 CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute must adhere to certain shared social commitments. These would include originality, social relevance, praxis, Pan Africanism, humanism and commitment to the democratic development of Africa.

Acknowledgement

Notes

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L'illusion du *e-voting* dans les organisations syndicales de Côte d'Ivoire[1] : entre légitimité et défis démocratiques

Yao Adoman Francis Kouadio*

Résumé

Sur la base de la méthodologie qualitative alliant données de terrain et documentation, cet article vise, à travers une étude au sein du syndicat RESAFIG (Renouveau syndical des agents des Finances générales), à comprendre les processus sociaux de légitimation de la technique de vote à l'œuvre dans les organisations syndicales en Côte d'Ivoire. De manière spécifique, elle montre, au prisme de la théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle, que les contraintes internes et externes au syndicat induisent le maintien du vote physique, bien que cette technique produise un faible taux de participation électorale et un recul démocratique. Sur cette base, l'analyse conclut, d'une part, que la satisfaction par les dirigeants syndicaux des attentes socio-corporatistes des syndiqués est la source légitimant le contournement du vote électronique. D'autre part, des responsables syndicaux intimidés et punis par l'État du fait des revendications corporatistes phagocytent indirectement l'engagement politique des syndiqués, ce qui traduit leur indifférence à l'égard du maintien du vote physique.

Mots-clés : *e-voting,* légitimité organisationnelle, démocratie, syndicat RESAFIG, Côte d'Ivoire

Abstract

Based on a qualitative methodology combining field data and documentation, this study aims to understand the social processes of legitimisation of the voting technique at work in trade unions in Côte d'Ivoire through a study within RESAFIG union (Renouveau syndical des agents des Finances générales). It specifically shows, through the prism of the theory of organisational legitimacy, that the internal and external constraints of the union induce the maintenance of the physical vote, despite the fact that this technique produces

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a low rate of electoral participation and a democratic backlash. On this basis, the analysis concludes, on the one hand, that the satisfaction by the union leaders of the socio-corporatist expectations of the union members is the source legitimising the bypassing of electronic voting. On the other hand, union leaders intimidated and punished by the state because of corporatist demands indirectly phagocytise the political engagement of union members, which reflects their indifference to the maintain physical vote.

Keywords: e-voting, organisational legitimacy, democracy, RESAFIG union, Côte d'Ivoire

Introduction

En 1960, comme la Côte d'Ivoire, la majorité des pays africains obtint leur indépendance : du Congo au Nigeria, du Togo à la Somalie en passant par Madagascar (Goerg, Martineau & Nativel 2013:13). Mais le « détachement » du giron colonial s'est fait sans ensemencement de la graine démocratique. Nombre de pays africains sous couvert de l'idéal de l'État-nation étaient dans une gouvernance autocratique (Obou 2000:21). Les élections organisées avant 1990 étaient d'excellents exutoires de la démocratie aux fins d'assurer le triomphe de l'autorité ascendante sourde ou peu respectueuse des autonomies individuelles (*op. cit.*:26). Mais en 1990, la Côte d'Ivoire a connu, après avoir été une vitrine économique, une faillite économique, une instabilité sociale et une agitation politique sans précédent. Cette déstructuration systémique favorise l'universalisation du discours démocratique (Darracq & Magnani 2011:2) en Côte d'Ivoire. Les injonctions démocratiques (Laïdi 2006:10) devenues la condition voilée d'octroi de l'aide au développement au sortir de la conférence franco-africaine de La Baule (discours de Mitterrand au sommet de La Baule, 1990) sonnent le glas du parti-État au profit de l'institutionnalisation du multipartisme[2], de la liberté d'expression et d'association, de l'État de droit et de la démocratie électorale.

Dans cette logique est organisée la première élection présidentielle, le 28 octobre 1990, entre Félix Houphouët Boigny et l'opposant historique, Laurent Gbagbo, marquant ainsi le prologue de la « concurrence » électorale. S'ensuivront d'autres élections présidentielles, législatives et municipales[3], ainsi que deux référendums (2000, 2016[4]). Cependant, les différentes échéances électorales ivoiriennes ont toujours été émaillées de failles[5] (Bouquet 2007:6), contestations[6] et violences, dont la plus emblématique est l'élection présidentielle de 2010. Face à une démocratie étatique peu reluisante, les organisations de la société civile qui occupent les interstices entre les sphères étatique et privée (Lewis 2001:5 ; Poncelet & Pirotte

2007:4) se présentent sous la caution des institutions internationales et du paradigme de la bonne gouvernance comme des acteurs sacro-saints de la démocratie en Afrique et en Côte d'Ivoire spécifiquement.

Devenues presque omniprésentes, les organisations de la société civile ivoirienne se sont métastasées dans le corps national. Pour maintenir leur crédibilité, ces organisations s'approprient le principe démocratique (Lewandowski 2007:3) en voulant être, contrairement aux structures de l'État, la vitrine de la gouvernance participative, de la transparence gestionnaire, de la communication, de la codécision entre dirigeants et membres, et de la dévolution du pouvoir par des élections régulières. On observe à foison dans leurs textes de fonctionnement et de manière incontournable des principes tels que « veiller à l'équité et l'égalité au sein [de la structure], favoriser la cohésion interne […], favoriser la circulation d'informations, la transparence et la franchise […] avoir un fonctionnement démocratique et participatif » (*op. cit.* : 6). Elles ont pour défi de s'accorder aux prescriptions démocratiques afin de légitimer leur rôle de contrôle et de critique de l'action gouvernementale. Plusieurs acteurs composent les organisations dans la société civile ivoirienne (ONG, groupes d'intérêts, lobbies, associations de quartiers, de personnels, fondations, think tanks, etc.), mais les organisations syndicales en sont des figures de proue.

Historiquement produits avant 1960 par les centrales syndicales françaises, la Côte d'Ivoire dénombre plus de 300 syndicats, regroupés en cinq centrales syndicales[7].

Bâtie sur l'idéologie apolitique, l'activité syndicale en Côte d'Ivoire est engluée pourtant d'intérêts politiques[8]. Les manquements démocratiques labellisés dans les arènes étatiques se rendent aussi visibles dans les organisations syndicales. Aussi bien en interne que dans leur fonctionnement externe, les syndicats de Côte d'Ivoire sont éminemment des champs de production du politique et donc de rapports de pouvoir. Au regard de l'édulcoration de l'idéal démocratique dans les syndicats de Côte d'Ivoire et vu la faiblesse des écrits sur la démocratie électorale dans ces organisations, cet article trouve son intérêt – à travers une étude de cas – à questionner la place des élections en général et l'introduction du numérique en particulier dans la dévolution du pouvoir dans les organisations syndicales.

Le Renouveau syndical des agents des Finances générales, en abrégé RESAFIG, est porté sur les fonts baptismaux en 2008. Il est créé pour la défense des droits des agents des finances générales de la fonction publique ivoirienne et est au confluent de deux ministères : le ministère de l'Économie et des Finances et le Secrétariat auprès du Premier ministre chargé du budget et du portefeuille de l'État. La mise en œuvre des actions syndicales

nécessite au préalable une structuration politique interne par la définition des instances de direction et de décisions porteuses de projets revendicatifs à adresser à l'État. Ainsi, le vote est le canal de choix des dirigeants au RESAFIG[9]. Le suffrage universel, qui est institutionnalisé, permet à tous les membres d'exercer leur droit de vote.

Mais, de fait, l'on enregistre un faible taux de participation lors des élections de 2008 et 2013, oscillant entre 18 et 20 pour cent. Ce manque d'implication de la grande partie des électeurs dans le vote s'explique par le fait que le choix électoral est manuel et se déroule uniquement à Abidjan. En effet, les contraintes professionnelles et géographiques contrecarrent la possibilité de voter de plusieurs membres. En principe, la direction des finances générales autorise les agents à exercer leur droit de vote. Malgré cette liberté syndicale, nombreux sont ceux qui n'osent pas jouir de ce droit à cause des restrictions et pressions tacites de la hiérarchie. De plus, la majorité des 1 354 membres travaille hors d'Abidjan, dans les autres villes régionales et départementales du pays. Ne voulant/ne pouvant pas venir à Abidjan pour voter, ils s'abstiennent. Il est des électeurs qui, le jour du vote, sont en mission de travail et il n'y a pas de possibilité de vote rattrapage pour ces derniers. Tous ces obstacles liés au vote manuel justifient l'inappétence au vote chez les membres du RESAFIG.

En vue d'accroître le taux de participation aux élections prochaines, la question de la modification du mode de vote s'est posée avec acuité aux dirigeants du RESAFIG. Depuis 2013, il a été décidé la mise en place du vote électronique[10] en complément au vote manuel. Le choix du vote digitalisé a eu d'unanimes approbations auprès des gouvernants et membres syndicaux. En dématérialisant le choix électoral, il s'agissait de voter en un clic sur Smartphone ou à travers l'ordinateur[11] sans se déplacer à Abidjan. Ainsi sont démantelées en principe, grâce à l'usage des TIC, les barrières professionnelles et d'éloignement géographique. En rehaussant le taux de participation, la légitimité du scrutin et des élus, et la démocratie se trouvent consolidées[12].

Cependant, 6 ans après (2013-2019), le vote électronique demeure au stade idéal, alors qu'il devrait être utilisé lors des élections qui étaient prévues en 2016. On devrait s'attendre à des contestations et critiques de la part des membres à propos du contournement ou de la non matérialisation du vote digital lors des élections de 2016. Mais le vote numérique non institué n'a entraîné aucune réprobation de la part des membres qui pourtant sont privés de droit de vote en grande partie. Ce silence ou indifférence est un marqueur de légitimité de l'échec d'instauration de l'*e-voting* au RESAFIG. Bien que le RESAFIG soit adossé au principe de la gouvernance participative, caractérisée par une implication de la base dans la dynamique syndicale, les

syndiqués sont décentrés des réalités politiques du syndicat. La codécision s'est muée en décision unilatérale, la gouvernance en gouvernement, le syndicat est happé par une gouvernance centripète autour des dirigeants, piégeant du coup sa culture démocratique au regard de la légitimité du vote manuel qui atrophie le droit de vote des membres. Au vu de ce qui précède, quels sont les processus sociaux légitimant le maintien du vote manuel aux dépens du vote électronique, bien que le premier ne favorise pas la croissance du taux de participation et la consolidation de la démocratie ?

La culture numérique modifie d'une manière inédite le paysage sociopolitique de nos sociétés, elle fragilise les intermédiaires classiques et invite les autorités comme les citoyens à imaginer un nouveau modèle du politique (Milad 2011:10). Malgré ce bouleversement, rarement a été posée la question du rôle et du statut du vote électronique[13] (*op. cit*:13). Or celle-ci est importante, voire urgente. Comment expliquer cet oubli ou cette indifférence alors que le numérique est lui aussi inséparable des pratiques démocratiques ? Cet article postule à partir des analyses effectuées que l'échec du vote électronique au RESAFIG est une décision politique légitimement construite autour de la satisfaction des attentes socio-corporatistes des membres dans un environnement d'influence et de répression des leaders syndicaux par l'État.

Ancrage théorique et méthodologique
La légitimité organisationnelle comme perspective théorique

Le vote en tant que processus de décision collective et de dévolution du pouvoir est à l'intersection de deux usages techniques : le manuel et le digital. L'adoption de l'un ou l'autre comme modèle d'expression du suffrage divise les praticiens et scientifiques. Dans une situation paradoxale où se conjuguent freins et incitations à l'usage de ces technologies (Favier 2011:9), l'univers scientifique s'interroge sur les logiques sous-jacentes de cette opposition. La problématique de l'introduction du digital dans le vote comme facteur d'innovation démocratique a été défrichée par plusieurs approches théoriques. De manière générale, les TIC dans les processus politiques et la démocratisation ont connu deux modélisations principales, à savoir celles des cyber-pessimistes et des cyber-optimistes. Selon les premiers, les outils numériques traduisent une innovation (Vergeer & Hermans 2013:17). Cette innovation suggère que les outils numériques permettent aux acteurs politiques de communiquer directement avec les citoyens sans passer par les médias traditionnels et favorisent ainsi le dialogue à travers l'emploi de diverses fonctions interactives en ligne.

Le modèle de la normalisation (Margolis & Resnick 2000:10) suppose au contraire que les acteurs politiques résistent au changement et favorisent plutôt un usage unidirectionnel *« top-down »* des outils numériques. Il en résulte un usage utilitariste des instruments numériques par les soupirants aux postes de pouvoirs, qui les mobilisent en période de consultations électorales pour convaincre les électeurs. Mais après les élections, ils n'en font pas usage pour communiquer avec les citoyens qui les ont élus.

Le vote repose, pour sa cohérence et sa fiabilité, sur la stabilité de l'identité et de son incarnation par le citoyen. La nature des liens entre l'identité numérique et la personne est au cœur des difficultés soulevées par le vote électronique. Si la culture numérique a donné lieu à des manifestations démocratiques inédites, il reste à voir comment cette même culture numérique est en train de modifier subrepticement nos démocraties, comment les États vont penser l'identité numérique dans tout son potentiel. Le vote électronique nous rappelle qu'une technique devenue culture invite à un nouveau regard sur notre démocratie (Doueihi 2011:14). Cette remarque produit la controverse scientifique portant sur l'usage du vote électronique, alors même que son développement nécessite une caution scientifique.

La certification des systèmes utilisés et leur capacité à être audités et à produire des résultats pouvant être vérifiés dépendent d'une ingénierie qui échappe au regard et au contrôle du citoyen. Les attaques possibles contre les systèmes de vote électronique ont été répertoriées et, pour certaines d'entre elles, testées (Filiol 2011:2). C'est dire que le processus informatique ne réduit pas, mais accroît nécessairement l'opacité du processus de vote et risque *ipso facto* de nuire à la confiance qu'on lui porte (Perriault 2011:7).

Le vote électronique ne se réduit pas à une banale application informatique qui faciliterait à la fois la tâche des scrutateurs et celle des électeurs. En confiant en bonne partie à un logiciel la gestion du relationnel humain qui se produit au sein d'un bureau de vote, elle en modifie sensiblement le sens. Il en résulte que le vote électronique n'offre pas les moyens d'assurer la confiance du corps électoral dans le processus auquel il est convié. On rejoint ici, par une autre voie, l'analyse de Rosanvallon de la dissociation contemporaine entre le choix d'un candidat et la confiance qu'on lui accorde (Perriault 2011:8). Le vote électronique a ses rites et ses pratiques symboliques, par une mécanisation, source de distorsions, il risquerait d'accroître la méfiance de l'électorat. En revanche, les adeptes du vote en ligne veulent l'utiliser pour repenser l'ensemble des interactions entre les citoyens et les instances de gouvernance. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'offrir une technique de vote supplémentaire aux électeurs, mais de reconstruire une « démocratie forte » dans le sens que Barber (1997:12) donne à cette expression : promouvoir « une culture civique

plus proche des concepts de participation, de citoyenneté et d'interactivité politique qui sont ses vertus essentielles».

Les travaux d'Arterton, Maigret et Bouillon (2000:7) sur l'utilisation des technologies de l'information et de la communication pour développer des pratiques participatives nouvelles dans les années 1980 ont en effet montré combien ces dernières étaient moins dépendantes des techniques que des contextes sociopolitiques de leur mise en œuvre. Toutefois, dans ce foisonnement d'expériences nouvelles, les pratiques politiques se cherchent, rencontrant de nouveaux écueils, et interrogent plus que par le passé la nature de la citoyenneté vers laquelle nous nous dirigeons et celle que nous voulons construire au sein des démocraties modernes. Si, comme le dit Schnapper (2000:5), «la citoyenneté n'est pas une essence donnée une fois pour toutes qu'il importerait de maintenir et de transmettre [mais] une construction historique», alors il est urgent de réfléchir aux implications politiques et symboliques de l'utilisation des NTIC dans les processus de vote.

Toutes ces approches théorico-conceptuelles abordent un pan des TIC dans le processus de la démocratie en général et des élections en particulier. Il en ressort des angles de vue nuancés qui fondent la pertinence des analyses. Il importe, dans le cadre de cette étude, de s'inscrire dans la perspective socio-constructiviste[14] (Gergen 1991) de l'usage des outils numériques dans la pratique électorale, en montrant, dans le continuum artertonnien et schnapperien, que l'introduction du numérique dans le vote, loin d'être exclusivement une affaire technique, a des pesanteurs sociales, culturelles, interactionnelles et politiques qu'il convient de questionner. C'est pourquoi l'originalité de ce travail réside dans la mobilisation de la théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle comme substrat analytique de l'échec du vote numérique dans les organisations microsociologiques comme le syndicat RESAFIG.

La théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle[15] analyse les interactions entre les organisations et leur environnement social (*external and internal controls*) aux fins d'identifier les ressorts de leur légitimité existentielle. La légitimité organisationnelle est l'acceptabilité sociale des activités de l'organisation par ses parties prenantes (membres internes et acteurs externes). Cette légitimité dérive donc de la capacité organisationnelle à gérer les demandes sociales des parties prenantes. En satisfaisant aux attentes, l'organisation conserve la possibilité d'influencer l'acceptabilité de ses activités et pratiques sociales par son environnement. C'est donc la production de biens et services désirés par les parties prenantes qui confère l'absence de critique, de récriminations dans une organisation. Dans un contexte où les intérêts prioritaires des parties prenantes sont assouvis, il n'y a pas d'égard pour des impairs, même en rapport avec la démocratie.

De la théorie qui précède, il transparaît qu'une organisation sociale est structurée autour d'enjeux et besoins qui fondent son existence. Les organisations comme les syndicats sont créés pour des questions corporatistes. À cet effet, ce qui importe n'est pas les moyens usés pour répondre aux problèmes de travail, mais plutôt les solutions probantes. Dès l'instant qu'il y a congruence entre les attentes socio-corporatistes des membres et les actions organisationnelles, les manquements électoralistes ont peu ou pas d'intérêts pour les membres. On comprend dès lors que la négligence à introduire le numérique dans le système de vote repose sur l'analyse des actions revendicatives du RESAFIG à l'aune des attentes socio-corporatistes des membres.

En mettant en relation le vote numérique et la satisfaction des besoins professionnels des membres (parties prenantes), cela interpelle sur la question de l'*internal control* comme source de production partielle de la légitimité de l'illusion du vote électronique. À cela s'ajoute l'*external control*, qui est caractérisé par l'environnement exogène dans lequel le syndicat agit. L'analyse théorique montre qu'ici le contexte relationnel entre le RESAFIG et les structures étatiques (les ministères de tutelle et ses composantes) produit l'indifférence des syndiqués sur les questions d'innovation électorale dans le syndicat. Cette relation est tissée autour du poids de contrôle et d'intimidation de l'État sur les leaders syndicaux qui portent les revendications corporatistes. L'hypothèse qui émerge est que la légitimité pratique du vote manuel est liée à la satisfaction des attentes socio-corporatistes des membres par les dirigeants syndicaux, malgré un environnement marqué par les menaces, punitions et intimidations de l'État sur les responsables syndicaux. Le schéma 1 illustre l'hypothèse de recherche.
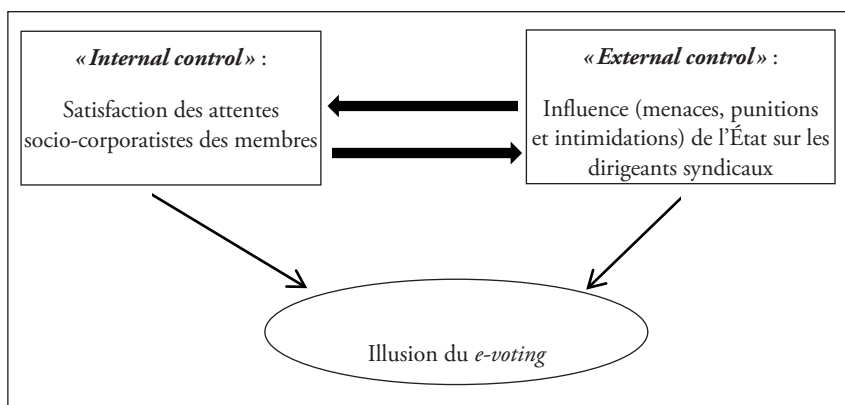
Schéma 1 : L'hypothèse de recherche à opérationnaliser
Source : Recherche documentaire

Approche méthodologique

Au regard du positionnement théorique (socio-constructiviste), le travail s'inscrit dans une approche qualitative de collecte et d'analyse des données (Flicks 1998:20 ; Kanenti & Savoie-Zajc 2004:14). Animé du désir d'expliquer et de comprendre ce phénomène contextualisé (Denzin & Lincoln 2011:9), nous avons fait le choix de l'étude de cas (Anadon 2006:11). Cette étude a débuté par une revue documentaire sur le numérique dans la démocratie et les élections en Afrique et au-delà. Pour ce faire, les écrits existants ont permis d'avoir des informations sur le rapport de la Côte d'Ivoire à la démocratie électorale dans un contexte de démocratisation de l'Afrique, la place des NTIC dans le système électoral africain en général et, particulièrement, dans les OSC, et l'histoire des organisations syndicales en Côte d'Ivoire.

Outre la revue documentaire, ont été faites des enquêtes empiriques, précisément dans le syndicat RESAFIG. À ce niveau, des entretiens individuels ont été menés auprès des catégories d'acteurs ayant une pertinence sociologique propre à fournir des informations probantes à analyser. Ce sont les membres du RESAFIG, qui ont participé ou non à des élections du syndicat, d'anciens candidats et les responsables syndicaux. Des directeurs des finances générales (représentant l'État) ont aussi été interviewés. Au total, 61 personnes ont constitué l'échantillon de l'étude[16]. Cette diversité des enquêtés a permis de varier les sources d'information de terrain.

Sur la base d'une analyse de contenu (Miles & Huberman 2003:22), deux ensembles de résultats ont été obtenus. Le premier résultat montre que les actions des dirigeants syndicaux qui résolvent les problèmes socioprofessionnels des membres sont des facteurs de non contestation du vote manuel au RESAFIG. En démontrant que ces acquis socio-corporatistes relevaient avant le RESAFIG de l'utopie, les dirigeants qui les rendent possibles sont perçus comme des symboles, à qui l'on doit davantage reconnaissance que doléances, récriminations et revendications de droits politiques ou civiques. Le deuxième résultat diagnostique les interactions entre le RESAFIG et les directeurs des finances générales représentant le gouvernement dans une perspective élargie de l'influence, de la répression des dirigeants syndicaux en Côte d'Ivoire. Cette dimension dominante de l'État permet d'identifier les sources d'intimidation et de sanction à l'endroit des dirigeants syndicaux et comment cela génère un habitus de désengagement politique des syndicaux, qui s'abstiennent d'exiger des droits politiques dans le syndicat, même si cela n'a guère d'intérêt pour l'État de savoir si les syndiqués votent ou pas.

Satisfaction des attentes socio-corporatistes : entre reconnaissance et symbolisation des leaders syndicaux légitimant le maintien du vote manuel

De l'utopie à la satisfaction des attentes socio-corporatistes des membres…

L'un des facteurs à la base de la non contestation du vote manuel au RESAFIG, bien qu'il soit un frein à l'exercice du droit de vote, résulte du contentement par l'élite syndicale des besoins socio-corporatistes des agents des finances générales en général, y compris les syndiqués du RESAFIG[17] particulièrement. Avant la création du RESAFIG, les agents des finances générales étaient désillusionnés du fait de la passivité du seul syndicat existant – SYNAFIG – dans la conduite des revendications pour la défense des droits des salariés des finances générales. Ces luttes syndicales devraient porter sur l'institutionnalisation du profil de carrière, la bancarisation et la trimestrialité des primes, la bonification de l'indice salarial, la transparence dans la titularisation des énarques financiers généralistes et l'amélioration des conditions immobilières de travail. Ne le faisant pas, ces insuffisances corporatistes produisent un cadre de travail inconfortable et une démotivation des salariés en ce qui concerne l'accomplissement de leurs obligations professionnelles.

Le profil de carrière n'étant pas formalisé, cela dévalorise l'image des finances générales par rapport aux autres régies financières, notamment les directions du Trésor et des Impôts, qui sont dans l'imagerie populaire les services publics les mieux traités en Côte d'Ivoire[18]. Il en découle «malheureusement» des nominations et promotions – obéissant au système de mandarinat ainsi que les cumuls de postes. Les primes du budget et du cabinet[19] des agents sont payées main à main au gré de la hiérarchie des finances générales et à la tête du client, ce qui assujettit les salariés aux pratiques manipulatoires de la direction des finances générales. L'indice salarial est, d'une part, en deçà de celui des autres régies financières (un traitement différentiel et d'injustice selon les agents) et ne respecte pas, d'autre part, les recommandations d'indice salarial préférentiel de l'Union monétaire ouest-africaine pour les régies financières[20]. Après la formation à l'ENA, les financiers généralistes sont majoritairement affectés dans d'autres ministères plutôt qu'aux ministères de l'Économie et des Finances ou du Budget, à condition d'avoir des réseaux forts dans les structures étatiques. Enfin, les agents se plaignent des bureaux en sureffectif, impropres, des déficits des bureaux de travail et de rangements des dossiers, de matériels informatiques et de climatisation. Ces inconforts immobiliers affectent l'attractivité et l'engagement professionnel des agents.

Ce tableau non reluisant est source de déception des agents qui ne croient plus en la volonté du SYNAFIG à défendre leurs intérêts professionnels. C'est dans ce contexte démotivant que naît le RESAFIG qui ranime l'espérance chez les agents. L'intrépidité des responsables du RESAFIG répond favorablement

aux attentes professionnelles des agents des finances générales à travers des négociations, préavis de grève, arrêts de travail, en dépit des menaces et sanctions du patronat (directions des finances générales), et marque durablement les esprits des agents. En effet, plusieurs actions ont été posées dans le sens du rétablissement des agents dans leurs droits corporatistes. La plupart des vœux corporatistes ont été réalisés par l'élite du RESAFIG. C'est dire que le RESAFIG a réussi là où le SYNAFIG était inopérant.

En réalité, les démarches syndicales ont permis la mise en place d'un cadre permanent de dialogue entre les syndicats des finances générales et le patronat pour la formalisation du profil de carrière, amenuisant ainsi les cumuls de postes et les nominations réseautées au profit de l'égalisation des chances d'ascension professionnelle. Le patronat n'a plus la mainmise sur la gestion des primes des agents, qui sont maintenant virées trimestriellement sur les comptes bancaires des agents. Quoique n'atteignant pas les directives de l'UEMOA, le RESAFIG a tout de même obtenu 100 points sur l'indice salarial des agents des finances générales et institué un cadre de suivi et de facilitation des orientations des élèves financiers généralistes dans les ministères convenant à leurs formations. Et enfin, les acquisitions en matériels de travail, la mise à disposition d'autres locaux, la disponibilité de bureaux sont autant de preuves d'amélioration du cadre de travail qui ont galvanisé l'entrain professionnel des agents.

Les dirigeants du RESAFIG ne se sont pas limités aux prouesses corporatistes, des initiatives débordant la sphère de travail ont été également mises en œuvre. Dans une logique de politique sociale digne des mutuelles et associations, les dirigeants du syndicat RESAFIG, pour montrer leur attachement aux membres, ont développé des interventions sociales en lien avec l'immobilier, le mobilier, l'endettement, la scolarisation et les événements sociaux. Cette surabondance de prestations se rend visible par la possibilité pour les membres d'avoir des propriétés immobilières, des appareils électroménagers et des voitures à crédit et à des coûts jugés abordables. D'ailleurs, le syndicat met à la disposition des agents des courtiers pour établir les documents administratifs afférents aux achats automobiles. En périodes de deuils, de naissances ou de mariages, le syndicat apporte un soutien financier aux membres concernés et accorde des prêts via sa caisse de solidarité. Pour les agents à la retraite, il est organisé des cérémonies d'hommage et de reconnaissance pour le service rendu aux finances générales.

Ces actions tant corporatistes qu'extra-corporatistes répondent aux attentes socioprofessionnelles des membres et apportent des changements sociaux significatifs dans leur quotidien. Ces avantages sociaux sont marqués par le repositionnement de l'image des finances générales dans le champ des

régies financières (Bourdieu 1992:7). Il y a l'amenuisement des ressources de pouvoir du patronat qui n'arrive plus à contrôler le mode d'allocation des primes aux agents. La transparence dans les mobilités professionnelles phagocyte les relations informelles de promotions et de cumuls de postes en démocratisant les possibilités de chances. Aussi la mise en état du cadre de travail influe-t-elle sur le niveau de rendement professionnel des agents. La politique sociale à travers les batteries d'actions en complément aux acquis corporatistes fabrique des liens forts (Granovetter 1974:16) entre les membres et dirigeants du syndicat. Au regard de ces acquisitions syndicales dans un environnement patronal hostile, les membres perçoivent autrement leurs dirigeants. Ces derniers sont identifiés comme des acteurs performants et compétents qui « sacrifient » leur carrière professionnelle au profit des attentes majeures des membres. Il en résulte de la reconnaissance à l'égard des responsables syndicaux qui deviennent des symboles dans la conscience des agents des finances générales et des syndiqués.

… Marqueurs de redevabilité sociale et symbolique envers les leaders syndicaux

Les gains sociaux au profit des membres du RESAFIG à l'issue des luttes syndicales et projets sociaux sont les cadres de compréhension de la légitimation du vote manuel. À l'analyse se pose l'enjeu de la priorisation des aspirations diverses des syndiqués. Ces derniers sont davantage préoccupés par des politiques nouvelles allant dans le sens de la matérialisation de leurs intérêts socio-corporatistes plutôt que politiques. En effet, ce qui importe aux membres du RESAFIG n'est pas qu'ils participent ou non au choix des élus syndicaux devant défendre leurs droits de travail, mais quelles actions efficientes ces élus posent et qui impactent durablement l'amélioration de leurs conditions sociales. Qu'ils aient des droits politiques n'est pas le plus urgent et la priorité pour les syndiqués, mais plutôt la mise sur agenda par les leaders syndicaux de leurs besoins en termes de bonification salariale, de mise à l'écart du patronat dans la gestion des primes, de formalité du profil de carrière et de défis corporatistes à venir. Les syndicalistes, en se soumettant à la volonté des membres, trouvent solution à leurs problèmes sociaux et corporatistes cruciaux. Des avenues heureuses que le SYNAFIG n'a pas été capable de tracer, malgré les remontrances des agents. Dans cette configuration, les responsables du RESAFIG sont perçus positivement par les membres. Ceux-ci, au regard des acquis fructueux, se sentent redevables aux meneurs des revendications. Cette redevabilité procède du désintérêt du SYNAFIG, des risques de pertes de travail bravés par ces « Resafigistes » pour inscrire une lueur d'espoir dans l'univers des travailleurs des finances générales.

Outre la reconnaissance, ils sont devenus des acteurs symboliques dans le syndicat. Cette symbolisation consacrée se traduit par l'irréprochabilité de ces dirigeants. Les enquêtes ont montré que les syndiqués trouvent du non-sens à l'émission de réprobations sur la démocratie politique conduite par les responsables. Dans un premier temps, ces leaders sont pour eux des symboles valeureux, auxquels il faut accorder égard et soumission au regard de toutes les revendications historiques abouties. Cela est comparable aux acteurs des indépendances africaines comme Félix Houphouët Boigny qui, quoiqu'autocratique d'une certaine manière, était sacralisé du fait des luttes indépendantistes en Côte d'Ivoire. Dans un deuxième temps, les membres se méfient des inconvénients à la fois corporatistes et sociaux qu'induiraient des reproches relatifs à la restriction des droits de vote. Ils agissent donc de manière stratégique et calculée de sorte à ne pas offusquer des acteurs symboliques qui sont les sources de matérialisation de leurs attentes d'antan inespérées. Cela pourra entraîner de la démotivation des cadres syndicaux qui resteraient passifs face à la préservation de leurs droits de travail, comme le faisaient ceux du SYNAFIG auparavant.

En Côte d'Ivoire, nombreux sont les syndicats qui existent, mais qui ne défendent pas réellement les intérêts des membres. Les droits électoraux n'étant pas le besoin premier des membres, il est inopportun d'en faire un facteur de critique vis-à-vis de la gouvernance des dirigeants. D'autant plus que ces derniers, sans que cela soit dans leurs obligations, ont développé des projets sociaux en faveur des syndiqués qui impactent considérablement leurs vies extra et même professionnelles. Dès lors, les preuves de compétences et confiances de ces acteurs symboliques anéantissent toute velléité de revendication de droits politiques par les membres. Ces derniers, en n'interpellant pas les dirigeants syndicaux, montrent que ces questions électorales sont accessoires par rapport aux résultats obtenus dans les luttes syndicales par les dirigeants, qui sont des symboles vivants en qui il convient d'avoir confiance en soutenant leur modèle de gouvernance, peu importe les ratés démocratiques constatés.

Le vote non digitalisé, une conséquence de la puissance répressive de l'État sur les organisations syndicales en Côte d'Ivoire

Des intimidations aux punitions : la puissance répressive de l'État sur les leaders syndicaux

Les structures de l'État (ministères et directions générales) liées aux finances générales modifient l'ossature démocratique et électorale du RESAFIG. Comme il est régulier de l'observer, les organisations syndicales sont dans des rapports tendus avec l'État relativement aux questions de revendications

corporatistes. Ces conflits permanents débordent de la sphère du travail et s'enracinent dans la gouvernance syndicale. Pour faire pression sur les leaders syndicaux aux fins de ramollir et d'étouffer leur radicalité revendicative, l'État use de ressources intimidantes et punitives. Aux finances générales, la mobilité professionnelle et le salariat constituent les moyens de répression de l'État.

L'État est l'acteur légal chargé de nommer, de promouvoir et d'affecter les agents (mobilité professionnelle), et aussi de payer les salaires. Il convertit ces prérogatives institutionnelles en domination implicite pour contraindre les dirigeants syndicaux. En effet, au RESAFIG, les dirigeants sont instamment menacés par l'État. Et ces menaces sont mises à exécution. Par exemple, sans le souhaiter, ils sont mutés dans des villes éloignées d'Abidjan afin de restreindre leurs possibilités de luttes syndicales. Malgré les performances professionnelles avérées, les leaders syndicaux insoumis aux volontés corporatistes de l'État ne connaissent pas de promotion. Enfin, l'État, sous prétexte qu'on ne paye le salaire qu'aux agents ayant travaillé, ponctionne ou gèle le salaire des responsables syndicaux qui ont fait des grèves.

Ces sanctions étatiques déstructurent, au-delà de la sphère syndico-professionnelle, la vie sociale des syndicalistes. Lorsque l'État mute sans consentement des dirigeants syndicaux dans une autre localité, cela induit la perte de repères durablement construits dans le lieu de travail précédent. En général, une affectation de travail est habituellement demandée par les agents qui prennent le temps nécessaire pour la préparer. Mais lorsque cela est imposé d'en haut, elle dynamite les ancrages relationnels des leaders syndicaux, qui sont obligés, dans cette nouvelle vie professionnelle forcée, de repenser leur univers social.

Les blocages nominatifs orchestrés par le gouvernement mettent à mal le statut social des leaders syndicaux. Ces derniers peuvent suivre la procédure officielle (les tests internes de promotions, l'ancienneté, la performance professionnelle, etc.) et ne pas connaître de promotions. Cette situation est d'autant plus difficile quand d'autres agents moins anciens et moins compétents dans le service gravissent les échelons professionnels. Enfin, les ponctions et gels salariaux restreignent la liberté financière et, partant, déteignent sur le rang social des leaders syndicaux. Dans un monde où les ressources économiques sont consubstantielles à l'équilibre total et à la construction de soi, être financièrement limité déstabilise et ternit la considération sociale. Au regard des enquêtes de terrain, les leaders syndicaux témoignent que les coupures de salaires pratiquées par l'État pour leur mettre la pression sont difficilement supportables en ce sens qu'ils sont contraints d'adapter leur mode de vie structurel à cette situation conjoncturelle marquée par la limitation des finances. Le stress et

la tension dans le couple et la famille, et l'incapacité à répondre aux attentes communautaires et à respecter les engagements pris constituent un lot d'incidences extra-corporatistes liées à la privation salariale.

À l'analyse, l'influence de l'État sur les structures syndicales en Côte d'Ivoire comme le RESAFIG impacte considérablement la politique interne de celles-ci. Il est évident qu'à la lumière de la description ci-dessus, l'État à travers les intimidations et punitions brandies contre les leaders syndicaux afin d'affaiblir leur entrain revendicatif, génère de la psychose chez les membres du syndicat. Ces derniers sont des témoins de la machine « répressive » de l'État sur les responsables syndicaux et des implications sociales qui en résultent. La représentation du dirigeant brimé par l'État chez les salariés décourage ceux-ci à jouer leur partition dans la gouvernance participative des syndicats, au risque d'être victimes de cette furie étatique. Ils préfèrent en majorité se désengager de la modélisation politique (implication dans la gouvernance, renouvellement des instances de directions, candidats aux élections, occupation de responsabilités syndicales, etc.), et, par ricochet, sont insensibles à la restriction de leur droit de vote.

L'illusion du *e-voting*, un désengagement politique

Le désengagement politique comme stratégie d'évitement des sanctions étatiques est au fondement de l'échec de la numérisation du vote et du non exercice du droit de vote par la plupart des syndiqués du RESAFIG. Les affres successives subies par les dirigeants syndicaux de la part de l'État incitent les syndiqués à se mettre à l'écart des postes de responsabilité dans le syndicat et donc à ne pas contribuer à l'ancrage démocratique et politique. La démocratie politique suppose la gouvernance horizontale, la co décision, le renouvellement des instances décisionnelles à intervalle régulier au travers d'élections inclusives. Justement, les entretiens de terrain ont démontré que les membres du RESAFIG ne se pensent pas comme des acteurs de la politique et démocratie syndicale, c'est-à-dire participant aux réunions, ayant des postes de responsabilités, etc. Ils trouvent logique que les décisions syndicales soient centralisées et prises uniquement par l'élite syndicale. Des membres avouent ne pas avoir, s'ils sont des leaders syndicaux, le courage dont font preuve les dirigeants acteurs malgré les ré-pressions de l'État. Or le décentrement de la vie politique du syndicat a des conséquences systémiques, c'est-à-dire qu'il fabrique des syndiqués passifs vis-à-vis de tous les aspects composant la gouvernance démocratique, comme le droit de vote par exemple. Les représailles de l'État sur les leaders syndicaux ne sont pas destinées à affecter à la première lecture le droit de vote des électeurs, quoiqu'indirectement il s'en trouve écorné.

L'indifférence aux réalités politiques du syndicat ne suscite pas le désir des membres de revendiquer l'instauration du vote électronique qui, paradoxalement, favoriserait l'exercice de leur droit de vote. Étant anesthésiés quant aux responsabilités politiques et préférant légitimer de manière atemporelle les autorités syndicales en exercice, les membres du RESAFIG se désintéressent de l'institutionnalisation du *e-voting*. De manière sous-entendue, c'est un risque de revendiquer le vote électronique, car il déconstruirait l'habitus du désengagement politique et favoriserait de fait une gouvernance inclusive susceptible de mettre sous projecteur d'autres syndiqués, qui veulent stratégiquement se dissimuler de l'État répressif. Il ressort de cette analyse, comme le dit la théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle (Lindblom 1994:15), que l'environnement externe (*external control*) conditionne l'acceptabilité d'une pratique sociale, en l'occurrence le maintien du vote physique. Ici, le contexte politique de l'État influence « négativement » les membres, les conduisant à ne pas s'intéresser aux questions de pouvoir dans le syndicat et à ignorer la matérialité de leur droit de vote que propose le vote électronique. L'introduction du numérique dans la pratique électorale au RESAFIG n'est pas relative à une décision technique et démocratique, mais doit tenir compte aussi de l'environnement exogène.

Conclusion

Cet article met l'accent sur les processus sociaux légitimant la non pratique du vote électronique dans les organisations micro-sociales comme le syndicat RESAFIG, en dépit de son adoption par ses dirigeants et des avantages démocratiques qu'il représente. Ces avantages sont relatifs à l'exercice accru du droit de vote des électeurs et à l'augmentation du taux de participation électorale. Mais dans une perspective constructiviste, en se basant sur la théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle, l'étude montre que l'introduction du numérique dans le vote relève d'une production sociopolitique et contextuelle et non uniquement technique. Autrement dit, le processus de numérisation du vote implique des considérations socialement situées.

De cet article, il ressort précisément que l'échec de la pénétration de la technologie dans le vote au RESAFIG répond à deux facteurs. D'une part, les acquis socio-corporatistes rendus possibles par les leaders syndicaux alors qu'ils étaient impensés à l'époque du monosyndicalisme. Dès lors, les membres doivent reconnaissance à ces responsables syndicaux devenus des acteurs symboliques. Il devient donc superfétatoire de critiquer les manquements de privation du droit de vote qui ont d'ailleurs peu d'importance pour les membres. D'autre part, l'environnement répressif de l'État sur les dirigeants syndicaux déteint sur l'implication politique des membres en les rendant

insensibles aux problématiques de démocratie liées à la restriction de leur droit de vote.

Le succès du vote électronique et, partant, la dématérialisation de la démocratie, doivent tenir compte de la coordination des contraintes sociales, des représentations, des interactions, des enjeux sociaux et du contexte. Il s'agit d'un ajustement des propriétés techniques aux contraintes sociologiques dans le processus d'adoption du *e-voting*. Concernant les organisations microsociologiques comme les OSC en général et les organisations syndicales en particulier, qui jouent leur crédibilité dans leurs fonctions de surveillance des actions gouvernementales, il est nécessaire pour elles, dans la consolidation de la démocratie à l'aune du numérique, de s'approprier, outre les exigences techniques, les pesanteurs sociopolitiques, les réalités externes existantes dans leur milieu de fonctionnement. Car, en se montrant démocratiquement « irréprochables », les OSC se crédibilisent davantage face à l'État.

La démocratie est un type de gouvernance qui imprègne tous les aspects de la vie en société. Sa nature inclusive et la participation du corps social consacrent sa spécificité. En démocratie, on parle de la gestion du tout, qui consiste à mettre tous les défis sur la même balance d'intérêts. Dans cet ordre d'idées, le défi démocratique répond à un enjeu de prise en considération des demandes politiques, économiques, culturelles, religieuses, sociales répondant au principe de l'équité, de l'égalité et de la diversité. La mise à l'écart d'un enjeu au détriment d'un autre affaiblit les principes démocratiques. Il est objectif de penser la démocratisation sous le prisme d'une activité sociologique répondant aux contraintes contextuelles du milieu social donné.

Notes

1. « de Côte d'Ivoire » renvoie à l'ensemble des syndicats que l'on trouve en Côte d'Ivoire.
2. La Côte d'Ivoire connaît une série inédite de manifestations contre les mesures d'austérité économique et le régime de parti unique. En mai, Félix Houphouët-Boigny décide finalement d'instaurer le multipartisme ; 14 nouvelles formations sont officialisées (http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20100806-cote-ivoire-grandes-dates-histoire-politique).
3. Depuis 1990, la Côte d'Ivoire a connu 4 élections présidentielles, législatives et municipales. Respectivement (1995, 2000, 2010 et 2015) (1995, 2000, 2011, 2016) et (1995, 2001, 2011, 2013, 2018).
4. Avant 1990, il y a eu le référendum de 1958.
5. Les électeurs ivoiriens avaient l'habitude d'être sollicités non pas pour choisir leur président ou leurs députés, mais plutôt pour confirmer des candidats qui avaient été préalablement désignés.

6. Contestations des candidats et électeurs écartés, supposés être des étrangers.

7. Les cinq centrales syndicales dites formelles de la Côte d'Ivoire sont : 1) Union générale des travailleurs de Côte d'Ivoire (UGTCI). Cette centrale créée le 4 août 1962 comporte aujourd'hui 157 syndicats affiliés (128 032 adhérents), dont 24 de la fonction publique (69 260 adhérents), 130 du secteur privé (57 472 adhérents) et 3 du secteur informel (1 300 adhérents), 2) La confédération des syndicats libres de Côte d'Ivoire DIGNITÉ, créée le 1er mai 1988, 3) Fédération des syndicats autonomes de Côte d'Ivoire (FESACI), 4) Centrale syndicale humanisme (CSH), qui compte 112 syndicats affiliés dans les secteurs public et privé, 5) Union nationale des travailleurs de Côte d'Ivoire (UNATR-CI) créée en 2004.

8. https://news.abidjan.net/h/363330.html.

9. RESAFIG, il y a 4 postes électifs pour un mandat de 3 ans renouvelable une fois, que sont le secrétaire général, les présidents de la commission de contrôle, les secrétaires et les commissaires aux comptes des sections de bases.

10. Dans l'imagerie populaire, le vote électronique ne fait toujours pas consensus. Il est tiraillé entre avantages et inconvénients. Au nombre des avantages perçus, il y a la rapidité lors du dépouillement, la fiabilité informatique et contre la fraude, réduit l'abstention, le coût des élections, l'avantage écologique (pas d'impression papier), la ressource humaine… Au titre des inconvénients perçus : le secret du vote non garanti, la possibilité de fraude par des virus (https://www.agoravox.fr/actualites/technologies/article/le-vote-electronique).

11. La possession d'un Smartphone est monnaie courante et dans les lieux de service, les agents ont des ordinateurs facilitant le vote en ligne.

12. Le vote électronique, outil de la démocratie sociale dans les entreprises. Les salariés disposent de plus de temps pour voter et peuvent voter où qu'ils se trouvent. Le vote est possible depuis l'entreprise, chez soi ou en déplacement (https://www.journaldunet.com/solutions/expert/47414/le-vote-electronique--outil-de-la-democratie-sociale.shtml).

13. Le vote électronique consiste à utiliser les technologies de l'informatique et des télécommunications dans le processus de vote. Un dispositif (ordinateur, téléphone) permet d'exprimer son vote et de compter automatiquement l'ensemble des suffrages (Laurence Favier 2011).

14. Dans le constructivisme social, les construits sont des artefacts sociaux, des conventions, des produits soumis aux processus d'interaction humaine.

15. Cette théorie a connu 3 mouvements essentiels. Dowling et Pfeffer (1975) font des recherches dans plusieurs entreprises et instituts américains en vue de combler le déficit de fondements empiriques de la théorie de la légitimité organisationnelle. Ashforth et Gibbs (1990) insistent sur la dimension sociopolitique et stratégique de la théorie à travers le concept de contrat social. Mais aussi ceux de « contrainte dynamique et de jugement social ». Et Lindblom (1994) introduit les concepts d'external control and internal control.

16. Un échantillonnage intentionnel (Deslauriers & Kérisit 1997 ; Saint-Jacques 2000) a été utilisé.

17. Tous les agents des finances générales ne sont pas des membres du RESAFIG. Il y a 3 syndicats : le Syndicat national des agents des Finances générales et ALTERNATIVE, outre le RESAFIG.

18. Le Trésor et les Impôts sont les lieux de travail de la fonction publique les plus convoités dans le secteur public en raison des prix, des sursalaires et autres, assez élevés, dont bénéficient les fonctionnaires concernés plus que ceux des autres corporations du secteur public, c'est-à-dire les agents du ministère de la Fonction publique.

19. La prime du budget : une incitation financière à la performance, et la prime du cabinet : complément de salaire pour une culture au rendement des agents.

20. Les régies financières comprenant le Trésor, les Impôts, les Finances générales et la Douane ont des indices différenciés, bien qu'elles soient toutes issues de l'ENA. Cette inégalité dérive du fait que les agents du Trésor sont payés à 2 500 points d'indice et ceux des Impôts à 3 000, contrairement aux agents des douanes qui ne perçoivent que 1 500. Quant à l'indice des agents des financiers généralistes, il est en deçà des Impôts et du Trésor.

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Droit d'accès à l'internet et ordre public électoral en Afrique : la crédibilisation institutionnelle au Congo-Kinshasa à l'épreuve de la surveillance e-citoyenne

Jacques Kambale Bira'Mbovote*

« … les citoyens ont la capacité de gouverner parce qu'ils peuvent s'informer ».
Goupil 2007:38

Résumé

Le processus électoral en Afrique ne cesse de surprendre bon nombre d'observateurs. Une des dernières innovations des pouvoirs en place, c'est la coupure intempestive de l'internet avant, pendant ou après le scrutin. D'où la question au centre du débat : l'ordre public électoral peut-il justifier la restriction du droit d'accès à l'internet ? Pour y répondre, les élections couplées de décembre 2018 au Congo-Kinshasa ont été au centre de cette étude. Ainsi, pendant cette période, deux approches ont émergé. Axée sur le monopole de la contrainte avec ses présupposés philosophiques de hiérarchie, d'ordre et de normativité d'en haut, et liée au double passé colonial et dictatorial du pays de Lumumba, la tendance étatiste se fonde sur la raison d'État sous couvert de l'ordre public qui tend à contrecarrer l'intervention citoyenne sur la scène publique. De l'autre côté, le modèle égalitariste, sous la houlette des défenseurs des droits humains et des activistes de mouvements citoyens, s'appuie sur le caractère sacré et fondamental du droit d'accès à l'internet, une composante essentielle du droit à l'information et de la liberté d'expression. Dans une approche à la fois systémique et historique, notre analyse débouche sur un modèle « entre-deux » : le modèle contractualiste, qui marie l'ordre public aux exigences démocratiques de la surveillance e-citoyenne du processus électoral.

Mots-clés : ordre public électoral, citoyenneté numérique, espace public, réseaux sociaux, droit à l'information

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Abstract

The electoral process in Africa continues to surprise many observers. One of the latest innovations of the current powers is to untimely disconnection of the internet before, during or after the elections. Hence the question at the centre of the debate: can electoral public order justify the restriction of the right to access internet? To answer this question, the December 2018 coupled elections in Congo-Kinshasa were the focus of this study. Thus, during this period, two approaches emerged. The statist approach, based on the monopoly of constraint with its philosophical presuppositions of hierarchy, order and normativity from above, and linked to the dual colonial and dictatorial past of Lumumba's country, is based on the reason of State under the guise of public order, which tends to block citizen intervention on the public scene. On the other hand, the egalitarian model, led by human rights defenders and citizen movement activists, relies on the sacredness and fundamental nature of the right to access internet, an essential component of the right to information and freedom of expression. In a systemic and historical approach, our analysis leads to an 'in-between' model: the contractualist model, which marries public order with the democratic requirements of e-citizen monitoring of the electoral process.

Keywords: electoral public order, digital citizenship, public space, social networks, right to information

Introduction

La coupure de l'internet est une parmi tant d'autres atteintes aux libertés publiques que ne cessent de déplorer les organisations de la société civile, en Afrique en général[1] et particulièrement au Congo-Kinshasa (RDC). Cette pratique s'amplifie durant le processus électoral pour réprimer dans le noir ou «manipuler» les résultats (Leclercq 2018a). Un journaliste-observateur du scrutin de décembre 2018 s'exclame : «Ils l'ont fait! À l'instar de la dictature nord-coréenne, le pouvoir kinois a fait couper le réseau internet pour éviter une propagation trop soutenue des résultats des bureaux de vote» (Leclercq 2018b). «*D'après Aubin Minaku, secrétaire général de la majorité au pouvoir en RDC et président de l'Assemblée nationale, des raisons sécuritaires justifieraient cette coupure des communications dans le pays au lendemain des élections*» (RFI 2019). La crainte inavouée était la publication prématurée des résultats par des services non habilités, autres que la Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) et les juridictions compétentes, notamment la Cour constitutionnelle pour l'élection présidentielle et les législatives nationales.

Rappelons qu'à la veille des scrutins combinés de décembre 2018 en RDC, il y a eu des initiatives de contrôle e-citoyen du processus : tel était le cas de l'application Miso Polele («Les yeux ouverts») de la société civile congolaise, application conçue par le Centre pour la promotion et la vulgarisation de l'informatique (CPVI) pour permettre aux électeurs de surveiller efficacement le vote de 2018 en RDC (deboutcongolaises.org 2019). Il s'est agi, dans ce cas, d'un engagement e-citoyen à participer à la transparence des scrutins. Cependant, «le 24 décembre 2018, au lendemain de la date initiale des élections générales, l'Autorité de régulation de la Poste et des Télécommunications du Congo (ARPTC) contacte ce jour-là les quatre opérateurs mobiles congolais. Par courrier, il leur est demandé de restreindre l'accès aux "vidéos et images sur les réseaux sociaux Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, YouTube, Twitter" » (Poireault 2019).

L'engagement e-citoyen, au travers des réseaux sociaux, ramène sur le plateau des politistes, des juristes et des sociologues la problématique d'une conceptualisation nouvelle de l'État, notamment son effectuation dans le contexte d'un État à forte culture autocratique comme la RDC (Ngondankoy 2008) et donc en difficulté de concilier pouvoir et libertés.

Par conséquent, il convient de se demander pourquoi l'ordre public sécuritaro-électoral prime, dans le cas congolais, sur le droit d'accès à l'internet ? Autrement dit, le maintien de l'ordre public sécuritaro-électoral peut-il justifier la restriction du droit d'accès à l'internet ?

De cette question principale découlent deux questions subsidiaires, soit :

- Peut-on expliquer la prédominance de la logique étatiste de l'ordre public sur la logique égalitariste des libertés en général et du droit d'accès à l'internet, en particulier au Congo-Kinshasa ?
- Comment comprendre l'incidence de l'internet dans le changement de paradigme «ordre public autocratique» au Congo-Kinshasa, notamment durant le processus électoral ?

Notre hypothèse principale est que la «culture quasi autocratique» permet de comprendre la prédisposition des autorités à procéder aux coupures de l'internet sous prétexte du maintien de l'ordre public. Cela s'expliquerait subsidiairement par un double héritage colonial et dictatorial sans lequel on ne saurait saisir les logiques de gouvernementalité au Congo-Kinshasa. Cependant, avec le numérique, qui facilite l'accès aux réseaux sociaux, le modèle de la «pyramide au réseau» de François Ost et Michel Van de Kerchoove associé à la théorie de l'«État au monopole éclaté» de Guy Aundu Matsanza peuvent nous aider à appréhender cette mutation paradigmatique. Du coup, notre intuition de départ est d'affirmer que l'accès à l'internet pourrait participer à la démocratisation à condition de

trouver un équilibre entre le pouvoir (garant de l'ordre et détenteur du monopole de la contrainte) et les citoyens (détenteurs des droits et libertés).

Pour vérifier l'hypothèse de départ, il nous faudra d'abord situer le cadre théorique sur l'incidence mutationnelle que cause l'accès à l'internet sur la conception monopolistique du pays de Lumumba, un État «au monopole éclaté» (Aundu 2012), en démontrant que, par l'utilisation populaire du numérique, la logique étatiste de la hiérarchie cède de plus en plus la place à la logique égalitariste des réseaux horizontaux, et en montrant quelles sont les conditions de possibilités d'un consensus. Par la suite, dans la perspective diachronique de la construction «problématique» de l'État en Afrique (Tshiyembe 1992), l'analyse nous amènera à comprendre, *in concreto*, le contexte d'exercice du droit d'accès à l'internet au Congo-Kinshasa, «État à forte tradition autocratique».

Fondements théoriques de l'État hiérarchique à l'épreuve du réseautage numérique

La conception classique de l'État a été construite sur les présupposés philosophiques de hiérarchie, d'ordre et de normativité d'en haut, c'est-à-dire sur l'exercice des pouvoirs par un Léviathan. Si la tendance des théoriciens est de ne pas naviguer dans le sens contraire du courant, il existe des études qui tentent de remettre en cause cette conception traditionnelle. Bien plus, la justification de ce nouveau paradigme s'abreuve aux idéaux de dignité et de liberté de la personne humaine.

Fondements mutationnels de l'État hiérarchique à l'État en réseaux

Si l'espace public a souvent suivi une logique hiérarchisée, avec les nouvelles technologies, il tend à s'organiser en réseaux, en cercles concentriques interdépendants. Les intervenants dans la sphère politique prolifèrent et leur participation ne cesse de confirmer le passage inéluctable du paradigme d'ordre public contrôlé vers un ordre public débordé ou éclaté :

> Bien que la politique ne se résume pas à l'art de communiquer et à l'effet d'annonce, il n'en demeure pas moins vrai que beaucoup de décisions prises par les gouvernants sont aujourd'hui tributaires de la manière dont les médias, et notamment les journalistes, vont les commenter. La relation entre médias et vie politique constitue donc un facteur important de la compréhension des enjeux liés à l'évolution des démocraties contemporaines. (Rieffel 2010:7)

«Le média, c'est le message», dirait MacLuhan. En effet, la révolution qui auparavant passait par la guerre et la maladie passe maintenant par les autoroutes de l'information, les inforoutes. Pas de médiatisation, pas d'information.

Mais cette mutation dans l'espace public semble se heurter à la résistance de la violence cyclique de l'arène politique. Guy Aundu soutient que dans un contexte d'éclatement du monopole de l'État,

> Les violences dérivent notamment de la réfraction du monopole de l'État par des groupes (internes et externes) qui infiltrent son organisation et en contrôlent le fonctionnement. Le nombre d'acteurs renforce les ententes ou les luttes dans les rouages du pouvoir, et éveille souvent au bas de l'État la violence citoyenne, par laquelle sont exprimées les opinions à inscrire dans l'agenda des politiques (dirigeants et groupes agissant dans l'État). La violence s'avère un moyen d'expression et de revendication dans une société où la base du pouvoir est écartelée entre les réseaux internes et externes de l'État. (Aundu 2012:11)

Par le numérique, le citoyen devient omniprésent dans le débat public, et ce, sur plusieurs questions (politiques publiques, processus électoral, etc.). Si, avec la démocratie, la logique de la gestion verticale de l'État a pu céder la place à celle de la gouvernance comme «nouveau mode de gestion des affaires publiques fondé sur la participation de la société civile à tous les paliers (national, mais aussi local, régional et international)» (Paye 2005:13), avec les TIC, la logique étatiste vire vers une gouvernance électronique, «caractérisée par les communications horizontales» (Goupil 2007:29). Rémy Rieffel théorise trois modèles d'échanges avec les politiques sur les médias (Rieffel 2010:9-10), soit :

- Le *modèle impositif,* le médiateur et l'acteur politique sont omniprésents, le public semble quasi absent. La rencontre est en effet construite autour des questions posées par le journaliste et par les réponses de l'invité.
- Le *modèle de l'agora,* dans cette configuration, l'acteur politique est confronté non seulement aux journalistes, mais aussi à des citoyens ordinaires qui peuvent lui poser des questions, mais qui n'ont guère l'occasion de poursuivre l'échange.
- Le *modèle interactif,* caractérisé par la mise en relation directe et prolongée du public avec l'acteur politique. Dans ce cas de figure, le rôle de journaliste se trouve réduit au minimum.

L'incidence des réseaux sociaux dans la reconfiguration de l'espace public rentre dans le modèle interactif. Comparativement aux médias traditionnels,

> Sur Internet, «tout le monde» peut aussi se faire émetteur, tout le monde est potentiellement «offreur de contenu». Tout le monde ne peut pas créer sa chaîne de télévision, mais chacun – ou presque – peut développer son site web, pour peu qu'il ait accès à un ordinateur en ligne. Cela ne coûte quasiment rien ; on ne compte plus les serveurs hébergeant plus ou moins gratuitement les sites de particuliers. (Campion & Lits 2001:526)

C'est pourquoi

> La grande innovation de la décennie 2000 a sans conteste été l'essor fulgurant d'Internet dont les nombreuses potentialités ont été rapidement exploitées par les hommes politiques. Censée favoriser l'accélération de la diffusion des informations et surtout les discussions et les échanges, la « Toile » sert aujourd'hui de plus en plus de vecteur privilégié pour entrer en contact avec les militants et sympathisants ou pour séduire de nouveaux électeurs. (Rieffel 2010:10-11)

La particularité des réseaux sociaux, c'est l'interactivité.

En effet, pendant la campagne électorale, « l'expression des idées politiques pendant la campagne officielle s'exerce à travers des réunions, des meetings, des affiches, des déclarations par voie de presse écrite ou audiovisuelle et par les techniques de l'information et de la communication, en particulier l'internet » (Sène 2017:191).

Au Sénégal, la société civile a une tradition de l'observation électorale qui lui a permis d'inscrire à son actif sa contribution à deux alternances démocratiques. Lors de la première alternance politique en 2000, les organisations de la société civile s'étaient constituées en Collectif des ONG pour la présidentielle de 2000. Il en est de même lors de la deuxième alternance politique en 2012 avec la mise sur pied de la Plate-forme des organisations de la société civile pour l'observation des élections, qui était sous haute tension avec la candidature contestée du président sortant Abdoulaye Wade par la quasi-totalité de l'opposition[2]. Lors des premier et deuxième tours de l'élection présidentielle de 2012, la Plate-forme a mobilisé sur l'ensemble du territoire national 5 294 observateurs, moniteurs et superviseurs[3]. Grâce à ce dispositif d'observation électorale, les observateurs ont fait remonter par téléphone en temps réel l'ensemble des informations et données du scrutin auprès de la Situation Room[4] et les ont publiées sur le site senevote2012. com mis en place à cet effet (Sène 2017:492). L'expérience sénégalaise prouve l'avantage de la démocratie participative dans la consolidation et la transparence du processus électoral, et cela pourrait concourir à une forte participation électorale et à la baisse du cynisme grandissant à l'endroit des institutions politiques et des élus du peuple.

Pour scruter les causes de l'effritement ou les facteurs explicatifs du faible monopole de l'État en Afrique à l'ère des NTIC, notre analyse s'attardera à étudier les acteurs de l'espace internet pendant le processus politique, et ce, en mettant en exergue leurs fonctions. Ainsi, notre réflexion s'appuiera sur l'approche systémique afin d'appréhender la logique de réseaux qui remplace celle de la hiérarchie.

Comme l'ont démontré François Ost et Michel Van de Kerchove, selon Pfersmann, «le paradigme de la "pyramide" aurait vécu et ferait place à celui du "réseau" », ainsi,

> L'État n'est plus le seul cadre de référence lorsque l'on veut penser le droit, non, il n'y a pas qu'un seul ordre juridique, mais une multitude de systèmes entretenant entre eux des rapports complexes et parfois étranges. Le droit n'est plus tellement, pensent-ils, imposé que négocié. Il n'est pas appliqué de façon linéaire de haut en bas, il n'est pas simplement autoritaire, mais résulte d'un enchevêtrement polycentré d'actes de nature fort diverse, produits par des acteurs de nature également tout à fait hétérogène. (Pfersmann 2003:730)

Le tableau 1 peut nous faire comprendre cette mutation.

Tableau 1: Matrice de la mutation

	Modèle étatiste (sans ou faible accès libre aux NTIC)	**Modèle égalitariste (avec l'accès libre aux NTIC)**	**Modèle contractualiste (équilibre pouvoir-libertés)**
Principe	Hiérarchie	Égalité	Légitimité
Logique	Pyramide (respect de l'ordre formel)	Collaboration (réseaux)	Consensus axiologique
Primauté sociétale	Pouvoir	Droits humains	Équilibre pouvoir-libertés publiques
Conséquence en cas de consolidation du modèle	Autocratie	Anarchie	Constitution-nalisme

Source *:* Conception de l'auteur

Dans cette matrice, l'idéal est de s'aligner sur le modèle contractualiste, car il trouve son ancrage dans la quête de l'épanouissement de la dignité et de la liberté de la personne humaine, à la fois dans son individualité et dans sa dimension collective (de société ou de communauté). Toutefois, ce modèle peut se heurter à la dysfonctionnalité d'un État au monopole éclaté, comme c'est le cas de la RDC.

Le modèle contractualiste : entre instrumentalisation du monopole de contrainte et quête citoyenne des libertés

Il est clairement soutenu que «les droits fondamentaux de l'individu constituent dans les sociétés modernes […] des principes ordonnateurs suprêmes, à la fois politiques et juridiques. Ils sont de ce fait des principes intrinsèquement constitutionnels. Leur mode d'opération et leur structure sont différents de ceux des règles juridiques ordinaires» (Kolb 1999:125). Ainsi, le caractère fondamental d'une liberté dépend de la notoriété de son contenant (constitution, traité ou accord international) ou de la pertinence axiologique de son contenu (noyau dur). D'ailleurs, la Constitution congolaise de 2006 préfère l'expression «libertés fondamentales» à celle de «libertés publiques». Cela traduit «d'ailleurs des préoccupations d'une importance relativement équipollente dans un État de droit démocratique : l'organisation du pouvoir politique et l'affirmation des prérogatives de la personne humaine» (Ngondankoy 2014:3).

Sans un équilibre pouvoir-libertés, ne sommes-nous pas en train d'avancer inéluctablement vers l'effondrement de l'État, entité souveraine caractérisée par le monopole de la contrainte? Il nous paraît qu'après avoir été utilisée comme outil majeur de la propagande, la télévision, avec sa logique hiérarchique où l'on voyait au Congo-Kinshasa le maréchal Mobutu planer dans le ciel, est en train d'être remplacée par les médias sociaux. Paradoxalement :

> C'est ce qui s'observe en Afrique : le monopole de contrainte de l'État éclate entre plusieurs de ses composantes, mais ne provoque pas nécessairement son effondrement. Ce fut le cas dans l'évolution moderne de l'État quand ses frontières ont perdu de leur étanchéité, s'ouvrant à la libre circulation des personnes et des biens. (Aundu 2012:14)

Cela s'accentue avec l'émergence des réseaux sociaux facilitée par l'accès à l'internet. La puissance de l'information déterritorialise l'ordre public[5]. En outre, soulignons avec le professeur Robert Kolb que

> Tout système de protection des droits de l'homme et toute jurisprudence y relative s'imposent d'abord comme univers politique et progressent ensuite vers le monde des phénomènes juridiques. Univers politique d'abord. Comment ne pas voir que les droits et libertés fondamentaux exprimés par les formules laconiques sont en premier lieu une affirmation suprême du modèle politique et social propre à l'État de droit issu d'une longue histoire constitutionnelle occidentale? Dès lors, l'aspect technique inhérent à l'administration du droit s'efface devant l'idée d'une concrétisation des valeurs fondamentales que ces principes proclament. L'application des droits fondamentaux est donc d'abord une fonction politique, liée à la représentation

des valeurs indispensables au bon déroulement de la vie publique […]. Progrès vers le monde des phénomènes juridiques ensuite. Toute jurisprudence tend à préciser les notions plus ou moins vagues soumises à son attention en les baignant dans le relief concret des espèces… Ainsi, des notions qui par leur généralité s'ouvraient au début à la subjectivité des représentations personnelles sont peu à peu objectivées ; elles sont enserrées dans des critères d'application déterminables *a priori* ; elles finissent parfois par avoir dans le langage juridique un sens technique différent du langage commun. (Kolb 1999:134-135)

« Toute personne a droit à l'information », telles sont les prévisions de l'article 24 de la Constitution de la RDC. Ce droit est fondamental au regard de cette disposition constitutionnelle. Le Conseil constitutionnel français a d'ailleurs rappelé que « le pluralisme des quotidiens d'information politique et générale […] est en lui-même un objectif de valeur constitution-nelle » (Cons. const., 10 et 11 oct. 1984). Toutefois, à l'alinéa 2 du même article, il est noté : La liberté de la presse, la liberté d'information et d'émission par la radio et la télévision, la presse écrite ou tout autre moyen de communication sont garanties sous réserve du respect de l'ordre public, des bonnes mœurs et des droits d'autrui.

Ce qui veut dire que ces libertés ne sont pas absolues. Et donc, il y a des limites pénales et civiles à la liberté d'information et à la liberté de la presse. Lesquelles limites sont fondées sur la protection de la morale, la sauvegarde de l'ordre public ou la protection des droits d'autrui. Ainsi, *la loi fixe les modalités d'exercice de ces libertés*. Par « sous réserve » ou « modalités d'exercice », il faut entendre, non des limitations étouffantes, mais les mécanismes facilitant la jouissance de ce droit dans la société. C'est avec raison que Eve Bazaiba, porte-parole de Martin Fayulu, un des candidats favoris du scrutin de décembre 2018 en RDC, rappelait que *« l'application WhatsApp et les SMS restent les moyens les plus simples pour les observateurs de communiquer les résultats provisoires des bureaux dans lesquels ils sont déployés »* (Rfi 2019).

Nous sommes ici en face de la citoyenneté numérique. Le Référentiel de compétences numériques TIC Unesco précise que la « citoyenneté numérique est le fait de posséder des équipements et des compétences TIC qui permettent de participer à une société numérique, par exemple d'accéder à des informations gouvernementales en ligne, d'utiliser des sites de réseaux sociaux et de faire usage d'un téléphone » (Unesco 2012). À l'ère de la société de l'information et de la communication, les universités, les écoles et les autres acteurs de la société civile sont appelés à former des « cybercitoyens » actifs, éclairés et responsables. Ceci permettrait une surveillance électorale capable d'aboutir à une gouvernance crédible et redevable.

La e-citoyenneté : un modèle de crédibilisation électorale en Afrique

Les NTIC sont des bêtes, disent les informaticiens et d'autres spécialistes de la question. Elles ne font que ce qu'on leur demande. Toutefois, si leur utilisation est sincère, elles participent à la consolidation de la démocratie sur le continent. Comme il existe un lien substantiel entre démocratie, droits humains, bonne gouvernance, l'élite africaine devrait (re)penser l'accompagnement des processus électoraux en Afrique, notamment dans l'utilisation et la certification de la science et de la technologie. Cela rapprocherait l'intelligence du pouvoir pour le mieux-être du peuple souverain. Il faut, pour ce faire, un dialogue constructif entre universités, centres de recherche et think tanks avec les tenants du pouvoir ainsi que les organismes de gestion électorale. Dominique Rousseau n'affirme-t-il pas que

> La nouvelle civilisation du numérique signe, en effet, la fin de l'État souverain national, la fin du contrôle de l'État sur l'économie et la société ; or, le droit reste aujourd'hui toujours fabriqué sous l'autorité de l'État. D'où cette impression d'un droit inadapté. Mais ce n'est pas le droit qui est inadapté, c'est la forme nationale : un droit national pour une civilisation qui devient globale est nécessairement inadapté. (Rousseau 2017:9)

Le savant est alors appelé à placer les lampadaires du savoir sur le chemin des gouvernants.

Au demeurant, il faudrait condamner les dirigeants qui, par des manœuvres frauduleuses, s'emploieraient à couper leur population de l'espace numérique, du simple fait que certains e-citoyens auraient porté atteinte à l'ordre public électoral, notamment la transmission des résultats qui, nous semble-t-il, constitue une modalité de transparence par l'entremise du *Parallel Vote Tabulation* (PVT). Si l'avenir du développement de l'Afrique dépend de la place que les gouvernants accorderont à la science et à la technologie, la réussite du processus de démocratisation passera de même par une utilisation idoine des outils et opportunités que nous offre le numérique, et ce, dans une finalité de transparence.

Il faut rappeler que

> Lorsqu'il est question de mondialisation de la communication, au-delà de grands médias comme la télévision, on pense presque inévitablement à l'internet. Internet serait à la fois le symbole et le moteur du développement du paysage médiatique de demain. Objet polymorphe et « partout » répandu, Internet est actuellement incontournable dans l'étude des processus de communication. La mondialisation de la communication (et la mondialisation tout court, d'ailleurs) passe par l'internet. (Campion & Lits 2001:525-526)

Comprendre la mutation de l'État au Congo-Kinshasa : l'étatisme traditionnel mis à l'épreuve par l'égalitarisme e-citoyen

On ne saurait comprendre l'incidence de l'internet dans la logique étatiste du maintien et du rétablissement de l'ordre public en RDC sans placer cet État dans son orbite coloniale et l'héritage de cette période dans les années suivant les indépendances, avec, en toile de fond, la dictature du maréchal Mobutu. Cependant, la technologie numérique (avec Internet) vient entraîner une reconfiguration forcée du modèle étatiste, ce qui amène à une co-production du discours dans l'espace électoral. Et donc, l'institutionnel se trouve happé par le réseau e-citoyens.

Le poids colonial dans l'affirmation des libertés en RDC

La colonisation a laissé intactes les tares autocratiques en Afrique, et ce, par son double système de gouvernement de domination directe (racialisation de l'État par le colon) et/ou de domination indirecte (la tribalisation de la gestion de l'État par la sous-traitance des autochtones). Du coup, la réinvention de l'État est devenue une problématique quasi génétique, mieux, anthropologique. Le passé colonial semble être un des facteurs justificatifs de la négation des libertés, et ce, malgré l'attachement textuel de l'État aux instruments internationaux de promotion et de protection des droits et libertés fondamentaux.

C'est à ce propos que Mwayila Tshiyembe soutient :

> À cheval sur la culture européenne et la culture africaine, l'État post-colonial n'a la maîtrise ni de l'un ni de l'autre. Ayant ainsi perdu la boussole qui saisit et interprète la capacité d'action de la société sur elle-même, les deux maillons de l'État post-colonial ont cédé sous la pression des conflits et crises […] l'État post-colonial a donc cessé d'être un lieu de coexistence pour devenir un lieu de rupture entre l'historicité africaine et l'historicité européenne, entre la société institutionnelle et la société vécue, entre gouvernants et gouvernés, entre peuple et élite. (Tshiyembe 1990:17)

In casus specie, la RDC a connu une historicité politique particulière : durant la période de l'État indépendant du Congo (1885-1908), la question des droits et libertés des populations locales est quasi insignifiante. Bien qu'échappant à l'esclavage et à la déportation, l'indigène connaît une vie déshumanisante. C'est l'époque du caoutchouc rouge, du sang sur les lianes. S'ensuit la période coloniale (1908-1960). Une période de faible institutionnalisation des droits des colons et des indigènes. Le politologue ougandais Mahamood Mamdani tente de restituer la problématique en ces termes :

> L'organisation ou la réorganisation de l'État colonial répondait partout à ce dilemme central et décisif : la question indigène. Ou, en d'autres termes, comment est-ce qu'une petite minorité étrangère pouvait gouverner une majorité indigène ? Il existait deux types de réponses à cette question : le gouvernement direct et le gouvernement indirect.

Et de poursuivre :

> L'expérience coloniale africaine se cristallisa dans la nature même de l'État forgé au cours de cette rencontre. Cet État était à deux faces comme Janus, bifide, puisqu'organisé de manière différente dans les régions rurales et dans les régions urbaines. Il manifestait une dualité : il existait deux formes de pouvoirs sous l'autorité d'une seule hégémonie. Le pouvoir urbain parlait la langue de la société civile et des droits civiques, le pouvoir rural évoquait la communauté et la culture. Le pouvoir civil affirmait protéger les droits, le pouvoir coutumier, quant à lui, s'engageait à appliquer la tradition. Le premier s'organisait autour du principe de différenciation afin de contrôler la concentration du pouvoir, alors que le second mettait en avant le principe de la fusion afin d'asseoir une autorité unitaire. (Mamdani 2004:34)

Pour sa part, mais dans le même registre, Nancy Rose Hunt, professeur d'histoire à l'université de Michigan, décrit la double face de l'État colonial : d'un côté, l'*État biopolitique* et, de l'autre, l'*État nerveux* (Hunt 2016:353). Le premier type d'État fonctionnait dans une logique de civilisation et de développement des colonisés, en s'occupant notamment de leur providence (santé, éducation, hygiène, etc.), tandis que le second constituait le bras répressif et d'imposition du pouvoir colonial (justice, prison, armée et police).

Ce « parfum liberticide et éventuellement paternaliste » semble se pérenniser dans l'État post-colonial (Quiviger 2017:27). En effet, à leur accession à la souveraineté nationale et internationale, les États africains, notamment les gouvernants, provenant essentiellement de la classe des évolués, n'ont pas pu s'émanciper de la philosophie coloniale, qui demeure intacte dans sa triple logique de domination, de répression et d'exploitation. Le tortionnaire colonial d'hier est remplacé par un tortionnaire local ou national.

De ce qui précède, rappelons que la question des libertés publiques ne peut être envisagée, d'abord théoriquement, que dans la quête de l'équilibre pouvoir-droits et État-individu, ensuite, dans la pratique, sur une perspective qui prend en compte les données à la fois culturelles, historiques et sociales de l'État au sein duquel les droits et libertés sont censés prendre effectivement corps.

D'où l'intérêt de relever le contraste qui s'observe au sein d'une tendance quasi structurelle d'atteintes aux libertés, particulièrement le droit à l'information et la liberté d'accès à l'internet, et leur répétitive consécration

dans différents textes constitutionnels. L'analyse des libertés publiques en RDC connaît un contraste entre les prévisions textuelles paradisiaques et le vécu de ces prérogatives, qui dépend souvent du bon vouloir du Prince, de ses humeurs et de son tempérament.

Depuis son accession à l'indépendance, la RDC connaît une situation des libertés en dents de scie. La Première République (1960-1965) est caractérisée par un pouvoir en balbutiement et qui subit de plein fouet les effets du néocolonialisme naissant. Cela s'est notamment traduit par l'assassinat de Patrice Emery Lumumba. S'ensuivra une dictature sanguinaire tenue de main de maître par Mobutu (1965-1997) avec des « élections sans choix » et « *choiceless democracies* » (Mkandawire 1999:119-135). En mai 1997, l'Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo (AFDL) prend le pouvoir. Cependant ce mouvement rebelle soutenu par le Rwanda et l'Ouganda ne tardera pas à connaître ou à faire naître une scissiparité quasi cancérigène (naissance du RCD et de tous ses démembrements : RDC/Kml, RDC/N, RDC national, CNDP, M23, etc. ; création du MLC). Il s'agit là de la période allant de 1998 à 2003 ; cette période sera caractérisée par une citoyenneté militariste avec l'accès au pouvoir des entrepreneurs de la guerre (Mba Talla 2012, Maindo, Segihobe).

Les gouvernements africains, pour la plupart, avec leurs partenaires internes et ceux externes, principalement occidentaux, renforcent le paradigme colonial au nom du développement ignorant l'avertissement d'Einstein selon lequel « nous ne pouvons pas résoudre nos problèmes avec la même pensée que nous avons utilisée pour les créer » (RASA 2018:102). De tels gouvernements rendent difficile le développement démocratique, par et pour les peuples africains.

Rappelons la correspondance de Monsieur Oscar Manikunda, président de l'Autorité de la régulation de la Poste et des Télécommunications du Congo, structure rattachée à la présidence de la République, du 7 décembre 2017 adressée au directeur de la société Orange RDC :

« Monsieur le Directeur,

En vue de prévenir les échanges abusifs des images via les réseaux sociaux entre abonnés de votre réseau, je vous prie de prendre, dès réception de la présente, les mesures techniques préventives susceptibles de réduire au strict minimum la capacité de transmission des images.

Les réseaux sociaux concernés sont les suivants :

Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, Baidu tchat, Skype, Viber. Linkedin, Tagger, Badoo, Youtube, Videos, Buzznet.

Vous recevrez, par la même voie, l'instruction de revenir à la normale dès que possible. »

Cette lettre prouve à suffisance la mainmise des gouvernants sur la liberté de communication, un des poumons de la démocratie. L'espace public qui devrait être ce «lieu de médiation entre la sphère publique et la sphère privée où s'effectue la délibération entre individus, considérés comme sujets politiques, de laquelle est censé émerger le consensus démocratique puisque les sujets participent d'un même principe universel, celui de la raison critique» (d'après Habermas, évoqué par Goupil 2007:37) devient une prison à ciel ouvert.

Droit d'accès à l'internet : une normativité à l'épreuve du réseautage citoyen

Le droit d'accès à l'internet est une liberté publique qui, comme telle, rentre dans la récurrente problématique de conciliation ordre public et exercice de libertés. Ainsi, Rémy Rieffel estime que

> L'omniprésence des sondages accentue la culture de l'instantané : les résultats, les commentaires et les réactions se succèdent à un rythme de plus en plus intense. On peut par conséquent affirmer que leur influence dans le jeu politique va croissant. Le public des électeurs-citoyens dispose toutefois d'autres moyens de se faire entendre : existence d'émissions de dialogue à la radio, interventions dans des forums de discussion et des blogs. Autant de signes qui montrent que l'influence du public n'est pas négligeable (sans oublier qu'il dispose par ailleurs d'un certain pouvoir grâce à son bulletin de vote). (Rieffel 2010:17)

Or communiquer, c'est avant tout entrer dans un contrat, une convention d'échange. Ce qui revient à dire qu'il y a un cadre normatif qui préside à l'organisation de l'espace communicationnel. Ainsi, la loi fait du droit le médiateur universel du vivre ensemble. Les e-citoyens sont soumis aux normes, car ils sont membres de la communauté des communicants. Mais, à la différence des citoyens territoriaux, ils interagissent sans contact physique dans un cadre virtuel. D'où l'intérêt d'ériger des garde-fous afin de maintenir l'ordre public légitime et légalement applicable. Il est admis que l'ordre en politique suppose une certaine hiérarchisation. Ainsi,

> La hiérarchie dans l'État implique trois éléments majeurs : l'ordre, la dépendance et le formalisme des liens entre structures, d'une part, et, d'autre part, entre les structures et leur environnement. D'abord, l'ordre établit l'agencement des structures de façon à harmoniser pour diluer les conflits. Il permet d'organiser la relation entre les composantes de l'État de manière à éviter les divergences qui pourraient briser ou faire imposer le système […]. En d'autres termes, l'ordre impose des règles et détermine

> des rôles. […] Ensuite, l'ordre d'agencement des structures ouvre une dépendance au sein de l'État entre les différents niveaux de pouvoir. Les rouages inférieurs dépendent de directives de niveaux supérieurs et ainsi de suite, afin qu'aucune structure ne soit indépendante de l'ensemble du système. Chaque structure est toujours soumise à une autre instance, afin qu'en définitive l'unique source de pouvoir soit la société (le peuple). […] Sans l'ordre et la subordination, les pôles deviennent autonomes et accaparent l'exercice de la contrainte. Enfin, si la hiérarchie s'appuie sur la fonction de la dépendance et de l'ordre, elle subsiste grâce à la formalisation de relations entre les composantes de l'État. C'est ici qu'intervient la norme juridique. Nous verrons que l'informel prend le dessus sur le formel, l'ordre est ébranlé, le système hiérarchique est désarticulé. Dans ce cas, le système se désinstitutionnalise, il se rompt par scissiparité, comme l'amibe lorsqu'elle réagit à un toxique soit en formant un kyste, soit en se scindant : chaque fragment recrée en son sein les fonctions vitales antérieures. Le désordre d'un système cause son éclatement, la structure perd l'unicité de ses prérogatives, mais peut subsister après réappropriation de ses compétences par ses agents. Ainsi, la voie est ouverte à l'usage privé de la violence légitime. (Aundu 2012:21-22)

Si l'interdépendance hiérarchisée concourt à la consolidation du monopole de la contrainte, l'interdépendance en réseaux sociaux participe à l'érosion de cette autonomie de puissance, car il y a égalitarisation des interlocuteurs, et donc dispersion due au concours de l'élite gouvernante et de la société d'en bas. Or, avec les réseaux sociaux, la reconfiguration du champ politique semble inéluctable. On assiste à un passage « d'une société solide faite de corps puis de classes à une société fluide faite d'individus » (Rousseau 2017:9). Les communicants d'antan ne sont plus dans la logique d'effort d'entrer dans le débat (acceptabilité et choix de l'interlocuteur), mais deviennent des coproducteurs du discours au même titre presque. Le champ autrefois réservé devient ouvert à tous. D'après Paul-Gaspard Ngondankoy,

> Par droits politiques, l'on vise spécialement ceux qui sont reconnus à une personne en raison de son lien juridique avec la nation (lien de nationalité), lui permettant, en tant que tel, de participer, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à la vie politique de son pays, et, par voie de conséquence, à l'expression de sa souveraineté. (Ngondankoy 2014:22)

En sus, le principe selon lequel la souveraineté nationale appartient au peuple est constitutionnellement garanti (art. 5, al. 1er de la Constitution de la RDC) et ne saurait être remis en cause.

Mais pendant la période électorale au Congo-Kinshasa, l'État, ce *monstre froid*, rebondit pour arracher sa place monopolistique à la contrainte légitime, par la coupure de l'internet. Or, comme le décrit bien le politologue Guy Aundu Matsanza,

> L'enrichissement de l'élite, surtout politique, et l'appauvrissement croissant des citoyens font de la violence un moyen à la fois de maintien et de libération de ce système. Pendant que cette violence est utilisée dans la gestion pour faire jouer à l'État un rôle favorable au régime en place, elle est aussi exploitée par les citoyens comme un moyen d'expression et de lutte sociopolitique. L'État perd son monopole de la contrainte légitime, qu'il partage désormais avec les individus et les réseaux qui incarnent ou contrôlent ses institutions. (Aundu 2012:182)

Et donc, il convient de trouver un juste milieu pour le maintien de l'ordre public électoral par les respects des principes de justice, de liberté, de transparence avec le droit à l'information en général et d'accès à l'internet en particulier. Une élection n'est pas une fin en soi, mais bien un moyen de légitimation des dirigeants pour une gestion redevable de la *res publica*.

La prise en compte des TIC dans la gouvernance électorale semble venir répondre à un « supposé déficit démocratique » auquel les systèmes politiques africains seraient confrontés (Goupil 2007:30). Totalement inconnu il y a à peine dix ans, Internet est en passe de bouleverser non seulement le champ entier de la communication, mais aussi celui de la politique. Après l'invention de la machine à vapeur par James Watt en 1776, après la première centrale électrique ouverte en 1882 par Thomas Edison aux États-Unis, la troisième révolution est celle de l'électronique, qui a cheminé très progressivement avant d'envahir l'ensemble du système technique, et de déboucher sur l'informatique, la robotique et les réseaux tels qu'Internet (Ramonet 2004:17-18). Cet outil charrie avec lui une mutation médiatique : des fonctions traditionnelles de la télévision (informer, éduquer et distraire) vers de nouvelles fonctions (annoncer, vendre et surveiller) (Ramonet 2004:20-22). D'où la pertinence de l'inquiétude de Florence Piron : « Peut-on remédier à ce "malaise démocratique" par "les vertus scientifiques du management public" plutôt qu'en affrontant "les pertes probables de pouvoir et de prestige associés à une transformation en profondeur du système démocratique" » ? (Piron cité par Goupil 2007:31). Or l'État de droit est non seulement la prévisibilité de la norme et son adaptation au contexte, mais c'est aussi la gouvernance optimale par des lois qui délimitent l'espace public et l'espace privé, sinon leur harmonisation aux fins d'une convivialité pacifique entre citoyens et de ces derniers avec le pouvoir.

Les élections démocratiques ne se font pas dans le noir artificiel (de l'État) et le désordre non citoyen : plaidoyer pour un modèle consensualiste

Dans le cadre de la thématique générale de cet Institut sur la Gouvernance «Technologies numériques et gestion des élections dans les processus de démocratisation en Afrique», il nous a paru indiqué de trouver les conditions de possibilité de conciliation entre le pouvoir incarné par l'État et les prérogatives inhérentes à l'individu que ce dernier peut exercer par voie d'internet, tels le droit à l'information et la liberté d'expression.

Comme il est toujours soutenu, l'instauration de l'État démocratique [2] en Afrique ne saurait se réaliser sans le respect des droits fondamentaux des citoyens. Mais ces droits, qui doivent s'harmoniser avec l'ordre public, semblent s'effriter sous prétexte de la sauvegarde de l'ordre public et/ou de la raison d'État. Pour Thierry Vedel,

> Si l'internet peut être une réponse à la crise de la citoyenneté, il est permis de se demander s'il ne contribue pas en même temps à celle-ci. En favorisant la mondialisation des échanges à travers le commerce électronique, l'émergence des groupes sociaux sans attaches territoriales, ou encore en estompant les frontières entre sphère publique et sphère privée, l'internet ne participe-t-il pas à l'affaiblissement des États-nations, à l'essor du communautarisme et à la consumérisation de la citoyenneté ? (Vedel cité par Goupil 2007:43)

> Le développement technologique et numérique en cette période postmoderne, avec les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication, paraît offrir à l'État l'opportunité d'encore s'étendre par d'autres acteurs (ONG, firmes, médias, etc.) et d'autres facteurs (humanitaires, droits de l'homme…). (Aundu 2012:15)

Cependant, pour les États africains à faible institutionnalisation, les effets des réseaux sociaux semblent noyauter l'État dans sa fonction de maintien de l'ordre public électoral. Ainsi, il faut repenser la citoyenneté à l'ère du numérique afin de limiter l'intervention des «imbéciles» (Umberto Eco) dans l'espace public et leur effet négatif qui peut aboutir à l'embrasement de toute la communauté (par des *fake news*), telle est la justification des dirigeants qui procèdent à la coupure de l'internet.

C'est ici le lieu de rappeler que les élections sont réussies si elles débouchent sur «une démocratie intégrative» qui protège les minorités et garantit la participation et la liberté d'expression de tous. Et pour qu'elles mènent à une vraie démocratie, les élections doivent participer au renforcement de la légitimité des institutions et de leurs animateurs. Au XXIe siècle, l'accès à l'internet est le futur de la transparence et de l'intégrité électorale. Mike

Hammer, ambassadeur des États-Unis en RDC, protestait contre la coupure internet en RDC, en ces termes : *«20 jours sans internet sont 20 jours de trop. Il doit être rétabli maintenant. Les démocraties s'épanouissent et les sociétés prospèrent quand les gens sont informés et peuvent communiquer librement»* (AFP janvier 2019). À chaque fois que la lampe de l'intelligence artificielle est éteinte dans un État, cela devrait interpeller tout citoyen, même non intéressé au numérique, sur l'avenir et le devenir de l'État de droit démocratique en Afrique. Ce grand continent doit cesser d'être ce trou noir qui engloutit les espoirs du bien-être de tous et de chacun.

L'incidence de l'internet dans la sphère de la citoyenneté est inéluctable. Le réseautage contribue à un accès et à un partage instantanés des informations. La logique hiérarchique a fini par céder à la logique des réseaux et de «fluidité» de l'espace public. Ce phénomène ne peut être stoppé, car l'accès à l'internet est devenu un droit fondamental ; mais il peut et doit être géré et canalisé[6] vers et pour la consolidation de la démocratie. La nature humaine implique la participation de l'individu au village global. Ce n'est pas la répression antidémocratique qui limitera cette liberté, mais elle pourrait tonifier la bombe sociale à retardement.

En effet, l'espace public hiérarchisé et matérialisé territorialement devient avec le numérique un espace public en réseaux et mondialisé. Ce qui nécessite la conciliation de l'État de droit et de la souveraineté dans le processus électoral, et ce, par l'applicabilité permanente de la «loi» pour mettre fin au désordre et pour le respect des droits humains.

L'intersubjectivité, prise dans un contexte électoral, se rapporte au droit de vote et de participation politique. Les élections libres sont un aspect clé de cette dimension de la citoyenneté, de même que le droit de se porter candidat à un poste politique. Autrement dit, la dimension politique de la citoyenneté a trait aux devoirs et droits des citoyennes et citoyens au sein du système politique (Kalindye 2006:1).

Conclusion

De l'État régalien vers la communauté d'individus en réseaux, cela semble devenir le futur de l'espace public à l'ère de la mondialisation et des NTIC. Plus les réseaux sociaux se multiplient, plus l'État perd sa maîtrise des trafics médiatiques, plus il est institutionnellement affaibli et laisse place aux réseaux e-citoyens, lesquels réseaux peuvent s'accompagner de certains effets pervers (violences, incitation à la haine, *fake news*, etc.) sur le cycle électoral. Cependant, sous couvert de l'ordre public électoral, les détenteurs du pouvoir ne sauraient méconnaître la légitimité des gouvernants «réellement» élus en faveur de ceux qui seraient «désignés ou nommés». S'il est vrai qu'«en

tout état de cause, après la communication dite moderne des années 1960-1990, nous serions progressivement entrés dans l'ère de la communication postmoderne, celle des canaux de diffusion des informations politiques et du ciblage de plus en plus sophistiqué des publics auxquels on s'adresse » (Norris 2000 citée par Rieffel 2010:11), il est de même vrai que l'État postmoderne doit être envisagé dans une vision à la fois territorialisée et mondialisée. En effet, les e-citoyens se sentent appartenir au monde, à la « case commune » (pape François), ce qui signifie qu'à l'époque postmoderne de la citoyenneté, il faut toujours dégager le consensus entre l'universel et le situé, trancher entre la fraude au nom de la souveraineté et la transparence au nom de la liberté individuelle. Et donc, par l'internet, l'État et le citoyen doivent parvenir à une « une ontologie du réseau » (Quiviger 2017:28), à une co-construction du vivre politique au travers des lois humanisantes fondées sur l'éthique de la discussion.

En définitive, la relation entre le numérique et le processus électoral en Afrique est comparable à un individu (acteur électoral) qui se promène la nuit, mais dont la lampe (le numérique) est tenue par une autre personne (État, société de télécommunication et/ou spécialistes de la technologie). Premier scénario, si celui qui tient la lampe se place loin derrière, le promeneur avance vers l'obscurité et ne peut voir clairement son horizon. Deuxième scénario, si la lampe est placée loin devant, le promeneur marche dans une semi-obscurité et donc il peut bien tomber dans un piège. Plus grave encore, si les deux personnes marchent en sens inverse, plus la lampe s'approchera du regard du promeneur, plus la lumière rendra floue la vue du promeneur. Troisième scénario, celui qui tient la lampe se tient aux côtés du promeneur et l'accompagne dans la même direction. C'est à ce troisième scénario que correspond le modèle contractualiste, basé sur la confiance des acteurs pour un numérique électoral efficient.

Notes

1. En Afrique, Internet sans frontières fait le monitoring sur la coupure de l'internet dans certains pays ; on peut citer le cas du Mali, du Bénin et du Tchad : « Depuis le 29 juillet 2018, date du premier tour de l'élection présidentielle au Mali, une escalade dans la méthode de censure du réseau Internet malien a été constatée par Internet sans frontières. Le premier acte de la censure a été la restriction d'accès aux principaux réseaux sociaux, depuis le réseau de l'opérateur de téléphonie principal Orange Mali ». Lire « Mali: escalade de la censure d'internet à la proclamation des résultats – Internet sans frontières », article consulté ce 26 juillet 2019 et disponible sur https://internetwithoutborders.org/mali-censure-en-cascade-du-reseau-internet-a-lapproche-des-resultats/« Internet sans frontières condamne avec la plus grande fermeté le blocage des réseaux

sociaux intervenu au Bénin à la veille des élections législatives de ce dimanche 28 avril 2019. De nombreuses sources d'Internet sans frontières au Bénin ainsi que des mesures techniques effectuées par l'organisation Netblocks confirment que les réseaux sociaux ainsi que les principales applications de messagerie sont actuellement bloqués au Bénin ». Voir « Censure d'Internet et recul démocratique au Bénin – Internet sans frontières », article consulté ce 26 juillet 2019 et disponible sur https://internetwithoutborders.org/censure-dinternet-et-recul-democratique-au-benin/« Depuis le 28 mars 2018, les internautes tchadiens étaient privés de l'accès aux principaux réseaux sociaux, ainsi qu'aux principales applications de messagerie ». Et dans ce cas, la connexion n'a été rétablie que 16 mois après, et ce, sur décision du président Idriss Deby Itno contenu dans un tweet du 13 juillet 2019. Au Cameroun, le gouvernement a décidé de couper l'internet dans les zones anglophones depuis le 17 janvier 2017.

2. La plateforme des Organisations de la société civile pour l'observation des élections est composée du Réseau des observateurs citoyens (Gorée Institute et Collectif des organisations de la société civile pour les élections), de l'Église des scouts du Sénégal (Commission épiscopale Justice et Paix et les scouts du Sénégal), de l'Association culturelle d'auto-promotion éducative et sociale (ACAPES) et de la plateforme des Acteurs non étatiques/ENDA Dialogues politiques.

3. Endadiapol, « Observation du processus électoral de 2012 au Sénégal », [s.d.]. url : http://www.endadiapol.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=210%3Aobservation-duprocessus-electoral-au-senegal&catid=66%3Aarticles-gouvernance-politique-et-citoyennete&Itemid=50. Consulté le 31 mai 2016. La plateforme a reçu le soutien financier et technique de partenaires au développement tels que l'USAID, OSIWA, IFES, One World UK, Oxfam Novib, NDI, l'Union européenne et l'Ambassade de Grande-Bretagne au Sénégal.

4. La Situation Room a été mise en place par la Plateforme des organisations de la société civile pour l'observation des élections présidentielle et législatives de 2012 avec l'assistance et le soutien technique de l'ONG OSIWA. La Situation Room est un observateur des différents événements de l'ensemble du processus électoral allant de l'inscription sur les listes électorales à la proclamation officielle des résultats avec une insistance particulière sur la prévention des violences, elle vient compléter le dispositif traditionnel d'observation électorale et renforcer la légitimité de l'observation électorale de la société civile. À ce titre, elle constitue une plate-forme de partage d'informations entre les différentes organisations de la Plateforme des OSC intervenant dans l'observation du processus électoral afin de plaider pour la correction urgente de tout dysfonctionnement capable d'engendrer de la violence.

5. Dans ses pérégrinations philosophiques, Pierre-Yves Quiviger entrevoit même « du numérique souverain, c'est-à-dire rien moins qu'un nouveau type de titulaire possible de la souveraineté », lequel numérique souverain est « entendu non plus comme numérique unique (en réalité américain), mais comme un univers numérique dans lequel cohabiteraient plusieurs souverains, de même que

cohabitent plusieurs États sur Terre. Je ne veux évidemment pas dire par là que ces souverains numériques devraient être distincts des États, mais simplement qu'un État ne saurait être souverain numériquement comme il est souverain politiquement. Le défi, redoutable, à relever passe par un dialogue entre droit et informatique : les juristes vont devoir inventer une nouvelle modalité de la souveraineté, capable de s'adapter à ce que les informaticiens pourront décrire en termes de possibilité et d'impossibilité technique et, pour parler comme un philosophe, d'ontologie du réseau ». (Quiviger 2007)

6. On rapporte que les internautes kinois ont émigré au Congo-Brazzaville en déboursant quelques dollars américains pour profiter de « l'immigration du net » en allant s'installer dans l'autre Congo. La même situation se fait observer à Goma, où certains habitants n'ont pas tardé à traverser la frontière rwandaise pour accéder à l'internet dans la ville voisine de Gisenyi. D'autres, en revanche, se sont débrouillés en se procurant des puces de pays voisins (Congo-Brazzaville, Rwanda, Ouganda) pour pouvoir communiquer dans les réseaux sociaux tout au long des frontières. Les internautes d'autres villes non frontalières, à défaut d'avoir l'application VPN, ont été contraints de purger leur « peine » entièrement. Lire, à ce propos, Habari RDC, « RDC : coupure d'Internet ou « cyberbrutalité » ? », article disponible sur www.habarirdc.net consulté ce 4 mars 2019. Cette situation prouve à suffisance l'hésitation des dirigeants africains à s'inscrire dans un régime précis des médias. Pour rappel, il existe quatre régimes des médias :

   • 1° Le régime communiste : seul l'État a le droit d'informer. Et donc, dans ce cas les réseaux sociaux appartiennent à l'État.

   • 2° Le régime autoritaire : l'État accepte l'investissement privé dans le secteur des médias, mais y exerce un contrôle permanent afin de tamiser les informations (cahiers des charges).

   • 3° Le régime libéral : l'État laisse faire, seul le public est juge de la qualité de l'information.

   • 4° Le régime de la responsabilité sociale : ici, on insiste sur la responsabilité du communicateur, celui qui produit la communication. En Afrique, généralement, nous sommes dans un méli-mélo avec prééminence du régime autoritaire (interruption volontaire du signal internet, etc.).

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Machine à voter et résistance politique à l'élection présidentielle de 2018 en RDC

Antomella Kornégie Atipo*

Résumé

Cet article, qui traite de l'impact de la machine à voter (MAV) dans l'élection présidentielle de 2018 en République démocratique du Congo, se base sur l'analyse et le croisement des documents provenant de la Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI), de la Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO), des journaux locaux et internationaux collectés sur l'internet et d'autres travaux portant sur les élections en Afrique et dans le monde, et sur le vote électronique. Il en ressort que le choix porté par la CENI d'utiliser la MAV dans le but de réduire la fraude et d'améliorer l'efficacité du processus électoral congolais entraîne la résistance de certaines formations politiques et des organisations de la société civile hostiles à son utilisation, qui y voient une manœuvre du président sortant afin de faire élire son dauphin.

Abstract

This article, which deals with the impact of the voting machine (VM) in the 2018 presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is based on the analysis and cross-referencing of documents from the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), local and international newspapers collected on the internet and other works on elections in Africa and the world and on electronic voting. It shows that CENI's choice to use electronic voting to reduce fraud and improve the Congolese electoral process leads to resistance from some political parties and civil society organisations hostile to its use, who see it as a manoeuvre of the outgoing president to get his successor elected.

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Introduction

Au vu des changements qui s'opéraient dans le monde, la chute des régimes communistes en Europe de l'Est imposait l'ébranlement des régimes monopartites installés dans la plupart des pays africains au lendemain des indépendances. Au demeurant, c'est le discours de la Baule prononcé par le président français, François Mitterrand, lors du 16e sommet franco-africain tenu du 20 au 21 juin 1990, qui enclencha l'expérience de la démocratie, donc du pluralisme. C'est dans ce contexte que les conférences nationales furent organisées un peu partout en Afrique francophone, et particulièrement au Zaïre (RDC actuelle).

Cependant, au Zaïre, l'entêtement du maréchal Joseph Mobutu, qui jouait son va-tout pour instaurer la souveraineté de son pouvoir contre le processus démocratique, conduit à l'embrasement du pays (Atipo 2019:246). C'est dans ces conditions qu'apparaît une rébellion (Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo) armée et politique, dirigée par un revenant de la politique de ce pays, Laurent Désiré Kabila. Ce qui permet l'accession de ce dernier au pouvoir, le 17 mai 1997, grâce aux soutiens militaires et politiques des Rwandais et Ougandais. Malheureusement, il exerce le « devoir d'ingratitude » (Braeckman 2003) en décidant unilatéralement en juillet 1998 de la fin des alliances, et en demandant aux troupes de ses anciens alliés de quitter le territoire de la RDC. Cette décision conduit le 2 août à l'éclatement d'une nouvelle guerre appelée la « deuxième guerre du Congo », dont il ne vit pas la fin, car il fut assassiné le 16 janvier 2001. C'est dans ces circonstances dramatiques que Joseph Kabila arrive au pouvoir en 2001.

Conformément à l'accord global et inclusif de Pretoria du 16 décembre 2002[1], Joseph Kabila est élu en 2006 et en 2011[2]. En 2015, à cause du retard pris dans l'organisation des élections nationales et locales et, de ce fait, du prolongement du mandat du président de la République, des mouvements insurrectionnels et de protestation apparaissent et embrasent la plupart des provinces du pays. La nouvelle élection avait été initialement prévue pour fin 2016. Mais en septembre 2016, constatant que le fichier électoral était incomplet, la Commission électorale nationale indépendante[3] préconisa son report. À la suite de négociations entre le gouvernement Kabila et l'opposition, les élections furent reportées à décembre 2017. Mais le 7 juillet, le président de la CENI, Corneille Naanga, déclara impossible de tenir ce délai. Le 5 novembre 2017, il fixa finalement la date du scrutin présidentiel couplé aux législatives et aux provinciales au 23 décembre 2018. Le 4 septembre 2018, au cours d'une conférence de presse en Corée du Sud, le président de la CENI, chargé de l'organisation des futures élections,

annonça l'utilisation des machines à voter lors des élections présidentielle, législatives et provinciales en RDC (Diasso 2018:3).

Dans l'objectif d'organiser des élections apaisées, d'accroître leur efficacité, mais aussi de renforcer la confiance des parties prenantes tout au long du processus électoral (depuis la phase d'inscription des électeurs jusqu'à la publication des résultats), de nombreux pays se sont tournés vers les nouvelles technologies : «La transmission des résultats électoraux grâce à la technologie de la téléphonie mobile, et l'utilisation, par les électeurs, de machines électroniques pour voter.» (IDEA International 2018:7) L'utilisation annoncée de la machine à voter en RDC divisa la classe politique congolaise en partisans et non partisans de ce moyen de vote. Les premiers estimaient que la machine à voter allait contribuer à un meilleur processus électoral en permettant de rapides résultats électoraux. Les seconds s'y opposaient pour trois raisons essentielles : la première était liée au fait que la RDC était le premier pays d'Afrique centrale à utiliser la machine à voter ; aucune expérience sous-régionale ne lui servait donc d'exemple. Certains acteurs politiques et ceux de la société civile récusent le vote électronique en s'appuyant sur les expériences vécues dans certains pays européens pour stigmatiser les faits ci-après :

- impossibilité pour le public de contrôler les opérations de vote ;
- possibilité de bourrage électronique d'urnes ;
- possibilité de remplacer le vote affiché par un vote différent ;
- en cas de contestation, impossibilité d'un recomptage indépendant ;
- le logiciel de la machine peut être «bogué», même sans intention de frauder.

Puisqu'on «n'organise pas les élections pour les perdre», selon l'ancien président congolais, Pascal Lissouba, le manque de transparence ne permet pas de garantir des résultats électoraux délivrés par une machine à voter. Ces systèmes de vote sont conçus pour fournir des résultats de vote même en l'absence de contrôle effectif, ils ne sont pas en mesure de garantir l'exercice des contrôles censés compenser l'opacité (Enguehard 2011:105). L'opacité étant «réputée protéger un pouvoir arbitraire que ne borne aucune règle, le fait du prince, ou dissimuler l'action de groupes poursuivant leurs intérêts particuliers» (Kone 2015:2).

La question qui nous est venue à l'esprit, suite à ce choix dans le processus électoral congolais de 2018, est donc la suivante : pourquoi les opposants ont-ils résisté à l'utilisation de la machine à voter dans le processus électoral congolais ? Quelles mesures ont-ils prises pour exprimer cette résistance ? Comment les partisans de la machine à voter se sont-ils organisés pour maintenir son usage et pourquoi ont-ils réussi ? Quelles sont

les implications des luttes entre ces deux coalitions de forces tout au long du processus électoral de 2018 ? Quelle est la légitimité du gouvernement issu de ce processus électoral ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, nous avons organisé notre travail autour de trois points. Nous rappelons d'abord l'historique de l'utilisation de la machine à voter (MAV) à travers le monde en nous appuyant sur la littérature existante. Ensuite, nous présentons et analysons le processus électoral congolais de 2018 avec l'usage de la machine à voter. Enfin, nous étudions les conséquences de ce vote et précisément la question de la légitimité du gouvernement issu de cette élection.

Historique de l'utilisation de la machine à voter à travers le monde

Avant d'aborder ce point sur l'historicité de la machine à voter, nous rendons compte de la littérature consacrée à la machine à voter.

L'introduction des nouvelles technologies dans le processus électoral a aidé certains organismes de gestion des élections à renforcer l'efficacité de leurs processus. Dans son rapport sur l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies dans les processus électoraux, IDEA International (2018:7) a montré que de nombreux pays se sont tournés ces dix dernières années vers les nouvelles technologies afin d'accroître l'efficacité et la rentabilité de leurs élections. Le recours à la technologie biométrique pour l'inscription des électeurs en est l'exemple. Si l'adoption de technologies telles que la biométrie a simplifié le processus électoral au Ghana et au Nigeria, l'introduction de machines à voter dans le processus électoral en RDC n'a pas eu l'effet de simplification escompté (Lesfauries & Enguehard 2018). Ce changement de mode de vote a entraîné de multiples tensions dans le pays. Ces tensions se sont rajoutées à celle relative à la constitution des listes électorales (Lagrange 2018). Leur adoption semble être récurrente dans les pays pauvres et qui n'ont pas une longue expérience démocratique électorale. L'adoption de nouvelles technologies, parfois coûteuses, vise spécifiquement à répondre au déficit de confiance entre les parties prenantes électorales (IDEA International 2018:8). Que ce soit dans la procédure d'acquisition des machines, dans la définition du scrutin manuel ou électronique, ou bien encore les errements du calendrier électoral, ces imprécisions n'incitent pas à la confiance dans les urnes (Congo Research Group 2018). Malheureusement, l'usage prématuré dans le processus électoral congolais de la machine à voter constitue en soi une faiblesse, car cet usage devrait être soutenu par une législation adaptée et suivi préalablement par des phases de formation et d'information.

La machine à voter est le terme par lequel les Français désignent un ordinateur de vote avec bulletins dématérialisés (Enguehard 2011:90). Elle

constitue l'un des deux types du système électronique que les Européens utilisent lors des élections. Le vote par Internet est le deuxième type de système électronique.

En France, c'est au début du nouveau millénaire que les électeurs ont commencé à utiliser les systèmes électroniques de vote. Dès 2003, les Français de l'étranger ont eu trois possibilités de vote : vote par correspondance postale, par Internet ou dans un bureau de vote.

Le vote par Internet est «assimilé à un vote par correspondance» (Enguehard 2011:91). En effet, indique-t-elle, «les électeurs utilisent un ordinateur connecté à Internet depuis chez eux, depuis un cybercafé ou ailleurs». Les électeurs doivent, pour ce faire, se connecter sur le site officiel du vote faisant office de serveur. L'électeur fait son choix et, après avoir voté, reçoit confirmation de son vote par un accusé de réception. Le serveur se charge de l'émargement, de la collecte des votes, de leur réception et de leur dépouillement.

La machine à voter est un système informatique autonome qui remplace le matériel habituellement utilisé lors des votes : urnes, isoloirs, bulletins. L'électeur fait son choix en utilisant un bouton ou une souris ou en mettant son doigt sur l'écran tactile. À l'opposé du vote par Internet, l'émargement est assuré par les membres du bureau de vote. Son but est d'accélérer le processus de traitement des suffrages exprimés et dans certains pays, notamment de démocratie récente, de réduire la fraude et d'améliorer l'efficacité.

En France, dès 2007, certains départements ont pris des initiatives favorisant l'utilisation des machines à voter. En effet, en 2007, lors de l'élection présidentielle, huit des douze candidats ont pris position pour un moratoire sur le vote électronique (par nombre décroissant de voix au premier tour : Ségolène Royal, François Bayrou, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Philippe de Villiers, Marie-George Buffet, Dominique Voynet, Arlette Laguiller et José Bové) ; trois n'ont pas pris position (Olivier Besancenot, Frédéric Nihous et Gérard Schivardi) et un seul a soutenu le vote électronique : Nicolas Sarkozy.

Comme on le voit, les hommes politiques français étaient encore dubitatifs sur l'emploi de la machine à voter. Le doute était aussi émis par les partis politiques à l'instar du mouvement des jeunes socialistes. Certains d'entre eux voyaient dans les machines à voter un risque. Les Verts demandaient leur interdiction pour l'élection présidentielle. Le Parti socialiste réclamait un moratoire lors des élections présidentielle et législatives ; Marine Le Pen du Front national ne cachait pas sa méfiance à l'endroit du vote électronique, tandis que François Bayrou de l'Union pour la démocratie française (Foucart 2007) et certains mandataires locaux souhaitaient recourir au préfet et à la justice pour le contrôle des suffrages

(Manach 2007). Mais c'est lors des élections européennes de 2009 que ces machines ont été véritablement opérationnelles.

En dehors de la France, depuis trois décennies environ, la machine à voter a été expérimentée dans plusieurs pays du monde avec des fortunes diverses. En Belgique, le vote électronique a été expérimenté pour la première fois en 1991, dans deux cantons électoraux, avec deux systèmes différents. Le premier système consistait en un tableau électronique comprenant les photos des candidats avec un bouton placé en face de chacun d'entre eux. Le deuxième système était fondé sur une carte magnétique remplaçant le bulletin de vote. Dans ce système, l'isoloir est un ordinateur muni d'un lecteur de carte magnétique, d'un écran monochrome et d'un crayon optique. L'urne électronique est un lecteur de carte doté d'un récipient pour conserver les cartes magnétiques après lecture.

L'Irlande avait expérimenté la machine à voter pour la première fois en 2002. Mais le 6 juillet 2012, le gouvernement décida de se débarrasser définitivement de 7 500 machines à voter, acquises en 2002 pour 54 millions d'euros, à cause de leur manque de fiabilité (*Le Figaro* 2012).

En Allemagne, 1 800 urnes électroniques ont été utilisées lors des élections législatives de 2005. Cependant, dans une décision du 3 mars 2009, la Cour constitutionnelle a déclaré inconstitutionnel le décret mettant en place ces ordinateurs de vote, au motif qu'ils ne permettent pas aux citoyens de vérifier le processus de dépouillement sans nécessiter une compétence technique.

Le Brésil a lancé en 1996 la mise en place de systèmes de vote électronique. Cette année-là, 32 pour cent des votes furent émis à travers les urnes électroniques. À l'élection présidentielle de 1998, le pourcentage a été porté à 58 pour cent et aux élections de 2002, c'est 100 pour cent des électeurs qui ont utilisé le vote électronique. Les données, à la clôture du scrutin, étaient transmises, sans possibilité d'interférence, *via* un réseau privé aux instances électorales régionales. Grâce à ce système, utilisant 414 000 « urnes électroniques », il a suffi de 24 heures pour connaître les résultats de l'ensemble du territoire national.

Aux États-Unis, bien que la vulnérabilité de la machine à voter ait été mise en exergue depuis 2007, celles-ci ont été utilisées lors des élections de 2018. Afin d'éviter que les machines soient manipulées à distance (Zhou 2018), le prestataire Election System & Software a suggéré que le firewall soit mis à jour pour limiter les adresses IPS ayant accès à l'urne électronique (Zetter 2018). De plus, certaines machines sont utilisées sans qu'aient été appliqués les *critical security patches*, comme Eternal Blue.

En dehors de l'Europe et de l'Amérique, la machine à voter a été aussi utilisée en Asie, notamment en Inde[4] (1982) et en Afrique, où la Namibie a été le premier pays à l'introduire dans son processus électoral de 2014.

En Europe, en Amérique et partout ailleurs où elle a été utilisée, la machine à voter a eu des partisans et des non partisans. En France, outre les réticences des leaders politiques signalés, lors de la présidentielle de 2007, les statistiques montrent que les machines à voter favorisent le vote blanc. Les opposants à cet outil de vote lui reprochent de favoriser de longues files d'attente, car il n'y a qu'un seul isoloir par bureau de vote et les électeurs ne savent pas manier les machines. Le jour du premier tour de la présidentielle de 2007, Philippe de Villiers, candidat du Mouvement pour la France, a qualifié les machines à voter de « machines de hasard », de « machines à tricher ». Pour lui, dans l'urne traditionnelle, qu'il dénomme encore « urne démocratique », il n'y a pas la possibilité de tricher. Certaines associations de la société civile française se sont inscrites sur le même registre. Elles ont pointé les problèmes ci-après posés par les machines à voter : possibilité de trafic de la matrice, non transparence des opérations, longues files d'attente, risque de retardement des votes lié aux problèmes d'électricité (*Le Monde* 2007).

Le débat entre partisans et non partisans de la machine à voter n'est pas encore clos. Le constat que l'on peut faire à ce jour est l'abandon par certains pays européens comme la Hollande, la Belgique et l'Irlande de cet outil de vote. Ils évoquent pour cela : le dépassement du nombre d'inscrits par les voix exprimées[5] ; le coût élevé du vote avec la machine à voter[6] ; le manque de confiance lié aux failles de sécurité. Confortés par ces observations et par ce qui s'est passé aux États-Unis lors de l'élection de Donald Trump[7], ces trois pays sont revenus au vote traditionnel.

La machine à voter dans le processus électoral congolais de 2018

Depuis la chute du président Mobutu en 1997, jamais un scrutin électoral n'a fait l'objet de tant de polémiques que ceux qui se sont déroulés en décembre 2018 en RDC. Malgré son usage par de nombreux pays européens, dont nous avons fait mention plus haut, l'Église catholique (la Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo), une grande partie de la société civile et l'opposition politique congolaise ont exprimé leur opposition à la machine à voter. Qu'est-ce qui explique la résistance de l'opposition et de la société civile congolaises à l'utilisation de cette machine ? Comment se sont-elles organisées pour faire barrage à l'introduction de cet outil de vote dans le processus électoral congolais ? Comment les partisans de cette machine ont-ils réussi à actualiser son introduction ? C'est autour de ces questions que nous allons étudier le processus électoral congolais de 2018.

Les raisons de la résistance à l'utilisation de la machine à voter

Si la machine à voter facilite l'efficacité du processus électoral et réduit la fraude, pourquoi son introduction a-t-elle suscité une résistance de la part de l'opposition politique et de la société civile ? Trois raisons essentielles émergent des discours des uns et des autres : raison juridique, raison liée au calendrier électoral et, enfin, raison liée à la configuration technique de l'outil de vote.

Pour les opposants à la MAV, le refus de cette machine est d'abord juridique. Ils s'appuient pour cela sur une requête en inconstitutionnalité déposée en septembre 2018 à la Cour constitutionnelle par Me Jean-Marie Kabengela Ilunga du barreau de Kinshasa-Matete[8]. Dans sa requête, l'avocat demande à la CENI de renoncer à la machine à voter pour revenir au vote papier. Il dit en effet : « Aucun instrument juridique n'autorise la Commission électorale à recourir à la machine à voter. Ce choix viole la loi électorale qui la proscrit en son article 237/ter/ en ces termes : "le mode électronique ne peut être appliqué pour les élections en cours". » C'est ce que Théodore Ngoy a repris dans la déclaration lue le 19 septembre 2018, au nom des onze candidats à l'élection présidentielle qui ont rejeté la machine à voter[9].

En revanche, l'article 47 alinéa 1 de la même loi stipule que « Le vote s'effectue soit au moyen d'un bulletin papier soit par voie électronique » (Loi n° 11/003 du 25 juin 2011). On constate dès lors qu'il y a conflit de normes dans cette même loi. Cependant, si la disposition de l'article 237/ter/ visait les élections de 2016 qui ont été reportées à 2018, le recours au vote électronique est donc proscrit.

La seconde raison du rejet de la machine à voter est liée au calendrier électoral, qui lui aussi ne prévoit pas l'usage de cet outil. Le calendrier électoral, en effet, prévoit du 20 septembre au 5 décembre 2018 l'impression des bulletins de vote papier[10], seul mode de vote prescrit par les législateurs congolais pour les élections en cours.

La troisième raison est liée aux éléments constitutifs de la machine. Celle-ci possède des ports USB[11] et une carte SIM et un dispositif Wifi susceptibles d'être utilisés pour la transmission des résultats s'ils ne sont pas désactivés.

Malgré ces différentes raisons, le faible taux d'alphabétisation des Congolais entraverait aussi le secret de vote, car ne sachant pas lire, certains électeurs auraient le droit « de se faire assister par une personne de leur choix ayant la qualité d'électeur » comme prévu dans la loi électorale. Mais « l'électeur-assistant » pourrait toutefois user du trafic d'influence vis-à-vis de « l'électeur-analphabète » et par conséquent ne pas respecter son choix. Quant à ces craintes, le rapport de la CENI sur les élections de 2018 et 2019

énonce que « La majorité d'électeurs qui ont été assistés ont librement opéré leur choix » (CENCO 2019:15).

L'opposition voyait dans cette machine un instrument de tricherie au service du pouvoir en place et destiné à perpétuer le pouvoir de Joseph Kabila, qu'elle soupçonnait de vouloir briguer un troisième mandat non autorisé par la Constitution. Elle refusait donc son utilisation et menaçait de boycotter les élections si d'aventure les autorités congolaises n'abandonnaient pas le choix de ce matériel de vote. La communauté internationale, précisément les grandes puissances occidentales, et la Mission d'observation des Nations unies au Congo (MONUSCO) sont entrées dans cette polémique en exprimant leur doute sur la sincérité des résultats qui émaneraient des élections faites avec cette machine.

Relayée par les activistes de la société civile et de la CENCO, l'opposition récuse donc cette machine. Comment les partisans de cette machine ont-ils réussi à actualiser son introduction ?

Quelle a été l'attitude de la CENI vis-à-vis de cette levée de boucliers contre cet outil de vote ?

Les réponses du gouvernement et de la CENI : la machine à voter, condition sine qua non de la tenue des élections

La réponse du gouvernement

Pourquoi les autorités de la RDC ont-elles recouru à la machine à voter pour les derniers scrutins qui ont eu lieu dans ce pays ?

Pour les autorités politiques aux affaires, c'est-à-dire le gouvernement de Joseph Kabila, cette machine est un outil qui permet de faciliter le processus électoral congolais depuis la phase d'enrôlement des électeurs jusqu'à celle de l'élection.

Il faut commencer par préciser que la RDC est l'un des plus grands pays africains du point de vue de son étendue (2 344 885 km²) et de sa population, avec près de 80 000 000 d'habitants (estimation de 2008 : 68 008 922 habitants). Cette immensité territoriale et cette masse humaine sont confrontées à deux sérieux problèmes : les voies de communication et les moyens de transport. L'absence de routes viables constitue un sérieux handicap pour la circulation des personnes et des biens, mais surtout pour l'enrôlement d'une population qui, pendant plus de trois décennies, a été maintenue hors du jeu démocratique. En période électorale, déployer les hommes[12] et le matériel électoral est donc un véritable casse-tête pour les autorités administratives qui ont la mission de permettre à tous les citoyens congolais de jouir de leur droit de choisir librement leurs représentants.

Le gouvernement congolais avait donc trois défis majeurs à relever pour organiser les élections prévues en 2016 : enrôler le maximum de Congolais, déployer le personnel chargé des élections sur l'ensemble du territoire national et publier les résultats dans un délai raisonnable.

Concernant le premier défi, il y avait lieu de réviser les listes électorales utilisées lors des deux derniers scrutins (2006 et 2011) en insérant tous les jeunes ayant atteint l'âge de 18 ans requis pour être électeur ou qui l'atteindront au moment des votes. L'étape des inscriptions sur les listes électorales et de la mise en place d'un fichier électoral accepté par tous (partisans du pouvoir et ceux de l'opposition) est une étape où partout, en Afrique, majorité au pouvoir et opposition s'affrontent vertement dans l'optique de lutter contre la déviance électorale. Concernant le second défi, la CENI, institution nationale chargée de l'organisation et de la gestion officielle des élections, annonça dès septembre 2018 son choix d'utiliser une machine à voter pour réduire la durée des votes et les délais de publication des résultats.

En effet, les avantages que procure la machine à voter sont, entre autres :
- un gain de temps : la machine permet d'utiliser les bulletins vierges, commandés bien avant la publication de la liste définitive des candidats ;
- une garantie et une crédibilité des résultats : seuls les résultats du dépouillement manuel comptent ;
- la rapidité de proclamation des résultats au lieu d'une longue attente[13].

La réponse de la CENI

Interpellée sur ce mode de vote, la CENI a répondu que l'usage de la machine à voter ne relève pas du vote électronique dans la mesure où celle-ci ne servirait qu'à imprimer le vote. Pour maintenir cette machine à voter, la CENI a multiplié des séances de démonstration publique et de sensibilisation de la population dans la capitale et dans les chefs-lieux de provinces afin que les électeurs se familiarisent avec la machine à voter avant la tenue des scrutins. Ces moments de démonstration et de sensibilisation peuvent être compris comme la réponse aux recommandations faites à la CENI dans le chapitre IV de l'accord de la Saint-Sylvestre[14].

Comment les partisans de la machine à voter ont-ils actualisé son introduction dans le processus électoral congolais ?

Alors que certaines organisations de la société civile manifestaient contre la machine à voter, qualifiée de machine à tricher, la CENI s'est fait aider par d'autres organisations de la société civile, telles que la Dignité humaine, la

Synergie des missions d'observation citoyenne des élections (SYCOMEL), etc. Dans le cadre de la sensibilisation de la population concernant la machine à voter, la Dignité humaine a organisé plusieurs séances d'essai dans différentes provinces de la RDC comme au Sud-Kivu (précisément à Mbobero le 12 août 2018), séance au cours de laquelle les participants recommandèrent à la CENI d'intensifier la sensibilisation en faveur des analphabètes et des vieillards. À Kinshasa, la Dignité humaine organisa une formation au profit des observateurs électoraux.

Face à la décision du gouvernement et de la CENI de maintenir le calendrier électoral et l'utilisation de la MAV, l'Église catholique, qui auparavant récusait l'utilisation de la machine à voter, a fini par déployer plus de deux mille observateurs formés pour accompagner la CENI dans ces missions durant tout le processus électoral. Ainsi, des observateurs de la Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo ont été déployés sur toute l'étendue du territoire national. L'Église protestante déploya elle aussi des agents sur le terrain afin d'aider la CENI dans ses différentes missions.

Toujours dans le souci de bannir les suspicions à l'endroit du processus électoral, notamment celles liées à l'utilisation de la machine à voter qui pourrait faire élire le dauphin de Joseph Kabila, Emmanuel Shadary, la CENI a même sollicité l'expertise d'une ONG britannique : la Westminster Foundation for Democracy sur cet outil de vote. Suite à son expertise, la Westminster a fait des suggestions afin que soient évitées les suspicions et afin de rendre des résultats crédibles[15].

L'introduction de la machine à voter dans le processus électoral congolais peut donc être comprise comme un moyen pour pallier les difficultés rencontrées par la CENI congolaise lors des précédentes élections (2006 et 2011). En effet, lors des élections de 2011, la CENI avait utilisé les *bulletins journal* que l'opposition accusait d'avoir favorisé des fraudes et irrégularités. Suite à ces élections, la CENI avait donc été l'objet de plusieurs critiques, et les élections à l'issue desquelles Joseph Kabila était proclamé comme président légitime de la RDC par les institutions habilitées, après quoi Étienne Tshisekedi s'autoproclama président, furent qualifiées de catastrophiques. Dans le souci d'éviter les violences post-électorales, d'élever le niveau de la tolérance et la culture démocratique en RDC, et de favoriser des élections crédibles, la machine à voter fut impulsée par la CENI.

Par ailleurs, le manque de consensus dans le processus électoral de 2012 (la CENI s'est heurtée à une forte résistance, au point de renvoyer les élections provinciales, municipales et locales en 2013) et 2014 (calendrier partiel) avait poussé la CENI à chercher d'autres voies et moyens pour éviter une nouvelle résistance dans les prochaines échéances. Ainsi mettait-elle en

avant l'usage de la machine à voter en vue de contourner les critiques de 2011 et d'organiser des élections libres, démocratiques et transparentes, et la publication d'un calendrier électoral global à la demande de la classe politique[16]. C'est pourquoi, en ce qui concerne la machine à voter, la CENI effectua deux voyages en 2014 sous la conduite de l'abbé Malumalu, alors président de la CENI. Après la mort de ce dernier et l'arrivée d'une nouvelle équipe au sein de la CENI, l'administration étant une continuité, la nouvelle équipe poursuivit le chemin entamé par l'ancienne équipe dans l'acquisition des machines à voter produites en Corée du Sud par la société MERU.

Cependant, quant au calendrier électoral, sa publication avait été attaquée par des politiciens, qui le qualifièrent de « trop global, moins inclusif et moins consensuel ». D'où l'organisation du dialogue de la Cité de l'OUA du 18 octobre 2016, sous l'égide d'Edem Kodjo, facilitateur désigné par l'Unité africaine, et ensuite celui du Centre interdiocésain de la Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo du 31 décembre 2016. Conformément aux recommandations faites au gouvernement à l'issue de ces deux dialogues « d'explorer les voies et moyens de rationalisation du système électoral pour réduire les coûts excessifs des élections » (chapitre IV Accord de la Saint-Sylvestre 7-8), la machine à voter fut donc l'unique voie de sortie de cette préoccupation de délai, de coût des élections, et de rationalisation du système.

Le recours à la machine à voter semble s'appuyer sur l'article 47 de la loi électorale. Si l'on tient compte de cet article, cette machine ne servant qu'à imprimer le vote peut donc être utilisée pour ces élections. Convaincue du caractère incontournable des élections et de l'utilisation de la MAV, l'opposition adhéra en fin de compte à son utilisation pour les scrutins du 30 décembre 2018, afin de mettre fin au régime de Kabila.

Coalition de forces pour les élections de 2018 et légitimité du gouvernement issu de la machine à voter
Coalition de forces pour les élections de 2018

Tout au long de l'année 2018, beaucoup d'observateurs de la vie politique congolaise et même de nombreux citoyens ordinaires ont craint deux choses : que les élections ne se tiennent pas ; que la situation post-électorale soit chaotique. D'aucuns pensaient que l'entêtement de la CENI à organiser les élections avec la machine à voter découlait d'un plan qui consisterait à ne pas organiser les élections et à permettre, suite aux tergiversations du camp de Kabila et de l'opposition, le maintien au pouvoir du président sortant.

Division de l'opposition

Les acteurs politiques de l'opposition mettent en place diverses stratégies dans leurs efforts pour accéder au pouvoir d'État, dont les principales sont la formation des coalitions électorales et le boycottage des élections. Dans le contexte de la RDC, face à l'entêtement de la CENI à utiliser la machine à voter, le candidat Martin Fayulu a indiqué que l'opposition ne boycottera pas les élections, car le faire serait ouvrir grandement la porte à l'élection du candidat du camp de Joseph Kabila[17]. Félix Tshisekedi, président de l'UDPS, considéré comme le principal parti de l'opposition, décida quant à lui d'y participer, avec ou sans la machine à voter. C'est dans ce contexte que l'opposition congolaise[18], à l'initiative de la Fondation Kofi Annan, décida de se réunir à Genève le 11 novembre 2018 afin de choisir un « candidat commun ». Les participants à la rencontre de Genève choisirent Martin Fayulu comme candidat commun de l'opposition pour l'élection présidentielle. Mais cet accord fut remis en cause par la base militante de l'UDPS. En effet, le lendemain de l'accord, à Kinshasa, les militants de l'UDPS protestèrent contre le retrait de Félix Tshisekedi de la course présidentielle. Le secrétaire général de son parti, Jean-Marc Kabund, « lui donna même quarante-huit heures, via les réseaux sociaux, pour qu'il revienne sur son engagement et se présente à la présidentielle[19] ». Ainsi, Félix Tshisekedi, qu'on croyait « faible », renia son engagement pour écouter sa base. Vital Kamerhe fit de même. L'opposition congolaise venait ainsi de voler en éclats : d'un côté, Félix Tshisekedi et Vital Kamerhe, décidés à se présenter à l'élection présidentielle au nom de leurs partis respectifs, de l'autre, les autres leaders de l'opposition soutenant la candidature de Martin Fayulu. Ces leaders considéraient le désengagement de Félix Tshisekedi et Vital Kamerhe comme une manœuvre du pouvoir de Kinshasa. Autrement dit, Joseph Kabila aurait corrompu les chefs de l'UDPS et de l'UNC[20].

Le désengagement des leaders de l'UDPS et de l'UNC de l'accord de Genève a entraîné la mise en place de nouvelles coalitions politiques en vue des échéances à venir. Les deux dissidents de l'opposition créèrent le 23 novembre 2018 à Nairobi (Kenya) le Cap pour le changement (CACH) et choisirent pour candidat à l'élection présidentielle Félix Tshisekedi. Face à cette situation, les autres leaders de l'opposition décidèrent de continuer à soutenir la candidature de Martin Fayulu. Ils baptisèrent leur coalition : *Lamuka*, mot en langue lingala qui veut dire en français « réveille-toi ».

Ces deux coalitions de l'opposition s'opposaient ainsi à la coalition au pouvoir : Front commun pour le Congo. La campagne électorale

pour l'élection présidentielle fut dominée par l'affrontement entre trois des 11 candidats : Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, dauphin désigné de Joseph Kabila et candidat du Front commun pour le Congo[21] (FCC) ; Félix Tshisekedi, président de l'UDPS, et Martin Fayulu représentant les principaux ténors de l'opposition restés fidèles à l'accord de Genève (Jean-Pierre Bemba du MLC, Moïse Katumbi, ancien gouverneur du Katanga et transfuge du parti de Joseph Kabila[22], et Adolphe Muzito, ancien Premier ministre et transfuge du PALU d'Antoine Gizenga).

En raison des difficultés rencontrées face à l'épidémie d'Ebola dans l'est du pays[23], ainsi que de l'incendie d'un entrepôt de la CENI à Kinshasa, trois jours avant la date prévue des élections, les scrutins ont été reportés au 30 décembre 2018.

Tenue des élections

Les élections se sont finalement tenues le 30 décembre sur l'ensemble du territoire national, à l'exception des circonscriptions de Beni, Beni ville et Butembo dans le Nord-Kivu, et de Yumbi dans la province de Maï-Ndombe, où la Commission électorale nationale indépendante avait décidé de les reporter au mois de mars pour des raisons sanitaires et sécuritaires. Près de 40 millions de Congolaises et de Congolais se sont donc rendus aux urnes, avec ferveur et dans le calme, afin de choisir leur futur président ainsi que leurs députés nationaux et provinciaux[24].

En dépit des problèmes techniques, logistiques et sécuritaires, les scrutins, selon les rapports des différentes missions d'observation déployées sur le terrain, se sont déroulés correctement. Ces missions d'observation affirment que ces difficultés n'ont nullement entravé la libre circulation des citoyens ainsi que l'exercice de leur droit de vote. Malgré quelques incidents mineurs, les élections se sont déroulées dans la paix dans toutes les provinces concernées.

Publications des résultats : accord secret FCC-CACH

On avait craint le bourrage des urnes électroniques par les agents de la CENI, que l'on soupçonnait de vouloir manipuler les données informatiques au profit de la coalition de Joseph Kabila. Les résultats de la présidentielle ont apporté un cinglant démenti à tous les contempteurs de la machine à voter. Contrairement à ce que d'aucuns pensaient et contre toute attente, le candidat de la majorité sortante, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, considéré comme potentiel vainqueur avant les échéances, est sorti en troisième position. Mais ces résultats, malgré tout, n'ont pas permis la transparence

et garanti la vérité issue des urnes. Au lieu de lutter contre la déviance, la machine à voter a au contraire, selon la CENCO, faussé les résultats des urnes en faisant du second le vainqueur.

En effet, les chiffres officiels proclamés par la CENI, organe habilité à rendre publics les résultats électoraux, sont très éloignés de ceux de la CENCO, comme on peut le voir sur le tableau 1.

Tableau 1: Résultats proclamés par la CENI et la CENCO

Candidats	Résultats de la CENI	Résultats selon la CENCO
Félix Tshisekedi	7 051 013 38,57 %	- 16,93 %
Martin Fayulu	6 366 732 34,83 %	- 62,11 %
Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary	4 357 359 23,84 %	- 16,88 %
Les autres	- -	- 4,09 %

Source : Antomella Kornégie Atipo 2019

Lorsque, dans son rapport, la CENCO indique que les procès-verbaux des bureaux de vote ont consacré un président, pour elle, il ne s'agit pas de Félix Tshisekedi, mais de Martin Fayulu, dont les voix comptabilisées ont été transmises grâce aux réseaux sociaux par ses 40 000 observateurs déployés à travers le pays. On comprend pourquoi le gouvernement de Kabila, craignant la circulation instantanée des informations relatives aux scrutins, a interrompu l'internet et coupé le signal de Radio France internationale (RFI) à Kinshasa, et brouillé son signal de Brazzaville. Sachant que les activistes de la société civile connaissaient la vérité issue des urnes, le pouvoir sortant n'a pu accréditer son candidat comme vainqueur, craignant un vaste mouvement de contestation.

La proclamation des résultats de l'élection présidentielle donnant Félix Tshisekedi vainqueur, ainsi que de ceux des élections législatives et provinciales (qui étaient pourtant prévues après la prestation de serment du président élu), a été contestée par la CENCO[25] et les autres candidats à la présidentielle, pour cause de fraude. Ces élections ont révélé la capacité de mobilisation de la société civile, particulièrement de la CENCO, qui a non seulement formé ses observateurs en recourant à des experts en matière électorale, mais surtout les a dotés d'outils de communication modernes (téléphone utilisant les réseaux sociaux).

Coalition Front commun pour le Congo-Cap pour le Changement

Ayant compris qu'il ne pouvait faire élire son dauphin, le président sortant a cherché à assurer des arrière-gardes à son camp politique en choisissant Félix Tshisekedi comme vainqueur de l'élection présidentielle. Ce dernier, en effet, représentait pour lui le moindre mal en raison de son inexpérience politique et de sa faible emprise sur le parti hérité de son père. Un *deal* aurait ainsi été réalisé entre Joseph Kabila et Félix Tshisekedi. Le *deal* permettait au président de l'UDPS de devenir président de la République et au camp Kabila de contrôler les deux chambres du Parlement. Grâce à cet accord, le camp Kabila était assuré d'avoir le poste de Premier ministre et la mainmise sur des ministères de souveraineté comme l'Économie, les Finances, la Défense, les Affaires étrangères et l'Intérieur[26]. Cet accord ouvrait donc grandement la porte à une cohabitation comme l'ont connue les présidents François Mitterrand et Jacques Chirac en France. Sauf qu'en RDC, le président semblait être sorti du chapeau d'un prestidigitateur : Joseph Kabila. Le grand risque, pour ce nouveau président « élu », était de devenir un chef d'État protocolaire. Mais les récents changements intervenus en RDC (création de l'Union sacrée) ont « libéré » le président de la République de l'emprise kabiliste et redoré par conséquent son image.

Quelle légitimité pour le gouvernement Tshisekedi issu de la machine à voter de la CENI ?

La fraude électorale faisant de Félix Tshisekedi le nouvel élu à la présidence de la République résulte d'un *deal* qui a été passé entre Joseph Kabila et Félix Tshisekedi, dont le maître d'œuvre a été, de l'avis de quelques-uns, Vital Kamerhe, un ancien kabiliste associé à Félix Tshisekedi. Cela a été confirmé par la suite par Moïse Katumbi et Félix Tshisekedi lui-même (Isango 2019a). Mais pourquoi les Congolais ont-ils accepté les résultats proclamés par la CENI, sachant qu'ils ne relevaient pas de la vérité des urnes et affectaient la crédibilité et la légitimité des institutions qui en sont issues ? Quelle a été l'attitude du camp des perdants de cette élection ?

Au nom de la coalition politique, Moïse Katumbi demanda au président Félix Tshisekedi, au lendemain de sa prestation de serment, « des initiatives fortes susceptibles de régler la question de la légitimité des institutions et de leurs animateurs[27] ». Il dénonça l'accord conclu entre Kabila et Tshisekedi pour une passation de pouvoir entre eux. Il affirma, au nom de son regroupement, que « L'exercice du pouvoir du président de la République doit se fonder sur la Constitution et non sur un accord politique sous seing privé et secret, qui n'engage pas la nation congolaise. Cet accord ne peut

valoir source de légitimité démocratique » (Isango 2019a). Ces propos montraient que le deal Kabila-Tshisekedi pour une passation de pouvoir était un secret de Polichinelle. Le président Tshisekedi le confirma du reste lors de son voyage officiel à Windhoek, en Namibie. En effet, en réponse à la question qui lui a été posée sur l'accord qu'il aurait conclu avec Joseph Kabila, il a admis en ces termes avoir eu une entente avec son prédécesseur, mais pour un gouvernement de coalition :

> C'est un *deal* que nous avons fait pour que, d'abord, l'alternance se fasse pacifiquement. Donc, il y a eu cette entente, et elle s'est faite pacifiquement pour qu'après les élections législatives et la majorité qui s'en est dégagée, il y ait une coalition avec le camp de M. Kabila, le camp sortant. (Isango 2019b)

À notre avis, au lieu d'ouvrir une page de contestation et de confrontation des forces, dont le grand risque était de faire sombrer le pays dans la guerre, les Congolais ont préféré la paix et l'intérêt national. Les exemples dramatiques du Congo-Brazzaville (qui a traversé la décennie 1990 dans des guerres répétitives issues du contentieux électoral) et de la Côte d'Ivoire post-Konan Bédié étaient encore présents dans les esprits.

Conclusion

Cette étude nous a permis, d'une part, de suivre les péripéties du processus électoral commencé en RDC depuis 2016, et, d'autre part, de réfléchir sur l'apport des technologies électroniques dans les votes africains. Le peuple congolais a fait preuve d'une grande maturité politique en acceptant d'aller aux votes de ses représentants malgré les risques de tricherie qui étaient prévisibles. Il s'agissait pour les Congolais de s'arrimer à la vision de plus en plus admise selon laquelle les représentants doivent être élus et non désignés. Les Congolais qui ont voté le 30 décembre savent la vérité sortie des urnes. Ils ont accepté, d'une part, le verdict donné par la CENI, seule institution habilitée à donner officiellement les résultats électoraux, et, d'autre part, les décisions de la plus haute institution juridique : la Cour constitutionnelle qui a fait de Félix Tshisekedi le cinquième président de la RDC. Face aux risques d'implosion du pays, ils ont choisi l'intérêt national, c'est-à-dire la paix et la stabilité du pays. Mais cette paix nous semble éphémère, car les frustrations issues des résultats de ces élections non seulement placent le président « élu » dans une situation inconfortable, mais surtout fragilisent l'avenir de la RDC, qui peut basculer dans l'inconnu si les alliances politiques ne sont pas respectées. Son voisin, le Congo-Brazzaville, a fait l'expérience d'une rupture d'alliance politique entre l'Union panafricaine pour la démocratie sociale de Pascal Lissouba (président entrant) et le Parti congolais du travail (PCT) de Denis Sassou Nguesso (président sortant) : une longue guerre civile.

Puisqu'on ne repasse pas les plats, c'est-à-dire que l'histoire ne se répète pas, ce que l'on craignait en RDC après la rupture d'alliance ne s'est pas fait comme on le présageait. Mais combien de temps l'Union sacrée va-t-elle tenir? Le peuple congolais ainsi que ses dirigeants, qui sont mûrs d'une longue et riche histoire politique commencée au lendemain de l'indépendance, sauront, nous en sommes persuadée, tirer les leçons de cette expérience de quête démocratique pour retenir et projeter ce qu'il y a de mieux pour la paix, la sécurité et le devenir harmonieux des Congolais.

Notes

1. L'Accord global et inclusif de Pretoria prévoyait la tenue des élections dans les vingt-quatre mois qui suivaient le début de la période de transition et pouvait être prolongé de 6 mois en raison des problèmes spécifiquement liés à l'organisation des élections. Il est renouvelable une seule fois pour une durée de six mois, si les circonstances l'exigent, sur proposition de la Commission électorale indépendante et par une décision conjointe et dûment motivée de l'Assemblée nationale et du Sénat.

2. Avant 2011, le président est élu pour cinq ans au titre d'un scrutin uninominal à deux tours. En janvier 2011, à la suite de l'amendement de l'article 71 de la Constitution, le scrutin devient uninominal à un seul tour. D'autres articles sont venus compléter les conditions à remplir par les candidats à l'élection présidentielle : posséder la nationalité congolaise et être âgé d'au moins 30 ans (article 72) ; le président reste en fonction jusqu'à la fin de son mandat, qui doit coïncider avec la prise de fonction effective de son successeur élu (article 65).

3. Appelée Commission électorale indépendante jusqu'en mars 2011, la CENI est créée suite à l'Accord global et inclusif de Pretoria et à l'adoption de la Constitution de transition de 2003.

4. En Inde, la machine à voter a été expérimentée pour la première fois dans l'État de Kerala en 1982, et est utilisée depuis dans tout le pays lors des élections, comme durant celles de 2019.

5. Le 18 mai 2003 à Schaerbeek (Belgique) où l'on utilisait le vote par machine, le décompte des voix exprimées a dépassé de 4 096 le nombre d'inscrits dans la circonscription, cf. les documents de travail du Sénat : *Série Législation comparée LC 176, de septembre 2007 sur le vote électronique*, p. 16.

6. Le 8 juin 2007, la Radiotélévision belge de la Communauté française annonça que le vote électronique s'élevait à trois fois le prix du vote papier traditionnel. De plus, il est plus cher à l'investissement, mais aussi en frais d'utilisation.

7. Allégations de piratage par la Russie, au profit de Donald Trump, dont aurait été victime la candidate Hillary Clinton en octobre 2016.

8. RFI, « RDC : requête en inconstitutionnalité contre la machine à voter » (http://www.rfi.fr). 20 avril 2019.

9. RFI, « Élections en RDC : la machine à voter remise en cause par les candidats » (http://www.rfi.fr). 20 avril 2019.

10. CENI, « Décision n° 065 du 5 novembre 2017 portant publication du calendrier des élections présidentielle, législatives, provinciales, urbaines, municipales et locales » (http://www.cenirdc.org). 5 avril 2019.

11. Bus informatique *plug and play* servant à brancher des périphériques informatiques à un ordinateur pour communiquer en série.

12. Selon la commission électorale nationale, 60 000 agents (membres des bureaux électoraux et techniciens) étaient chargés de la compilation et de la transmission des résultats. La conférence épiscopale du Congo dit avoir déployé 40 000 observateurs sur l'ensemble territorial.

13. Le président a prêté serment moins d'un mois après l'élection présidentielle.

14. Renforcer la sensibilisation de la population sur le processus électoral et les enjeux électoraux, avec les parties prenantes au processus électoral au niveau tant national, provincial que local.

15. Voici les principales suggestions faites par l'ONG britannique :
    - désactiver les communications externes (carte SIM et Wifi) jusqu'au moment où celles-ci sont nécessaires ;
    - recouvrir tous les ports externes (soit modifier le volet de protection, soit boucher le port USB exposé) ;
    - limiter le nombre maximum de bulletins par machine à 660 pour empêcher un excès de vote ;
    - supprimer la fonction d'impression de code QR ;
    - veiller à ce que des bulletins de vote insérés de façon incorrecte ne produisent pas de votes manuels invalides ;
    - limiter les données sur l'USB à l'échelon provincial ;
    - réviser le processus de confirmation du vote pour éliminer la fonction permettant d'enregistrer le vote lorsque l'électeur touche la photo du candidat ;
    - élaborer et diffuser des directives procédurales claires concernant le rôle des machines à voter, en plus de protocoles concernant leur maniement, configuration et administration ;
    - réexaminer les processus de distribution pour réduire la période de temps pendant laquelle la machine est sous la garde du personnel du bureau de vote ;
    - inviter les représentants des partis politiques et les observateurs aux centres de distribution ;
    - impliquer les témoins des partis politiques et les observateurs dans les contrôles préalables ;
    - préparer des plans opérationnels détaillés pour remplacer le matériel et les disques externes ;
    - organiser des simulations pour permettre au personnel des bureaux de vote d'acquérir de l'expérience dans l'utilisation des machines ;
    - se préparer aux files d'attente et s'engager à laisser voter les électeurs encore dans la file d'attente à la clôture du scrutin ;
    - créer un fichier log distinct pour permettre un audit.

16. CENI, «Cérémonie de présentation du rapport des experts de la fondation britannique Westminster pour la démocratie sur la machine à voter» (http://www.cenirdc.org) 5 avril 2019.

17. Martin Fayulu estima que son espoir que la CENI écouterait la voix du peuple congolais, qui rejette dans sa majorité cet outil de vote, était fondé. Tshisekedi, président du parti historique d'opposition (UDPS), quant à lui, décida d'y participer avec ou sans machines à voter.

18. Cette coalition était constituée de sept ténors de l'opposition congolaise qui sont : Martin Fayulu, Jean-Pierre Bemba, Félix Tshisekedi, Vital Kamerhe, Adolphe Muzito, Moïse Katumbi et Freddy Matungulu.

19. Pierre Boisselet et Trésor Kibangula, 2018, «RDC : comment l'opposition a sabordé l'accord de Genève pour un candidat commun» (http ://www.jeuneafrique.com). 20 avril 2019.

20. Selon la rumeur publique, une rencontre a eu lieu entre Félix Tshisekedi et Joseph Kabila dans la ferme de ce dernier dénommée Kingakati. Selon la même rumeur, l'invitation avait été faite en premier lieu à Martin Fayulu qui déclina l'offre.

21. Le Front commun pour le Congo, c'est la coalition politique et électorale regroupant le Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie, l'Alliance des forces démocratiques du Congo et alliés, l'Action alternative pour le bien-être et le changement, le Parti du peuple pour la paix et la démocratie ainsi que d'autres partis. Sa charte consécutive date du 1er juillet 2018, et Joseph Kabila Kabange est son autorité morale. L'objectif principal de cette plateforme est la conquête du pouvoir par les moyens démocratiques.

22. La coalition Lamuka a été mise en place le 11 novembre 2018 à Genève à la suite d'un accord signé entre : Martin Fayulu Madidi (Dynamique de l'opposition) ; Moïse Katumbi Chapwe (Ensemble pour le changement) ; Adolphe Muzito (Nouvel Élan).

23. Il s'agit des circonscriptions de Beni, Beni ville et Butembo dans le Nord-Kivu et de Yumbi dans la province de Maï-Ndombe où la Commission électorale nationale indépendante avait décidé de les reporter au mois de mars.

24. Le corps électoral s'est présenté comme suit : inscrits (38 542 138) ; votants (18 329 318), soit 47,56 %.

25. La CENCO avait recommandé que la CENI publie les résultats par bureau de vote pour plus de transparence, car les résultats collectés par ses observateurs à partir des fiches des résultats affichées devant les bureaux de dépouillement ne correspondaient pas à ceux publiés pas la CENI.

26. Suite aux négociations, le Front commun pour le Congo a gardé les ministères souverains comme la Défense, les Finances.

27. Eddy Isango, 2019 a, «Des pro-Katumbi demandent à Tshisekedi une réponse à la "question de légitimité"» (http://www.voaafrique.com). 10 avril 2019.

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The '#tag Generation': Social Media and Youth Participation in the 2019 General Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines the roles of social media on youth's political participation in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. It interrogates the roles played by these communication tools in the emancipation and agency of youths while revealing the double-edged implications the devices may have on the democratic processes and aspirants. The article employs both primary and secondary methods of data sourcing. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with social media 'influencers' who played vital roles during the 2019 General Election in Nigeria. Further, data were obtained from selected social media accounts of prominent politicians and analysed using content analysis. Secondary data were extracted from books, articles, newspapers and magazines. Also, the study was contextualised using use and gratification theory. The study concluded that social media played a vital role in the 2019 General Election in Nigeria. It revealed how social media contributed to citizens' power and agency through debates and narratives which were instrumental in agenda-setting for the ruling class and citizens' democratic expectations.

Keywords: social media, youth, political participation, hashtag generation

Résumé

Cet article examine l'impact des médias sociaux sur la participation politique des jeunes aux élections générales de 2019 au Nigeria. Il interroge sur le rôle de ces outils de communication dans l'émancipation et l'action des jeunes tout en révélant les implications, à double tranchant que ces dispositifs peuvent avoir sur les processus démocratiques et les aspirants. L'article utilise à la fois des méthodes primaires et secondaires de collecte de données. Les données primaires ont été obtenues à partir d'entretiens approfondis avec des « influenceurs » de médias

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sociaux qui ont joué un rôle essentiel lors des élections générales de 2019 au Nigeria. En outre, les données ont été obtenues à partir d'une sélection de comptes de médias sociaux d'éminents politiciens et analysées à l'aide d'une analyse de contenu. Les données secondaires ont été extraites de livres, d'articles, de journaux et de magazines. De plus, l'étude a été contextualisée en utilisant la théorie des usages et des gratifications. L'étude a conclu que les médias sociaux ont joué un rôle important dans les élections générales de 2019 au Nigeria. Elle a révélé comment les médias sociaux ont contribué au pouvoir et à l'agentivité des citoyens à travers des débats et des récits qui ont été déterminants dans l'élaboration du programme de la classe dirigeante et les attentes démocratiques des citoyens.

Mots-clés : réseaux sociaux, jeunesse, participation politique, génération de hashtags

The globalisation of the world has been transformed by the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) since the 1990s. Today, communication barriers have been reduced to the barest minimum as local events easily become global and vice versa. However, ICT has come with a growing power that can be located in the social media space. Technological innovations are not only expanding the effects of social media on politics but are also involving citizens in political debate like never before (Ruskell 2016: 1). The impact has been that a critical mass of once 'voiceless' youth have got their persuasive 'voice' through the internet and their political participation has evolved (*ibid.*). The implication of this is massive for youth at large in the context of democracy and governance. This becomes important, as youths, through the use of social media, have not only evolved from an identity of stable consumers of news and political narratives but have also become sources of newsfeeds, and trendy agenda framers concerning leadership, accountability and good governance within the polity.

African youth have also embraced social media. This is in connection with their rich history of failed governance which manifests in various forms of marginalisation. While accounts of state repression (Wilkes 2014; Arthur, Angeline, Vincent *et al.* 2013; Williams 1996) are not new to African literature, studies on African youth and political participation continue to show low turn-out in the political space. Increasingly, African youth have deployed different strategies in getting out of the failed system in which their destinies are seemingly trapped. One strategy has been political participation through social media in order to advance good governance delivery. Their efforts have put political officeholders on the spot as they constitute the greatest number of social media users and they have kept a chunk of their time in the online world (Leslie 2015: 1).

Instructively, Nigerian youth have not been left out. Nigerian youth have often shown interest in turning around the peculiar challenges which hold the country back. For one, they face socio-economic challenges which include unemployment and poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics reports that Nigeria's unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2018 moved from 23.1 per cent to 27.1 per cent in 2020 (Onuba 2019; Proshare.com 2020). Worse still, data on corruption showed the appalling state of rot in the system. For instance, Transparency International rated Nigeria in 149th position out of 180 (2020), a step above 148th in 2017 (Sahara Reporter 2018). Youth have however realised that they cannot continue to sit back and watch their potentials being under-utilised. They have also realised that a critical aspect of their socio-economic and political ascendancy is attached to existing corruption, nepotism, cronyism, incompetence of public officeholders and lack of transparency, accountability, probity, and poor governance which are exhibited in government. Hence, their functional approach has been to peacefully engage the system by organising cerebral, non-violent movements through '#' codes, viral videos and online movements, to convey serious feeds of comments, debates, newsfeeds, and editorial headlines through which their agenda are nationalised. Today's youth have grown up with the concept of 'viral media' and approach their role in society differently than older generations (Ruskell 2016).

Consequently, the 2019 Nigeria General Elections witnessed a high level of participation of youth through social media like never before. This is because social media allowed young Nigerians to contribute to discussions and events. The campaign period was dominated by robust, creative engagements of the youth of different ethnic group and apologists, political parties, 'faceless' (anonymous) social movements influencers whose roles shaped debates which questioned the integrity of aspiring politicians. Questioning of record of performance in service and character were mainstreamed. The electoral period, as Yetunde Daniel (2019) noted, did not only witness heated arguments on Facebook pages, blogs, Twitter handles, online newspaper comments sections, and propaganda messages as evidence of the awareness that the election generated amongst youth; but also demonstrated the evolvement of youth in political participation through social media platforms. In many cases, social media accounts of prominent politicians or aspirants become space for youth debate over topical issues or trends. This was used in expressing their love, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the policy thrust of such a personality. The most daring is how Twitter, YouTube videos, Facebook and WhatsApp were used. Twitter spaces, for instance, were used to raises questions on critical issues in the polity. Examples includes: #budgit, #sarakiatCCB, #Gandujedollar, #iwillsellNNPCtomyfriends

and #nameoneprojectcompletedbyBuhariandwinonemillion. The spate at which 'O' To Ge Movements' became viral and began to convey Kwara indigenes' protests towards the political establishment of Senate President Bukola Saraki suffices here. These negatively impacted the electoral chances of aspirants whose accountability and image deficit perception were questionable. The connection of Nigerians to the news and social media grid has renewed hope in the public sphere with minimal gate-keeping (Mustapha, Gbonegun and Mustapha 2016: 22). Furthermore, social media also provided an avenue towards the democratisation of information which helped youth to make informed decisions on those vying. This became important as it enabled them to bypass mass media which often constitutes part of the ruling establishment. Importantly, social media became sources of news for mass media itself. With the democratisation of information to electorates and the teeming youth, which Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) data showed constituted 51 per cent of the 84 million eligible voters (on leadership, see Natsa 2019), citizens were able to distil vital news and critique official statements. Propaganda was rebuffed while policy direction and manifestoes of candidates were scrutinised.

More so, social media enabled youth to express their views against cultural values that seemed protective of the status quo. While culture protects elders in African society (Ogo 2015; Idang 2015; Okoye and Obikeze 2005), Nigerian youth were able to challenge cultural structures through the use of social media technologies. Michel Essoughou put it well when she said that social media provides 'one of the few ways young Africans can bypass the inefficiencies in the system that allows the status quo to hold on' (2016: 4). This position was further corroborated by Theophilus Konamowo, cited by Essoughou (2016:3): 'in the African context, being able to voice one's opinion freely is not that easy, especially for young people'. Consequently, social media allows for freedom of thought and participation of youths with positive energies in democratic development, especially through elections. It must be noted that youth access to these opportunities does not come without reactions from the government and ruling elites. In most cases, the challenges resulted in political persecution through arbitrary arrests. Government's propositions on the regulation of social media content under the guise of 'hate speech' to control the internet space or, in some situations, the shut-down of internet engines suffice. This study, therefore, reacts to the problematic of the Nigerian youth and political participation in the 2019 General Election using social media. It problematises how social media played key roles in engendering youth participation in the 2019 General Election that manifests in the form of debates on probity, accountability, transparency, anti-democratic cultural reviews, and advocacy for, and action

on, good governance in a way that reconfigures power for the agency of the youth. This is very important because of how Nigeria's democratic space continues to grow with mixed signs. Even though elections are periodically held for political transition, a lot remains to be achieved in terms of good governance and the processes of electing credible public officeholders. More important is the marginalisation of the youths in democratic governance (Rast, Hogg and Moura 2018). The plight of the Nigerian youth is well documented in African literature (see William 2016). Nigerian youth have over the past decades deployed several strategies[1] to draw the attention of the government to issues that affect them. Issues pertaining to rights, political inclusion, gender equity, human rights adherence, human security, development and, most importantly, unemployment are common denominators in their struggles for decent lives. Their challenge has also been exacerbated by corruption in all spheres of governance. With ICT, youth have begun to engage the established political class (ruling elites) who have performed below their expectations in terms of good governance by voting them out of political offices during elections through their usage of social media tools for campaign and debates. The idea is to elect leaders who will be sympathetic to their cause for the realisation of a decent life for themselves and also to sustain the entrenchment of good governance as the cog of the country's foundation. This position became vigorously pursued via social media space such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and even text messages in mobilising and coordinating their thoughts around issues in their respective constituencies.

However, many studies on youth participation in politics are inadequate in accounting for how social media has increasingly impacted General Elections. In some cases, attempts are made to understand how the youth use such platforms to bring to the fore governance issues that affect them (see Iwilade 2013). Scholars have also looked at how social media changes attitudes of youths in political discourse but not elections per se (see Dagona, Karick and Abubakar 2013) while youth and decision-making has also been explored (United Nations Youth 2012). Certainly, youth participation has proven impactful (even though its extent has not been empirically studied) on electoral processes. Social media platforms have therefore become channels through which youth demand probity, transparency, and accountability from Nigerian leaders through their participation. Yet, it is surprising this scope of the study has not been keenly investigated. This study is significant given the global attention that the 2019 Nigerian election attracted. Importantly, the study is significant for several reasons. First, social media and youth participation in political processes is an ongoing debate in Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large. Secondly, statistical data

on youth political participation in Africa and Nigeria inclusive continue to show low political participation of people aged 18–45 years. This is attached to the marginalisation of youth in democratic space by the ruling class which continues to relegate this 'active population' by consolidating their established political structures.

Furthermore, the drive for democratic practices and development rests on the contribution of youth in any country. Research has affirmed that youth have largely been part of the electoral processes as active agents of violence, thuggery and ballot snatching. Hence, it is important to study how groups of mobile but voiceless youth have begun to gain 'national voices' with the advent of social media tools such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and even text messages. This is important as social media has helped in the facilitation of an actively engaging population which could be regarded as the 'hashtag generation' for their savviness on social media in the quest for good governance in Nigeria's 2019 General Elections. The study is also significant to understand how youth participation has introduced positive energies into the political processes and how such energies have impacted leaders vying for public offices in their respective constituencies as exemplified by the 2019 General Election. This article therefore examined the problem which was held in Nigeria's February 2019 General Elections. In doing this, it seeks to raise specific questions which include, first: why social media became pivotal in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. Second, it evaluates the role of social media in enhancing the involvement of Nigerian youth in electoral debates. Finally, the article analyses the major challenges that confronted young people in Nigeria in using social media as platforms for political participation in the 2019 General Elections. The article rests on two assumptions which include, first: social media operated to deepen, rather than undermine youth participation in the 2019 Nigeria General Elections. Second, the emergence of social media as a platform for political debate has significantly reduced the power of the state to suppress free speech among the youth.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section focuses on the conceptual clarification of the study. The second section provides a literature review, theoretical framework and contextual relevance. The third section is devoted to the methodology. This is closely followed by data presentation on youth participation in Nigeria's elections in 2019. The fourth section entailed a discourse analysis on social media, youth agency and political participation in Nigeria's General Elections. The last and final section is the summary and conclusion of the study.

Conceptualising Social Media, Youth, Political Participation and the Hashtag Generation

This section conceptualises the key terms in the article. These key terms are: social media, youth, political participation, and hashtag generation. Social media is defined in Merriam Webster's dictionary[2] as any form of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). Boyd and Ellison (2008) submit that these are websites that allow the creation of profiles as well as visibilities amongst users. To Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy et al. (2011), social media embodies web-based tools, codes, or applications with a key feature that allows sharing of contents amongst friends or users which could be in the form of texts, audio or videos. Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana et al. (2017) and Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2013) share the idea that these are 'internet sites' which allow interactions and networking. Networking in this context involves both formal and informal (personal) associations or interactions.

More technical definitions are those provided by scholars such as Huang and Benyoucef (2013: 246) and Huberman (2010) that social media are 'Web 2. 0 Technologies built to gather and share intelligence but also permitting individuals and groups in sharing information amongst themselves. These resonate with O'Reilly and Battelle's (2009: 1) conceptualisation of the term as 'web-based and community of connected users'. O'Reilly and Battelle (2009) differed in that their social media conceptualisation has an economic ideological precept to its endpoint. The above shows that the term is still conceived from diverse perspectives; hence, in the context of this study, social media refers to digital technologies, tools, and devices which aid communication and allow for social networking which might be conveyed in the form of audio, video or text. They include internet wired applications useable on smartphones and computers which allow people access to information and to reply, and comments on particular information (posts). Social media examples, therefore, include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp and Telegram.

The term youth is one of the concepts in social science that has eluded a generally agreed definition. This is given by the different lens from which it is conceived and how flexibly the term cuts across sociological, cultural, political, as well as security and biological perspectives. The United Nations defines youth as people above eighteen years but not exceeding twenty-four years (United Nations 2012). However, the Secretary-General of the supranational

body added that the term is culturally defined; hence, communities or societies perceive youth differently. Youth are therefore subject to the interpretation of cultural, sociological identities and the epistemological notion of an individual (Nunn 2002: 1). Biologists have often time argue that youth are people cut in between childhood and adulthood, i.e., youth are better understood as a subject of human stages of development; however, it is difficult to see how this measures up in each locality since hormonal growth differs with impact on decision-making and reasoning. Also, Hollingshead (1946: 6) defined youth as 'the period in the life of the person when the society in which he functions ceases to regard him as a child and does accord him full adult status, roles, and functions'. It is obvious from the above that the central idea of what constitutes youth is a product of societal construction, decision-making and human growth in the form of biological conception of age. This study conceptualises youth as people who are above eighteen to thirty-five years and who are in the early but critical phase of their adulthood. Youth are therefore seen as men and women whose ability to make decisions are believed to be sound, matured and, of course, who understand the intricate linkages of such actions and consequences to their personal development. In the submission of sociologists such as Kehily (2007), Jones (2010), Pierre (1978), Spence (2005) and Frith (2005), youth are products of social constructs; an imaginary display of the concept waxed around age.

Like other concepts in social sciences, political participation is one of the most contested terms in the literature. This is hinged on the fact that scholars define it from a different perspective. To some, it is just an activity to get involved, and influence or support the government or otherwise. In the context of this study, political participation refers to the determined or conscious effort of an individual or groups to be involved in political processes via debates, mobilising, campaigning and voting in response to specific goals. These goals include reviewing the activities of a public officeholder or willingness and conviction to project an aspirant to political posts. Van Deth (2001) conceptualises political participation as those 'activities' of 'citizens' that are 'voluntary' and aimed at influencing or taking crucial impact decisions in the political process. This definition synthesises Milbrath and Goel's (1977: 2) idea that political participation is a private citizen's activities or actions seeking to influence or support government and politics in their respective constituencies. Although, these activities could be directly or indirectly targeted towards the instalment of a government (Kaase and Maarch 1979: 2), candidates or personnel (Verba and Nie 1972: 2). Nevertheless, Parry, George and Neil (1992: 16) summed this up by asserting that such citizens' actions are mainly public-

focused towards representational or official selection in a democratic style of government where the minds of the people are communicated to their leaders in satisfactory or protest form.

Lastly, the phrase 'hashtag generation' is operationalised in this study to mean a generation of youth who are more social media adept and more energetic in the participation or involvement of political discourses, debates, ideas and other civic responsibilities, especially democratic election and good governance. The hashtag generation, therefore, represents an inclusive idea of a youthful set of people between the range of 18–35 years who are more attuned to their socio-political and economic rights, expectations of the political officeholder or aspirants, and very engaged in shaping narratives in the Nigerian polity. The term captures a generation of youth which uses social media to participate in the development and dynamics of political processes within the Nigerian state.

Review of Literature

There exists a substantial amount of literature on social media and youth participation, most of it in articles, journals, and editorials on the internet. Social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram can be harnessed in educating citizens due to their penetrative capability (Ayeni 2019). According to Ayeni (2019), social media could be used by INEC to educate youth on shunning violence; while advertisement and persistent posting to the social media space are the right strategies to go about engaging and building a credible internet presence for the electoral body. As plausible as Ayeni's narrative seemed, his article was focused on the pre-2019 analysis of INEC usage of social media. It did not account for youth level of participation per se but suggests how such a platform could be used for robust participation. Furthermore, United Nations Youth (2012) submits that youth are key drivers of national development as they constitute agents of 'power'. The article argues that the low representation of youth in political discourses and processes often reinforces the dominance of the older generation. Therefore, initiatives that will improve youth decision-making skills should be encouraged. Nevertheless, the article failed to account for how social media has impacted youth political participation especially in areas of followership and accountability. It even failed to explain how youths became implicit or direct decision-makers during the 2019 Nigerian General Elections. Dagona, Karick and Abubakar (2013) posit that social media platforms such as Facebook allow the youth the opportunity to air their diverse views but do not necessarily translate to participants' positive political influence. Nevertheless, their article failed to interrogate youth political participation as a result of social media during the

2019 General Election. Their study also failed to analyse how social media has empowered youth or otherwise, despite its usage in the last three General Elections. Lastly, the article did not provide statistical claims that cut beyond the scope of the study (Facebook); hence, statistical records which include YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp will be areas of focus in analysing the 2019 General Election in Nigeria.

Shamsu, Mohamad and Muda (2016) contend that Facebook has become a tool for engendering political participation and interactivity with politicians. Their study further notes how social media enrich the quality two-way information sharing medium and broadening of democratic spaces, unlike the pre-social media era when mass media was controlled outside the reach of the youth. However, Shamsu, Mohamad and Muda's (*ibid.*) work did not account for how social media engendered youth participation during the 2019 General Election while other viable fora which youth utilised in setting agenda, changing narratives and refuting propaganda in the 2019 General Election were not explored. Iwilade (2013) contends that social media has engineered new dynamics to Africa's politics of resistance; hence, social media is reconfiguring youths' power and creating means to bring peculiar socio-economic challenges to the fore. Nevertheless, even though Iwilade's analysis exposes his reader(s) to the agency of youth, it did not interrogate how social media facilitates youth political participation in the General Election despite explaining the growing power of youth in Nigeria and Zimbabwe through social media. Coombs, Falkheimer, Heide et al. (2016) posit that the use of social media in established public institutions in Africa seemed a mixed blessing since information can be diverted, uttered or used to promote a political development. However, due to its focus on public organisations, their analysis did not examine how social media engendered youth participation during Nigeria's General Election.

Apuke and Tunca (2018) explain that social media was deployed differently during the 2011 and 2015 Nigerian General Elections. In this context, they submit that it was used for sharing information that was exclusively the preserve of the ruling elites. Also, it was used for a political campaign by politicians, to follow collation of results from the polls from ward level even before the declaration of results. More so, Apuke and Tunca's (*ibid.*) study notes that images of politicians are projected using the tools either positively or for the campaign of calumny or hate speech which does degenerate into online abuse, harassment, misinformation or mischief. Therefore, there is a need to grasp the various ways social media can be used in electoral processes. This rich contribution is however embellished with the gap of how social media helps youth to facilitate political participation in general elections, hence the study.

Moreover, Pierre Omidyar (2018) examines how social media can be put to different uses and asserts that social media poses existential threats to Nigeria's nascent democracy. His article points to the manipulative tendency of 'fake news' and distorted 'viral videos' which are enhanced by anonymous status for users. However, this work did not examine how youth participated in political processes as a result of social media during Nigeria's General Election. Also, Ngozi Onyechi (2018) asserts that social media can be mobilised to foster democratic change amongst student youth. But Onyechi's work did not explain how such ideas of youth mobility for social change took place during the 2015 Nigeria General Election.

Mustapha, Gbonegun and Mustapha (2016) argue that social media has helped youth to overcome the deficiencies of traditional media which hitherto deny them political participation and mobilisation. Nevertheless, they submit that more data should be drawn to prove how such platforms engender active youths' participation in electoral processes. This was argued as a way to distinguish between mere 'civil participation' and 'political participation'. Despite the salient contribution of Mustapha, Gbonegun and Mustapha (2016), its assertion on participation is short on conceptual depth. It is silent on how social media facilitated youth political participation during the 2019 Nigeria elections. Aliyu Kolawole (2019) explains how youth are adopting new means such as the internet and social media tools to facilitate communication and political campaigning during the 2019 General Election. Establishing his research on a survey conducted amongst conceptualised youth between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, Kolawole argues that youth engagement was facilitated by social media better than at any time in Nigeria's political history. In this context, Kolawole further explains how 'Not too Young to Run' (NTYTR) canvassed, mobilised and pressurised the National Assembly into signing its bill into law. However, as apt as the article seems, it is weak on the methodological processes of data representation. This is because it only drew representation from Osun State tertiary institutions with implications for the entire thirty-six states without any other complementary primary data to interrogate youth and social media enhancement in the 2019 general election. This work will, therefore, contribute to statistical and other forms of data. It will help dissect how such position challenges encountered in Kolawole's (*ibid.*) study in terms of political participation by youth during the political campaign era were overcome using social media.

More so, Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya et al. (2017) submit that social media has not only allowed freedom and political participation in Nigeria's political processes but that its features help the multitude who are in need

of vital information about their political choices. They contend that social media features which include anonymity, accessibility, affordability, privacy, and personal contact exchanges help citizens to scrutinise the policy thrust of leaders and aspirants, consequently allowing a more accountable democratic value in the conduct of the election. Nevertheless, emphasis on youth and General Elections through this means was not made hence the study. Ayodeji Adeloju (2016) in his article submits that social media enabled youth during the 2015 Nigeria General Elections to show their displeasure. He contends that social media was used to challenge political figures whom they would not have critiqued due to culture and socio-economic standing. Hence, such platforms were critical in deciding the direction of the election. As insightful as Adeloju's study seemed, his work is weak in empirical data. His article drew references from a selected timeline and newsfeeds of politicians which makes more use of desk research. This study combines such an approach with a semi-structured interview with social media influencers. This will enhance the study's data and the impact it had on the electoral outcomes.

From the foregoing, scholars have provided useful insights into social media and youth participation in Nigeria's 2019 General Election. Nevertheless, it could be observed that there exists a gap in how social media tools enhance youth's political participation through debates, with a direct impact on the electoral outcomes in the 2019 General Elections. Empirical data on this referent seemed scarce or non-existent. Further, while there are a few accounts which address the implicit powers accruing to social media usage by youth, none explicitly demonstrate how such social media impacted a candidate during the 2019 General Elections nor the last two elections; but only referred to such a point in manners that deal with organising revolution as seen in the fuel subsidy crisis and the Maputo bread, water, and fuel riots in Iwilade's (2013) account. It could also be discerned that the literature on youth participation in areas that cover accountability, transparency, probity, good governance, character deficits, and utterances of leaders in the 2019 General Elections were not covered from the above reviews. The reviews dealt more with the conceptual, theoretical and functional usage of social media by youths without links to political participation and electoral outcomes. This is the gap the study fills.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is based on use and gratification theory. Use and gratification theory derives from mainstream mass communication theory (Hossain 2019; Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley 2013; Al-Jabri, Sohail and Ndubisi 2015; Hsiao, Chang and Tang 2015; Williams and Whiting 2013: 2; McQuail

1994; Ruggiero 2000). It emerged in reaction to the need to know why radio and television listeners get glued to music and adverts such as Soap Opera. Coming from Herzog's radio research findings, it was discovered that there are communication contents that satisfy the psychological and social needs of the audience (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 2016: 2). The theory assumes that media contents are powerful social and political tools meant to achieve a particular goal. Put differently, individuals look out for media messages and contents that satisfy their needs and lead to ultimate gratification (Lariscy, Tinkham and Sweetser 2011). Therefore, news contents are targeted to yield gratification from the users' end. Use and gratification theory also assumes that individuals use contents of communication in their environment (physical) among other resources to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 2016: 1). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch posit that, for every communication or information, there exists an active audience (2016: 2). That is, information and communication are goal-oriented and directed (McQuail, Blumler and Brown 1972: 21).

More so, the theory also assumes that data and information supplied are in tune with people who are sufficiently aware of their environment, interests, and motives. However, these specific interests and motives are recognised when confronted in reality with reactions showcasing intelligible and familiar verbal formulation (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 2016: 3). The theory thereby assumes that value judgements about the significance of such communication to an audience are taken up given audience orientations towards such a line of information that meets their goals and interests as consumers (*ibid.*). The gratification therefore comes in the form of goal outcomes which each supplier of information has provided to a targeted, interest-oriented audience. Moreover, the theory assumes that audience gratifications can be derived from at least three distinct sources: media content, exposure to the media per se, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media.

Contextual Relevance

The above assumptions of use and gratification theory explain the roles of social media and youth participation in the 2019 Nigeria General Election. It captures the idea that social media contents are purposive and goal-directed to a specific audience. Furthermore, it also relays how the producer of news content shares and posts information (text, image, video and audio) via their social media handles to drive a goal. Shared data and information on social media represent ideas whose ultimate goal is aimed towards engendering political participation of youth in electoral processes

during the 2019 election. Furthermore, the theory highlights that the youth participated in political processes given the debates emanating from social media. Moreover, the idea that gratification comes in the form of outcomes of participating in vote patterns against a particular candidate explains the relevance of social media's information and communication. This means that youth are moved by what they read, listen to and share as sentiments through social media. A cumulative effect of which enhanced their mobilisation, awareness of candidates, and informed their choices to active participation in the last General Election.

Nevertheless, the theory is not without weaknesses. For one, gratification as assumed by the theory exemplifies a social construct. That is, gratification is a product of social construction and it is difficult to determine exactly what and the extent to which media content becomes the real influencing factor for political engagement or decisions made by youth in a particular context. Nonetheless, this does not derail the value of the theory in explaining the phenomenon.

Methodology

Data for this study were drawn from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were got in two ways. First, a purposive selection method was used in extracting data from four presidential candidates' social media accounts. These candidates include President Muhammadu Buhari, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, Omoyele Sowore and Professor Kingsley Moghalu. In this context, data were drawn from their Facebook and Twitter pages. The PEW survey of 70 per cent of youth presence on social media (Ogunlesi's study on youth presence on the internet reflects the same) was used as the baseline in calculating the percentage of youth presence on each post that was sampled for the study. In doing this, data were studied, reviewed and analysed from 18 November 2018 (when INEC declared political campaigns officially opened) up to a month after the election ended to ascertain how much youth participated in political processes during the 2019 General Election. Selected posts samples were therefore copied with careful counting of the first fifty comments by youth. Painstaking attention was devoted to face recognition and profile proof-reading. In a situation where justifying the certainty of youth profile could not be guaranteed, such comments were discarded, and others analysed.

Secondly, primary data were also extracted from semi-structured in-depth interviews with targeted 'social media influencers' such as Deji Adeyanju, Ayo Olowo (godfather), J. J. Omojua, Hamzat Ibrahim (CODE), and Ibrahim Faruk (YIAGA) to gain deeper knowledge of the inner working and

reflection of the hashtag generation (youth) concerning the Nigerian 2019 General Election. The selection of these influencers is motivated by the large followership which they command in the social media space amongst Nigerian youths. Only 'influencers' with not less than 10,000 followers on Twitter were purposively selected. Their selection was informed by their capacity to shape narratives, debates and topics through initiated posts which often attract youth participation in political debates. Furthermore, they also represent an active supplier of news to their followers and friends, especially the youth whose influence during the 2019 General Elections proved decisive. Their selection resonates with the key roles played in youth discourses around the 2019 General Elections. More so, data were drawn from the feeds, posts and comments by Nigerian youths from these influencers in reaction to a particular debate, trend, viral video, or issues. Data were analysed using a descriptive and content method of analysis. The above method was supported by a pool of secondary data available in books, articles, magazines as well online sources. This helped in situating the context of what took place during the 2019 General Elections and how social media enhanced youth's political participation with implications for power relations.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Youth Participation in the Nigerian Elections 2019

This section focused on youth participation in the last General Election using social media accounts such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube where major debates took place. Table 1 shows the texts and reaction by youth in political discourses and debates by calculating the extent to which support for and against such posts were made.

Analysis Table 1

Table 1 shows five selected Twitter posts of President Muhammadu Buhari. The total comments for the first post represent 4,700 while youth participation indicates 3,290. The analysis showed from fifty comments with negative reaction from the youth to the text. The comments also revealed anger over the violence and perceived rigging that characterised the elections. Furthermore, for posts 2, 3 4, there were 2,900, 2,500, 6,000, and 2,400 comments and 2,030, 1,750, 4,200 and 1,680 numbers of youth who reacted to the texts respectively. Of the first fifty comments analysed, the second post showed negative reactions from the youth towards the removal of the Chief Justice of Nigeria with capture such as 'tyranny',

'desperation' and 'autocracy back to its old days'. A summary of the idea put forward by the President: it could also be discerned that a good number of the first fifty comments were negative on the third post while the few positive comments in support of him got angry or responded mockingly to those who supported his view. More so, the fifth post reveals a trend of youth against the President. In sum, the youth expressed negative or sarcastic comments regarding the tweets.

Table 1: President Muhammadu Buhari's selected Twitter posts

S/N	President Muhammadu Buhari's posts	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	The hard work to deliver a better Nigeria continues, building on the foundations of peace, rule of law and opportunities for all. We have no other motive than to serve Nigeria with our hearts and might, and build a nation which we and generations to come can be proud of.	27 February 2019	4,700	3,290
2.	Fellow Nigerians, A short while ago, I was served with an Order of the Code of Conduct Tribunal issued on Wed 23rd January 2019, directing the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Honourable Justice Walter Nkanu Samuel Onnoghen from office pending final determination..	25 February 2019	2,900	2,030
3.	Yesterday I visited our Presidential Campaign Head-quarters in Abuja. I met the very hardworking members of our Team, many of them young people, and was briefed on the performance of our party so far in the Presidential Elections.	22 February 2019	2, 500	1, 750

4.	I humbly ask for your support again in the coming election to enable us move to the NEXT LEVEL & consolidate on the successes recorded in making Nigeria a better place. I don't take your support for granted. We will continue to work to protect your interest & deliver our mandate.	10 February 2019	6,000	4,200
5.	Fellow Nigerians, this is our story. Join us as we take Nigeria to the Next Level!	12 February 2019	2,400	1,680

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

Analysis Table 2

The selected posts in Table 2 are extracts from Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's Twitter handles during the electioneering period. The total number of posts were analysed using the first fifty counts. For the first post, there were over 2,500 comments with 1,750 youth involved in the social media debate. However, the text received mixed reactions with some promising him their votes, mobilising their friends and family while some called him 'Mr. President'. On the other half, there are those calling his integrity into question, especially with regards to corruption which could be best summarised as 'you will never become president'. Furthermore, the second post reflects a more positive reaction with over 70 per cent of those who reacted promising him their votes. The total number of comments is estimated as 1,600 while 1,120 youth participation was indicated. For the third post of the fifty comments analysed, a large chunk of comments were against him being a president. Common language used was 'his delusion of coasting to victory'. Many replied to his post as someone thinking delusionally about winning the elections. Moreover, posts 4 and 5 attracted 2,700 and 2,300 comments with 1,890 and 1,610 estimated youth participants in the respective debates. The fourth texts drew sympathy of the youth with a statement extolling him when he said, 'join me irrespective of who you want to vote for'. The last post attracted mixed reaction with some youth denouncing their support for him while others saluted his courage to have escaped the 'trap' of the ruling party who want to expose him to the flaws of technically sound candidates through the debates even though the sitting president (President Muhammadu Buhari) did not attend.

Table 2: Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's Twitter posts

S/N	Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's posts	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	Earlier today I received a call from US Secretary of State, @SecPompeo, who reaffirmed the international community's commitment to free and fair elections in Nigeria. Wishing you all a peaceful election, wherever you are. God bless Nigeria.	25 February 2019	2,500	1,750
2.	Dear citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as you know, the Independent National Electoral Commission has announced a postponement of the elections until 23 February and 9 March respectively.	16 February 2019	1,600	1,120
3.	So, let me reassure you, we are going to win these elections. And to our long-suffering citizens, I say do not despair, our time is now, and together we shall reshape the destiny of our beloved country. #PDPNECMeeting #LetsGetNigeriaWorking-Again	19 February 2019	2,500	1,750
4.	I will be voting on Saturday, the 23rd of February 2019, and I call on you to please join me. #LGNWA	21 February 2019	2,700	1,890
5.	We came here for a Presidential debate, not a candidacy debate, and I, Atiku Abubakar cannot challenge or question an administration where the man at the helm of the affairs of the nation is not present to defend himself or his policies. #2019Debate I just cast my vote at Ajiya Ward in Yola, Adamawa State. Go out and cast your vote too if you have not done so yet. -AA #NigeriaDecides2019	25 January 2019	3,300	2,310

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

Table 3: Omoyele Sowore's Twitter posts

S/N	Omoyele Sowore's posts	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	We defeated @APCNigeria APC's Muhammadu Buhari @MBuhari and PDP's Abubakar Atiku @atiku at our polling unit 005, Apoi Ward llc In Ese Odo LGA, Ondo State. Final Results: AAC 208, APC 82, PDP 11, AA 8.	23 February 2019	762	534
2.	New date for Nigeria's Presidential Election is NOW February 23rd 2019...Postponing their day of judgement by one-week #TakeItBack	16 February 2019	136	96
3.	It is Election Eve in Nigeria! "Prominent" religious leaders gathered together in my country. Half of them are asking that they want a THIEF, and the other half want a KILLER to rule over our affairs. We are taking it back do good. #TakeItBack	22 February 2019	93	66
4.	'Sowore disrupts Godfatherism politics, raises N150m from public donation for campaign' - Vanguard News Nigeria	21 February 2019	51	36
5.	President Buhari finally sheds any pretense of democratic decency. Nigeria is down under his jackboot. We must #TakeItBack in few days or you might as well forget it!	25 January 2019	102	72

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

Analysis Table 3

Table 3 represented five selected social media posts by Omoyele Sowore with comments and youth participation totalling 762 and 534; 136 and 96; 93 and 66; 51 and 36; and 102 and 72 respectively. The first fifty comments were analysed. The first post x-rays a positive and congratulatory comment to Sowore for his polling unit result while birthday felicitation was meted on him with some saying he should 'do the next in the *Aso Rock Villa* after the election'. The third post however was a total rejection of vulgar and uncouth language in the campaign message of Mr Sowore which used words like 'thief' and 'killer' in his post. The fourth post revealed a mockery of token raised from his projected campaign fund while the last post shows mixed reactions over the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) which some see as a way to avoid being rigged in court by the major opposition party (PDP). Others saw it as a desperate project of a dictator which Sowore shared with his tweets.

Table 4: Prof. Kingsley Moghalu's selected Twitter posts

S/N	Prof. Kingsley Moghalu's posts	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	My campaign contracted with NTA to show my special address to the nation this night at 8.30 pm. But they have sabotaged our campaign and declined to broadcast our material because I am an opposition candidate. Send the @MBuhari dictatorship a message at the polls. Vote YPP!	21 February 2019	487	341
2.	A fake news report making the rounds on social media that I have teamed up with PDP's Atiku Abubakar is just that- fake news! If it's not that I am working for Buhari, it's that I am with Atiku. Wow. Is this dude popular or what?	21 February 2019	60	42
3.	So after I rebutted their original fake news, desperate PDP continues to spread the falsehood that I have "finally" stepped down my candidacy and joined up with @atiku. Lol! I thought it was supposedly "a two-horse race" between APC and PDP"? Who's afraid of #YPP? #Itistime!	22 February 2019	204	143

4.	Onnoghen's Suspension Must Not Stand President Muhammadu Buhari set aside the constitution by "suspending" the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN), Justice Walter Onnoghen. This action is a serious threat to Nigeria's democracy and a gross violation of the rule of law, which must…	26 January 2019	62	44
5.	"Atiku and Buhari are not here because they want to come to power on the wings of entitlement without a record of performance…" #VoteKingsleyMoghalu #ItisTime #PresidentialDebate2019 #2019Debate #PresidentialDebate2019 #IAmVotingMoghalu.	19 January 2019	81	57

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

Analysis Table 4

Table 4 reflects comments from the youth who participated in the political processes arising from five selected social media posts. First, fifty comments by youth were calculated using the baseline which is 70 per cent as for the others above. The data showed total comments of 487, 60, 204, 62, and 81 respectively, while 341, 42, 143, 44, and 57 were the estimated number of youths who participated in the discussion. However, the first and second posts x-ray mixed reaction on his chances; hence, some youth advised him to 'join hands with Atiku' to avoid wasting his time and splitting the youth vote which will be to the advantage of the ruling party. The third post showed a mockery of him overrating his chances to the PDP candidates. There seems to be a negative reaction over his position on the suspension of the CJN as well as the debates in which the President and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar did not participate. Comments from most of the youth showed that he will only derail the perceived decent chance of Alhaji Atiku with oratory prowess while helping the sitting President continue for another term which is deemed underperformed.

Selected Social Media Influencers' Posts and Youth Participation

This section examined selected social media influencers' posts. It used a 70 per cent PEW survey data baseline to calculate the percentage of youth who participated in political debates from the Nigerian registered voters. It showed that over 65 per cent of the youth population participated in Nigeria's political debates and electoral processes. This agrees with Ogunlesi (2013) and Gambo's (2015) study that the age bracket that is most active in political discussion on social media in Nigeria falls within the range of 18–35. This is also in consonance with the Nigeria's Youth Policy (2015) which defines the age bracket within 18–35 despites cultural interpretations.

Table 5: Selected social media influencers' posts and youth participation

S/N	Posts	Posts	Post	Total number of comments (C)/ estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1. Adetutu Balogun	"I am handing over this flag of honour to our presidential candidate." When the man to his left corrected him, he responded with "to our senatorial candidate". Again, the man corrected him, This time, Buhari said: "governortorial candidate". Buhari is totally clueless.... (17 January 2018)	President @MBuhari gets daily security briefings but not aware that the CJN is being charged to court!!! What type of daily security briefing does he get? (14 January 2019)	Atiku is the second highest employer of labour in Adamawa and Kadaria is asking the impact he has made? #NgThe Candidates (20 January 2019)	390/273 137/96 120/84
2. Reno Omokri	How can Present @MBuhari endorse Gandollar @GovUmarGanduje of Kano for a second term and still pretend to fight corruption? Who is more corrupt than a man caught on camera collecting bribe? RETWEET if you agree that Buhari is fighting OPPOSITION, not CORRUPTION #RenosDarts	MUST WATCH: President @MBuhari raises up the hand of the wrong gubernatorial candidate. Not only that, he still calls the man a GOVERNATORIAL candidate. This man should be in a RETIREMENT home not at @AsoRock. The CABAL is in charge, not Buhari. WATCH,	BOMBSHELL: LISTEN and SHARE Part 2 #Amaechi Tapes. Rotimi @Chibuike Amaechi, DG of @MBuhari's campaign said "This country can never change, I swear. The only way this country can change is in a situation	159/112 905/634

(31 January 2019)	COMMENT and RETWEET (31 January 2019)	where everybody is killed. This country is going nowhere." LISTEN and RETWEET (6 January 2019)	1200/840
3. Tolu Ogunlesi	Obasanjo believed he could fight poverty with 2,000 Tricycles (his poverty alleviation programme ultimately failed, by the way) but doesn't believe Buhari and Osinbajo can fight poverty by giving micro-credit loans to 2,000,000 Petty traders. SMH. 21 January 2019	PDP's biggest achievement in 16 years on the 130km Lagos-Ibadan Expressway was the demolition of toll-gates. True or False? 24 January 2019	PDP people are legit trying to accuse Kadaria of bias. Imagine! Y'all need to have your brain checked atink. I think that's enough evidence one needs that the interview went very badly for their candidates. Meanwhile the main defeat is still loading... 30 January 2019	139/98 210, 147 219/154
4. Aka Ebube	FT: Lifeless FC 0 - 6 Atikulate FC Despite poor officiating by the Referee, Atiku scored a Hat Trick Peter Obi controlled the Midfield, gave brilliant assists, and exposed their baseless "propaganda" tackles with "OBJ's VAR" #NGTheCandidates (30 January 2019)	My attention has been drawn to the fact that ACPN(Aunty Oby's party) has endorsed Buhari. I want to thank Atikulate FC Manager and Technical crew for their sound judgement at the last Debate El Classico. They averted the disaster of playing against Lifeless FC's U-23 team. (25 January 2019)	Watching NGTheCandidates on NTA Baba is fumbling like Bakayoko of Chelsea as usual He can't hear or answer simple questions well So Osinbajo is now doing a Kante for him He is intercepting all the passes and covering up for him Fam, We need to sell this Bakayoko this season (16 January 2019)	158/111 158/111 403/283

Source: Oluwasola Festus OBISESAN (author's survey)

Analysis Table 5

Table 5 shows selected posts of social media influencers during the 2019 electoral campaign. The data captures the total number of comments as well as that of youth who participated in the discussions. The first fifty youth comments were counted and analysed as was done in the previous examples above. This was matched with the percentage adopted for the study which is hinged on the 70 per cent survey by PEW, Ogunlesi (2013) and Gambo (2015). Adetutu's posts reveal a total number of 390, 137 and 120 comments while the youth percentage who partook in the discussion is estimated as 273, 96 and 84 youth. The first post mocked the President for handling the flag to the wrong candidate; hence her claim that he is 'old and unfit to continue'. This became the subject of negative comments on her walls by lovers of the President. It generated hate speech or online violence with abusive languages being railed out on her while sarcasm and value discussion were some of the reactions to it by participating youth. The second post got a warm reception from over 70 per cent of those who share the view that the suspension of the CJN was a calculated attempt at rigging the election at the tribunal. The third post equally celebrated the effort of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar for his contribution and outstanding business success which they hope can be replicated when he assumes office. This was predominantly responded to positively.

Furthermore, for Reno Omokri, total comments for his three selected posts are 159, 905 and 1,200 while calculated youth who joined in the discussion were estimated at 112,634 and 840. The first posts centred around the Ganduje scandal and the reactions of the President to the leak. Youth reacted negatively to the President's endorsement of his party member who was caught on the video stashing money to his 'Babaringa' while claiming to be an anti-corruption fighter because of political expediency. The second video received negative reactions from youth who saw Reno's post as culturally disrespectful and over-exaggerating the physical fitness of the President being called to question by what they described as 'human error'. The last video received positive reactions for exposing the inner workings of the presidency who do not believe in what they claim to be doing in the country. Thus, some youth were asking for more of the same to let Nigerians know what is happening to the ruling President's leadership.

For Tolu Ogunlesi's posts, there were a total of 139,210, and 219 comments respectively. Youth participation in the feed amounted to 98,147, and 154 people. The first post evidenced a negative comment from Tolu for comparing Obasanjo's economic policy to Muhammadu Buhari's economic policy; a thrust argued for being in disarray. This witnessed a huge exchange

of hate speech-language and online violence. However, for the second post, Tolu had a good number of youths who shared his sentiment for PDP's failure of fixing basic infrastructures such as roads, education, health and rail. This was shared as a reason to not see the President get re-elected. The third post received a fair number of negative reactions for churning out propaganda on Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's interview. Tolu was accused of trying to turn the fact on the head. He was abused online for his candidate, President Muhammadu Buhari's performance at the same desk.

Lastly, Aka Ebube's post x-rays a political sarcasm of political developments. His three selected posts received 158 and 111; 158 and 111; as well as 403 and 283 comments. Notably also, youth participated actively in response to his post. His first post centred on the debates which he opined saw Alhaji Atiku Abubakar outperform his critics' expectations. He received a positive response from this post from youth who joined his tweets and this was juxtaposed to mock the President's interview as seen in the third post as an unfit leader, lacking in ideas, energy and mental capacity. Therefore, a solid reason never to re-elect him. The second post however was targeted on Dr Oby Ekwezili's resignation which was rejected by the Electoral Commission because it had passed the stipulated timeframe to withdraw. The sarcasm was made to mock her naivety to dabble in the electoral process without grassroots structure. This received positive responses from his walls from the youth who participated in the discussion.

Table 6: Selected television and radio station posts and youth participation

S/N	Media outlet's post	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	Punch – I'm APC member, though I'm Atiku's spokesman – Galadima	21 February 2019	429	301
2.	Premium Times – BREAKING: Snatch ballot boxes and lose your life – Buhari	18 February 2019	402	282
3.	Sahara Reporters – We Have Employed Eight Million Nigerians in Three Years, Says Buhari | Sahara Reporters	2 February 2019	304	213
4.	Channels TV – 12 Presidential Candidates Back Buhari Two Days To General Elections.	21 February 2019	631	442

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

Table 7: Selected YouTube political trends and youth political participation

S/N	Post	Date	Total number of comments (C)	Estimated number of comments by youth (70% of C)
1.	#GandujeGate Video – 412,115 YouTube views	October 2018	205	144
2.	I WILL SELL NNPC TO MY FRIENDS Abu Sidiq – Atiku just confirmed what we have always known about him. 'I will sell NNPC..... I will sell to my friends.... Are my friends not entitled to be enriched?' Take a listen	16 January 2019	197	138
3.	SARAKI AT CCB Channels TV – BREAKING! Assets Declaration: Supreme Court Upholds Saraki's Appeal, Frees Him Of Charges.	6 July 2018	141	99
4.	NAME ONE PROJECT AND WIN ONE MILLION NAIRA OkeStalyf – I'm giving out 20,000 naira to anyone who can name ONE federal government project initiated, completed and commissioned by Buhari since he came to power 3 years ago The project must be physical and actually initiated, not body language project Entry close by 6 pm today. Goodluck	28 March 2018	1,000	700

Source: Oluwasola Festus Obisesan (author's survey)

The Discourse

The above data demonstrate the active engagement of the Nigerian youth in online debates that forged the core aspect of the electioneering campaign. The selected data demonstrate a high percentage of youth in almost every post with over 70 per cent participation. This is significant as the youth were able to undertake dialectics over topical issues that bother them on corruption as seen with Ganduje gate[3] and its endorsement. Also, leadership deficit and competence issues were brought to bear with examples from the Amaechi leaks[4] and the President's lack of awareness of the CJN house boggling. The above data also explain how social media trends became the subject of national discussion and mass media prints. This comes to play with the aforementioned scandals and leaks. It therefore explains how youth increasingly became producers of information due to the democratised features of social media. In evidence also are troubling issues on hate speech among the youth which is on the rise. The culture of reigning abusive language and online violence remains a challenge in the social media space. This corroborates the Kofi Annan Foundation (2018: 23), Adelakun (2018: 13–15) and Mutahi and Kimari's (2017: 18) study on hate speech and social media platforms in political engagements.

The discourse in tandem with data obtained answered two research questions and objectives. First, it could be gleaned that social media played a pivotal role in the 2019 Nigeria General Election. This is as it was used to facilitate communication, marketing, and image projection which allowed Nigerian youth who have often been marginalised in the electoral processes to contribute to national discourse in a meaningful way. It is important to also note that social media allowed this hashtag generation to upturn, review and uphold values which are in line with their needs and aspirations. This explains why transparency, credibility, image and unemployment were at the centre of the campaign of all the major candidates. More so, this is more important given the political history of Nigeria's youth who have been rendered politically irrelevant. Rather, the youth have often been made agents of violence prior to the social media era. It is also evident that youth agency is undergoing re-invention and accruing more power within the polity given their ability to partake, mobilise and negotiate spaces on national issues as a result of social media tools. The youth were therefore not only rooting for their preferred candidates using digital technologies in scrutinising leaders' accountability, transparency, policy thrust and moral values. They were equally becoming a reckoned with constituency whose voices are heard and listened to by political candidates. This helps the agency of youth during the electoral process. It could be observed also that

such digital technologies helped in fostering needed social networking and social bonds which are used in aggregating opinions on public officeholders and aspirants. This helps in setting the agenda of what is expected. Hence, the credibility of candidates took a fair share of the peddled narratives. This speaks to the research questions which ask: why did social media become pivotal to the 2019 General Election and to what extent did social media enhance the involvement of Nigerian youth in the electoral debates during the 2019 General Election?

Secondly, social media fulfilled the purpose of enhancing youth access to participating in political debates. Youth were able to join issues raised by mass media. Traditional mass media outlets were taken up on issues of interest vis-à-vis leaders. It helped in the framing of what was expected from political aspirants. In this context, the roles of social media influencers cannot be over-emphasised, for they helped in the shaping of narratives while generating heated debates amongst youth. This invariably contributed to the outcomes of aspirants' chances during the process. This upheld the research assumption which states that: social media have operated to deepen, rather than undermine, youth participation in the 2019 Nigeria General Elections.

Social Media, Youth Agency and Political Participation

The agency of youth in the Nigerian democratic space was revitalised by the use of social media during the 2019 General Election. Argument buttressing probity and accountability endeared youth to participate in deciding their next few years with credible leaders. Social media, therefore, provided itself as an effective tool for expanding the communication network of the youth during the period against established political views. This was made possible by sharing information, news items and bulletins that helped shape opinions and knowledge about candidates. It invariably helped mobilised the teeming youth which INEC data showed was a staggering constituency. This reflects Mucktar Ibrahim's (CODE) submission when he said, 'youth are now using social media to hold their government accountable during the election and are also doing same after the electoral processes' (Mucktar Ibrahim, Interview, 2019).

Furthermore, the convenience of joining political discussions online, spreading propaganda and reviewing policy could not have shaped patriotism more than social media did on Nigerian youth during the electoral period. Moreover, social media shattered the financial barriers which have marginalised a chunk of the youth. This helped the youth agency with political aspirants re-aligning their commitments (manifesto) through reactions on the online issues regarding their candidacy. Therefore,

unlike the traditional media which is essentially owned or tilted to favour the older generation, social media allowed for equal participation, breaking financial barriers and consequently allowing active participation during the electoral period from the youth constituency. The youth were able to participate in debates, singing jingles for their loved candidates, and share their opinion on national discourses. Ayo Olowo alluded to this position when he said: 'right now, you might not have money but with a phone, and a little data to surf the internet, young people can participate and join political discussions or shape it' (Ayo Olowo, Interview, 2019). Besides, social media mobilised youth on cultural values. Cultures were reviewed in the light of participation, accountability, transparency and credibility. The 'hashtag generation' was able to bring forth debates on established norms of developed democracies. For instance, the issue of 'Not too Young to Run' and presidential debates were elevated to a higher standard expected of any leader. All these galvanise youth to form an impression of a better Nigeria while electoral frauds were vigorously debated.

Youth, Social Media and the Power of the State

During the 2019 General Election in Nigeria, youth participated in the political debates unfolding within the polity through social media platforms. These social media debates became appropriate sites for youth's engagement and voice aggregation in support or rejection of politicians' ideas and policies. Consequently, youth, through their political participation, wielded a new form of power that impacts states' ability to control citizens' expression and other anti-democratic tenets. The theoretical power inherent in electoral choices that had been nearly non-existent was reasserted. African political disposition to key areas of leadership was challenged and capitalised on by the opposition. For instance, the idea of privatisation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and acquisition by former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar by the APC and other leading aspirants was discerned as 'corruptible' and negligent of public character. Also, President Muhammadu Buhari was taken head-on regarding Chief Justice, Walter Ononghen's removal in office. Also, the rejection of corruption and godfatherism was meted on former Senate President, Dar. Bukola Saraki with the 'O To Ge' chant and campaigns. This invariably created 'big wig' losses. Issues such as insecurity in the Northeast (Boko Haram) and Northwest (banditry and herder–farmer conflicts), poor economy, unemployment, anti-corruption, projects (infrastructure) completed, leadership and competence did not only become the central themes around which heated and robust debates were placed. But political officeholders and aspirants were put on the spot on what

they say or put out as a policy thrust. In most cases, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube's accounts of candidates and news agencies became sites of power relations and reconfiguration between government officials' perceived taking of elites' bids while political parties' representatives were scrutinised with their past records, achievements and policy positions beyond conventional media narratives. This is in line with Ayo Olowo's submission that 'social media has given the young people opportunity to becoming producers of information with inherent powers which has changed the landscape for them to be listened to'.

Although signs of the North-South divide were silent as in the 2015 General Election, the government's twice attempts[5] to curb the vitality and potency of freedom of speech being exemplified through social media under the guise of regulation were rebuffed. Social media in the course entangled itself with the power structure. Information from individuals and opposition social media accounts became the arena of power struggles between the citizenry and the state. Citizens' voices became a threat to established political order. Hence, social media activists like Deji Adeyanju were incarcerated for almost a month (up to a few days to the election) in order to curb the thread of information reducing political capital of the ruling President and its party. Social media thereby empowered Nigerian youth to challenge the status quo during the processes. This was alluded to by Mucktar (CODE) when he said:

> Basically, for whatever new, it is always difficult to change the mindset of a people at a time so easily, so, we have seen issues of the arrest of people being jailed harassed and molested … for example, one of our (CODE) observer in Nasarawa state who was using social media was arrested just as another experience in Kano State in the Gama Local Government. However, a whole lot of youth continue to say no to attitudes that do not conform with democratic tenets and accountability during the elections (Mucktar Ibrahim, Interview, 2019).

The inability of the state to muscle down youth dissenting voices was made possible via social media, even though harassment and house boggling were recorded just to chicken out youth activism via social media. This calculated attempt at cutting down information supplies to followership failed. These actions became counter-productive because they only re-invigorated the 'hashtag generation' that their 'voices' and displeasure were being heard. This new invigoration led to the emergence of citizens' trusted information disseminators or influencers. The youth began to follow and see social media influencers and activists as the true voice of the people or real patriots. This justifies how committed they were to their social media accounts. Social

media influencers relegated the roles of political spokespersons as the mouthpiece of information. Spokespersons' identities were lost as part of the problematic establishment. The tech-savvy youth were able to dig into the social history of their representatives and 'fact shame' their governance deficit and failures vis-à-vis 2019 election promises. Social media trends consequently became a source of information and headlines in the dailies, even for the mass media. It suffices here to mention the presidential debates, the Ganduje scandal and the reaction of the President to it. The utterance of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's on his intention to sell (privatise) NNPC to his friend and Dr Bukola Saraki's campaign leaks on how he funds the APC in 2015 to get to the Senate Presidency, as well as the 'O To Ge' movement's virality, substantially generated serious impact on the choices of the youth and their followers.

The implications are that social media amongst youth plays two major roles concerning power. First, it decentralises power: from government establishment to the ordinary citizen. This implies that whoever possesses information, as seen with the examples of Jafar Jafar's confession on Governor Ganduje of Kano State[6] or Reno Omokri's 'Amaechi Tapes' (scandals) and Deji Adeyanju's internal workings of the ruling party, shapes the narratives, sets the agenda and reconfigures power in a way that does not serve the status quo but places it in the hand of the people as against the state and established power structures. This invariably means information became a key tool which was made possible for youth re-shaping the structure of the polity with enormous impact on image perception and re-modelling during the 2019 election. Secondly, youth participation through social media meant that the government had to accept the responsibility that good governance was the key and that it was therefore imperative to re-jig itself off image deficit towards re-election. The sacking of former Secretary to the Government, Babachir Lawal, in an internal reshuffling within the ruling party (political caucus), buttresses this point. This implied that social media linked citizens directly to power as a shaper of polity and government direction.

Youth, Social Media and Agenda-setting and Framing

Framing and agenda-setting are as important as political discourse and debates themselves. Who shapes and sets what controls the dynamics of elections. This has consequential effects on decision-making and power in politics. The control of what goes on as debates and political discourses concerning power eluded youth in Africa and Nigeria in particular until the recent development in ICT which social media provided in the 2019 General Election. Social media tools helped wax a stronger voice of youth agency as

a calculus of power whose constituency determines electoral direction. This captures the evolving power of the youth to control narratives and frame ideas that are dealt with by political parties, politicians, electoral bodies and other stakeholders. Texts, video and audio posts arising from the agency of youth became the source of direction on which political calculations were based. Agenda-setting helps them put forward their peculiar needs and aspiration as seen in the 2019 election. The effects of these feeds and contents became difficult for politicians or public officeholders and aspirants to eschew. Nevertheless, the youth's agency and understanding of how to wield this nascent power must be grasped with its inherent challenges to shape political discourses. For instance, the burning issue of unemployment, lack of adequate infrastructural facilities in key sectors of the economy, as well as moral and legal issues such as rights and anti-corruption were at the centre of Nigeria's 2019 election. This position was given credence by Ayo Olowo when he said that:

> social media indeed helped youth in setting agenda and frame what decide the strategy of political parties' electoral campaigns; hence, this is only possible as a result of social media tools which has to empower these social media generation as observed with the not too young movement (Ayo Olowo, Interview, 2019).

This signifies that unlike in the pre-social media era, citizens are now increasingly at the centre. Movements and online activism therefore help them to pursue the vigour of good governance, accountability, responsibility and enhance democratic tenets. What is certain is that this will continue to grow further as reflected by Ayo Olowo's summary that 'social media is helping the young people to get their voice heard while letting their opinion known with consequences on narratives being shaped in the polity' (Ayo Olowo, Interview, 2019). This was also corroborated by J. J. Omojua who posits that 'social media influence will continue to soar in the deepening of political processes in that in near future say 2023, more Nigerians would have got access to the internet. Thus, more social media generation can be expected with implication for more robust political engaging Nigerian youths on good governance and democratic practices' (Japhet J. Omojua, Interview, 2019).

Youth, Social Media and Malicious Contents: Digitised Opportunities and Democratic Implications

One significant value that social media added to the course of youth political participation and politicking in Nigeria's 2019 General Election is the access to online information that has relevance for the manner of

electoral value. However, this observable course was double-edged: used by the youth and seasoned politicians as a manipulative tool. Notably, social media also unleashes the 'fake news' attributes that have become politicised in the course of the electoral campaigns. It must be noted that fake news has been an integral part of social media innovation, but its adaptation to political strategies and electioneering was made conspicuously potent during the 2019 General Election by actors of different classes and interests. The ruling political party (APC) has been alleged to have made it to the *Aso Rock* with propaganda through social media by its ex-party leader, Alhaji Lai Muhammed. According to Dr Farrok Pkeroqi, his conviction that Alhaji Lai Mohammed and the APC gained political capital using social media had inspired his research on his published Lai Mohammed's fifty legendary lies (see *Nairaland* 2017; *Daily Trust* 2017). To the PDP hierarchy voiced by Reno Omokri (*Daily Trust* 2018), the APC was simply reacting against the same structure that it rode to power with attempts to gag the power of the social media through hatched regulations and bill passages. The youth usage of fake news to project narratives about unwanted politicians or aspirants was therefore weaponised fully. This leaves both the states as represented by the ruling elites and the revisionary agents (the youth) as both employer of divisive mechanisms to score points against each other, whether to de-market an opponent(s) or against the electorate's brainwashing for its desired political ends.

Also, there was a heavy deployment of malicious contents in the form of text, news broadcast, graphics and cartoons by the youth against politicians not celebrated. This position was corroborated by Joseph Japhet Omojua when he said:

> A lot of malicious promoting contents such as hate speeches and texts, videos were used by youth who do not agree with another supporter's view during the electioneering period via the social media. The social media space in turn became hall of online violence amongst politically polarised Nigerian youths especially. Worst still, social media influencers were trolled while their feeds became saturated with unprintable attacks on the personality of the person and its supposed supported. Also, conversation that was meant to stir good governance nearly lost its focus and became ethnicised, sentimentalised without recourse to objectivity and respect for the individuals whose view were considered politically non-soothing (Japhet J. Omojua, Interview, 2020).

Malicious contents are not without implications for democracy. First, they threaten peace and the spirit of sportsmanship in electoral processes. This is more important when the realisation of Africa's nascent democracy is put into context: for a democracy which is often paused by military *coups*

d'état. Raising undue tensions in an atmosphere where power is personalised is delicate for usurpers and 'illiberal' in government. Fake news as it is known has effects on national security as it is often a veritable means for securitisation of the media and civil space by the ruling class. Attempts to regulate the media space through the aborted social media bill buttress this point. More so, fake news helps in autocratising the democratic terrain. This is because the ruling class resorts to the conclusion that such information is the opposition or surrogate's sponsored ideas. It is not surprising that rather than sieving through inappropriate information through people-friendly awareness campaigns to accommodate liberal views, the African political party as it is characteristically oriented towards power capitalised on this as leeway to ending liberal dissenting in the polity. Nevertheless, malicious contents and fake news have constituted new security challenges.

Conclusion

The study examined the roles of social media in facilitating youth participation in the 2019 General Election. It revealed that youth were able to actively participate in political debate and processes through the use of social media. In most cases, youth were even at the centre of a social media frenzy which shaped narratives and subsequently in some cases became headlines in mass media. Youth were therefore able to re-invent power and aggregate it to themselves in light of their needs through in-depth debates. This transmutes to thorough scrutinisation of public officeholders or aspirants' policy thrusts, as well as speeches. Furthermore, the study revealed how social media enhanced the agency of youth not only as an inclusive constituency but as a structure that is increasingly becoming the centre of information production and power, agenda-setting and framing, and cultural review. Youth, through the use of social media, are now faced with new opportunities as well as challenges of malicious contents or what is popularly regarded as 'fake news' and opportunistic manoeuvre through the use of social media. However, the above showed that social media, concerning youth's political participation in Nigeria's 2019 General Election, addressed the research questions. It is therefore right to conclude that social media is important in endearing youth political participation especially in the General Election as witnessed in the 2019 Nigerian election, hence it intensified and enhanced youth political participation. More so, it is also clear that challenges arose with youth who used social media to participate during the 2019 election. This aligns with the second research assumption that the emergence of social media as a platform for political debate has significantly reduced the power of the state to suppress free speech among the youth.

Notes

1. Strategies such as joining political parties, protesting against bad policies as seen in the fuel subsidy crisis of 2011 or countless universities protests on infrastructure or tuition hikes as well as forming or joining movements such as 'Our Mumu Don Do', 'Enough is Enough', 'O To Ge Movements' and environmental movement such as the Ogoni Peoples Movement.
2. Merriem Webster, 'Social media noun, plural in form but singular or plural in construction', https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media, accessed 26 July 2019.
3. Ganduje gate connotes the reported scandal to the Governor of Kano State and a member of the APC presidential team. Ganduje was found collecting bribes from contractors and stashing them into his kaftan in a leaked video that went viral.
4. Amaechi Leaks pertains to an audio tape where the Minister for Transport of the Republic and Chief Campaign Chairman of the APC Presidential Campaign was quoted to have said the President is incompetent and does not read or is not bothered by anything.
5. The Federal Government and the ruling party first introduced a bill to regulate social media in 2016 with contents targeting imprisonment, and the second hinged on the need to target 'fake news' under the guise of national security.
6. Ganduje gate typifies the allegation of contract throwback by the Governor of Kano State. See *Premium Times* (2018).

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'Open the Servers':
The Implications of Electoral Technology for Kenya's Democratisation Process

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Abstract

Digital technologies for elections were introduced in Kenya with a vision that they would bring election reforms through increasing administrative efficiency, reducing long-term costs, and by enhancing transparency in the electoral process would enhance citizenry inclusivity. Despite the voting exercise taking place without a hitch, the 2017 General Election results were dismissed by various stakeholders who called on the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to 'open the servers', with witnesses, to use the results inside the servers to verify the ballot papers in the ballot boxes. Promises by IEBC that counting, transmission and verification of results would promote citizens' rights during the electoral process were not met hence the Swahili phrase, '*Fungua server*' (Open the servers) was coined. The server became the Holy Grail, the gadget of hope for free and fair elections. Chants of '*Fungua server*' unveiled the dreaded side of Kenya's democratisation; of flawed elections and violence that followed. '*Fungua server*' was a call to free and fair elections. The paradox of technology this article seeks to interrogate was how technology has subverted democratic elections in Kenya; arguing that there is need to demystify the server and focus on electoral transparency as a yardstick of democracy.

Keywords: server, subvert, democracy, digital technologies, elections, hashtag, Kenyans on Twitter (KOT)

Résumé

Les technologies numériques ont été introduites au Kenya pour les élections avec la vision qu'elles apporteraient des réformes électorales en augmentant l'efficacité administrative, en réduisant les coûts à long terme, et en améliorant la transparence du processus électoral renforcerait l'inclusion des citoyens.

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Bien que l'exercice de vote se soit déroulé sans accroc, les résultats des élections générales de 2017 ont été rejetés par diverses parties prenantes qui ont appelé la Commission électorale et des frontières indépendante (IEBC) à « ouvrir les serveurs », avec des témoins, afin d'utiliser les résultats à l'intérieur des serveurs pour vérifier les bulletins de vote dans les urnes. Les promesses de l'IEBC selon lesquelles le comptage, la transmission et la vérification des résultats permettraient de promouvoir les droits des citoyens pendant le processus électoral n'ont pas été tenues, d'où l'expression swahilie « *Fungua server* » (ouvrez les serveurs). Le serveur est devenu le Saint Graal, le gadget de l'espoir pour des élections libres et équitables. Les chants de « *Fungua server* » ont dévoilé le côté redouté de la démocratisation du Kenya : les élections entachées d'irrégularités et les violences qui ont suivi. Le « serveur Fungua » était un appel à des élections libres et équitables. Le paradoxe de la technologie que cet article cherche à interroger est la façon dont la technologie a subverti les élections démocratiques au Kenya, en soutenant qu'il est nécessaire de démystifier le serveur et de se concentrer sur la transparence électorale comme critère de démocratie.

Mots-clés : serveur, subversion, démocratie, technologies numériques, élections, hashtag, les kenyans sur Twitter (KOT)

Introduction and Background

There has been growing use of digital technologies in elections around the world. Digital technologies were introduced in Africa's elections with the hope that they would transform electoral systems, enabling credibility; through offering devices and resources that generate, store or process data. Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis (2018: 1397–8) echo this by noting that:

> The hope is that new technology will enhance the electoral environment in three main ways: by making the functioning of the electoral commission more robust and efficient, by reducing the scope for electoral manipulation, and by generating greater clarity and transparency regarding election outcomes. On this basis, the proponents of new technology also expect it to boost the process's legitimacy – and hence that of the elected government.

The nature of politics in Kenya in the digital age has been coupled with the introduction of digital technologies in General Elections, local telecommunication networks and international data collection firms contracted to offer services. Digital technologies for elections were introduced with a vision that they would bring election reforms by increasing administrative efficiency, reducing long-term costs, and enhancing transparency in the electoral process. This motivation came after the 2007 polls, which were marred by irregularities in the tallying and transmission of final results for parliamentary and Presidential candidates. This was a

clear indicator of how lack of proper use of modern technology and a weak electoral system can trigger political chaos.[1] Digitisation of the 2013 General Election came with some fiasco. The secure servers intended for results transmission were unable to handle the volume of data being uploaded, leading to a breakdown. There was an error with the results transmission system source code that multiplied the actual number of invalid ballots by 8 (an '8x error').[2] This motivated improved digitisation of technologies to be used in the 2017 General Elections; through the Kenya Integrated Election Management System (KIEMS) that used biometrics to identify voters and sought to curb impersonation during the voting exercise, making sure that only those who had been registered are allowed to cast their votes.[3] The technologies the KIEMS system handled included: the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) and Electronic Voter Identification (EVID) Results Transmission System (RTS) to be used during tallying.

Despite the voting exercise taking place without a hitch, the digital aspects (transmission of the results) failed; hence the election results were dismissed by various stakeholders. The voting exercise, I argue, was smooth because malpractice had been successfully executed during campaigns by Cambridge Analytica (CA), but without detection by the opposition and civil society. At this point, digital technologies did not offer opportunities but threats to democracy as well. A few hours after tallying began, Presidential candidate Raila Odinga termed the outcome that saw him trail Uhuru Kenyatta by more than one million votes as 'sham, fictitious and fake'. Mr Odinga said that the results were the 'work of a computer' and did not reflect the will of voters, a claim denied by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC).[4] Raila's team claimed that forms 34A and 34B[5] should be the basis of the results but the Commission was keying in results without scanning the forms as required, demanding that the IEBC should provide forms 34A and 34B to help verify the outcome as claims that numerous Forms 34A are at total variance with the KIEMS kits. Similarly Forms 34B were differing. The refusal by IEBC to offer these forms led to anti-IEBC demonstrations, and voters demanding that the Commission should open its servers for stakeholders to verify whether the results on forms 34A and 34B are similar to those that had been tallied.

Promises by the IEBC that counting, transmission and verification of results would promote citizens' rights during the electoral process were not met, hence the Swahili phrase '*Fungua server*' (Open the servers) was coined. The servers became the Holy Grail, the gadgets of hope for free and fair elections. Chants of '*Fungua Server*' unveiled the dreaded side of Kenya's democratisation; of flawed elections and violence that followed. '*Fungua*

server' was a call to free, fair and transparent elections, a call to IEBC to avail Form 34A and form 34B and open the server, with stakeholders as witnesses, to use the results inside it to verify the ballot papers in the ballot box. Refusal of IEBC to open the servers precipitated protests, chants, and violence in major cities of the country. IEBC had betrayed its mandate to give effect to the sovereign will of the Kenyan people and instead delivered predetermined computer generated leaders (Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto); referred to by the National Super Alliance (NASA) principal Raila Odinga (at a press conference on Wednesday 16 August 2017) as '*Vifaranga vya kompyuta*'. According to Mr Odinga, the two Jubilee leaders were elected through the computer. He asked Kenyans to 'say no to computer generated leaders' and ask IEBC to open the servers.

Digital technologies, which were introduced to the Kenyan electoral process for the citizenry to trust the process and outcomes since manual voting was not trusted, revealed that the more technology is incorporated into the Kenyan system, the more there was mistrust towards the administrative systems hence digital technologies destabilising the process of participatory democracy. The voters regarded the manual aspects in the electoral process as free, fair and transparent while the digital ones denied them their rights. This puts emphasis on the technological paradox that this research seeks to interrogate.

Kenya's number one mobile network provider, Safaricom, was accused of aiding IEBC by hosting their website and other crucial databases on Safaricom servers. Their fault: electoral malpractice during the results transmission; Safaricom had been hired to provide connectivity between polling stations and the Electoral Commission's national tallying centre. Telephone network, internet connectivity, and the transmission of votes and central electronic tallying were a concern as Safaricom did not deliver its mandate. So did CA, a British data collection firm that provides data, analytics, and strategy to governments and military organisations worldwide. Allegedly, CA used artificial intelligence robots for Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta's Jubilee's online campaigns, and secretly stage-managed campaigns in the hotly contested 2013 and 2017 elections. Kenya's newspaper (*Daily Nation*, 21 March 2018) reported that:

> Cambridge Analytica has claimed to have worked with President Uhuru Kenyatta in the 2013 and 2017 elections. According to the exposé on Britain's Channel 4, the company's Managing Director Mark Turnbull was recorded saying that the company rebranded both The National Alliance and Jubilee parties, conducted research on behalf of the Kenyatta campaign and wrote Jubilee's manifestos and speeches. Cambridge Analytica has been accused of obtaining data and psychological profiles of over 50 million Facebook users

through an app that was developed by British scholar Aleksandar Kogan for academic use. The application then collected data from the users and their Facebook friends, mining over 50 million Facebook records, and then handed it over to Cambridge Analytica. According to Facebook, once they discovered what had happened, they deleted the data, but investigative reports by the international media suggest otherwise.

Crisis of democracy was feared as IEBC frustrated the people's will by delivering a flawed election. To ease the political pressure, Raila Odinga petitioned the Supreme Court for a review of the results of the 2017 election. On 1 September 2017, the Supreme Court declared the Presidential election held on 8 August 2017 invalid, null and void. The IEBC was ordered to conduct a fresh presidential election within sixty days. The second Presidential poll became uncertain when electoral reforms required to ensure irregularities would not be repeated were not set in motion. Elections were nullified, followed by a call for another election, the servers still remain unopened. In the second election, results coming in through the same digital technologies used in the first election showed false votes, fake votes, children voting (despite the KIEMS), and thousands of votes where there had been a handful of voters. This contested the idea of participatory democracy; which appeared to be a fallacy based on the Kenyan context.

The server mystery continues. To date, the aggrieved stakeholders, whose shouting of 'Open the servers' died out after the infamous handshake,[6] still make sarcastic references using the phrase '*Fungua server*' (Open the servers). There have been debates around the use of digital technology in the national vote tally, everyone wondering whether sticking to physical counting of ballot papers may have been the better option. This begs the questions: are votes transmitted electronically the true voice of the people? Are the servers the evil of flawed elections? Are digital technologies possible futures of democratisation in Kenya? How can Kenya protect its democracy by harnessing the benefits of digital technologies?

The paradox of technology and democracy in Kenya focuses on how technology has subverted democratic elections in Kenya; is accountability, participation, and respect of the rule of law a lived outcome of multiparty elections carried out in Kenya?

Statement of the Problem

During the 2013 General Elections in Kenya, secure server(s) intended for results transmission were unable to handle the volume of data being uploaded and the system kept breaking down producing invalid ballots. This motivated the Kenya electoral body, the IEBC, to use an upgrade of

the voting system and technology; introduced through the KIEMS kits, the servers and website portals meant to conduct and supervise the 2017 elections. In spite of electoral management bodies being enabled by the internet and digital technologies to engage with citizens through the electoral cycle, absence of transparency of election technology introduced new dimensions of election malpractice posing risks of manipulation of servers to determine the final Presidential tally results; therefore subverting Kenya's democratic elections. Efforts to rig elections increase with inequality between the opposition and the incumbent, the rich and poor; but competitiveness – which institutions help to shape – determines the ballot-rigging strategies parties adopt (Lehoucq 2003).

Research Questions

1. How have digital technologies subverted Kenya's democratic elections?
2. What is the relationship between management of the server and stakeholder satisfaction?
3. How can Kenya protect its democracy by harnessing the benefits of digital technologies?
4. Are low levels of public confidence in the Electoral Management Board correlated with the contentious application of electoral technology?

Method

This research employed a mixed method approach allowing for both exploration and analysis of the same study including case study qualitative analysis, desk research, descriptive research, contextual analysis, and content analysis. A case study analysis approach was employed to study the impact of the use of digital systems in the 2017 General Elections in Kenya. The method was selected because it is based on an in-depth investigation of a single event to explore causation (Yin 2003). The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or a set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result (Schramm 1971 cited in Yin 2003: 12).

The research was digital in nature, its intention was to use case-reports and surveillance, hence desk research was important towards finding relevant data which already exist in regard to digital technologies and the democratic dilemma in Kenya. Content analysis was used to analyse the public participation clauses in Kenya's Constitution and recommendations

by the Kriegler report, an international commission of inquiry established by the Government of Kenya in February 2008 to inquire into all aspects of the 2007 General Elections with particular emphasis on the Presidential elections. Descriptive research method in this case was used to diagnose issues that warrant the immediate attention of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (Loeb, Dynarski, McFarland et al. 2017: 9), help stakeholders understand that there is a problem, and subsequently target and test interventions for the population in need.

To find out how digital technologies influence filter bubbles, implementation and management tech infrastructure by electoral bodies and cases of using algorithms for election rigging, and vote tallying issues, this research used contextual analysis; the semantic representation of what has been made explicit in the utterance and what is implicit from context was analysed.

To date Kenyans still question the legitimacy of the government; therefore qualitative methodology is preferred in seeking to find out the attitudes people have towards technology and how important elections are to the citizenry. This is due to its ability to provide detailed data and to tell the story from the point of view of the actors (Silverman 2005; Baxter 2003). The qualitative method, unlike the quantitative, has the advantage of giving room (Silverman 2005; Priest 2010) and allowing for an in-depth focus on the study (Patton 2002). The data obtained from the research were in the form of words rather than numbers, while the majority of the data will contain verbatim quotes from the respondents (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 20) through Twitter and court documents from the cases filed by the opposition party.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

Activity theory[7] was used as a framework of qualitative analysis to position digital technologies. Blayone states that 'digital technologies are not independent forces responsible for defining human action. Rather, they are social artifacts with affordances, representing opportunities for action implemented by design and made visible in relation to human needs' (2018: 7). In relation to this research on whether technology has subverted democracy in Kenya, the study borrowed heavily from Blayone's (2018) thoughts that humans are positioned as active agents capable of identifying, taking up, modifying and even subverting established technology uses in pursuit of meaningful objectives. In the Kenyan case, technology goes beyond electoral management bodies but is more embodied by the stakeholders. This is a clear illustration that societal culture is not changed by technology use. Rather the culture of election rigging would only become electronic.

The participatory theory of democracy was also employed in this research. The two central characteristics of participatory democracy are the directness of participation by citizens in governance and deliberation in public opinion formation (Zittel and Fuchs 2007: 39ff.). Participatory democracy 'involves extensive and active engagement of citizens in the self-governing process; it means government not just for but by and of the people' (Barber 1995: 921). Political participation is characterised by direct and immediate involvement in the process of decision-making by the individuals concerned. Based on the above, this theory was used to establish a greater understanding of policy formulation and implementation.

Technology and the Elections in Kenya

In as much as it is assumed that technology will enhance the quality of the electoral process and deepen the democratic culture, Kenyans are not confident that their ballots are counted, despite the IEBC using the Results Transmission and Presentation system to enhance transparency through electronic transmission of provisional results from the polling stations.

The Kenyan case reveals: 'It's not the voting that's democracy, it's the counting' (Tom Stoppard in Murphy, Chad and Johnson 2019). These authors note that democratic governments should be concerned that everyone's vote is counted and counted fairly. Discrepancy in electoral information flows, network disruptions, struggles with biometric kits and poor planning and coordination among the election administrators, election observers and election compromised the integrity of an election, posing threats and challenges to democracy.

Elections and the management of the electoral process in Kenya have failed, hence the demand that the IEBC should 'open the servers' due to the fact that there has been no voter confidence in election administration; there is a lack of confidence in the electoral process, so that citizens can negotiate towards democracy as a peaceful process to avoid painful problems confronting Kenyan citizens caused and resolvable by citizen participation that occurs during General Elections.

Data Presentation and Findings

#Funguaserver: Social media as a tool for democratic participation

Social media has created opportunities for active citizenship and civic engagement. The current social media statistics in Kenya reveal that Twitter is among the most popular social media platform in Kenya (Stats 2020);

with active users famously known as Kenyans on Twitter (KOT), with the hashtag #KOT that forms part of this research. #KOT is a hashtag that was turned into an activist movement used to characterise the participants on Twitter, rallying participants towards a certain subject. Discussions span from stories that have been turned into tweets based on subjects that KOT are passionate about. The most trending being politics, corruption, socio-economic injustices, soccer, battles with international media, celebrity gossip and memes. While interrogating the #FunguaServer hashtag, this article notes that the discussions around *Fungua server* were not only based on elections but injustices surrounding the election process depicted in the following themes.

Democracy: State of the Country after the Flawed Elections

Through the Kenyan citizens' responses to the IEBC's role in the flawed elections, this study revealed that digital technologies subverted Kenya's democratic elections.

#FunguaServer Hashtag

Months and years following the 2017 flawed elections, #FunguaServer chants still prevail, evidence that Kenyans still want their democratic right to be met.

Some random tweets read:

> Salome @nyagonyalo, on October 20, 2017 states:
>
> 'FUNGUA server bwana! THAT'S about rule of law AND standing up against FRAUD! Watu wa NASA are Kenyans too!'
>
> Mathenge Wahome @mathenge_wahome
>
> 'Dont blame the System it only generates what it is fed. Fungua server.' (12 July 2018)
>
> Doug Onali Chancnima @onalihi on October 16, 2017
>
> 'Fungua server #NoReformsNoElections Form 34B 34A #NasaDemosWeek4 #NasaInMombasa'

Other users still blame the IEBC officials as being responsible for subverting Kenya's democracy. Evident is in a tweet by Ezra Chiloba, a Former CEO at IEBC. Through his twitter handle @ezraCHILOBA, he states:

> 'Lots of FAKE NEWS today. Let us all be advocates of TRUTH – at all times. It doesn't matter how long it takes! As a matter of fact the event went on very well. There is lots of genuine LOVE and good FOOD in Trans Nzoia County (TNC) – And that is my home' (3 February 2018).

His tweet is met by responses by The Kennedy @Sempaiken, stating that:

> 'You should be the last person to lecture us on FAKE NEWS, fungua SERVER that is where there isn't FAKE NEWS' (3 February 2018).

IEBC used their Twitter handle @IEBCKenya to send wishes to the Muslim community. The tweet states: 'Eid Mubarak to all our Muslim brothers and sisters' (24 May 2020). This was followed by the following responses:

> Balikuddembe Snr. @NNabwangu, "Fungua server" (Open the server) (24 May 2020)
>
> Shilabula @ShilabooksM, 'You cannot wish people good things. Stick to your lane' (24 May 2020)

Kenya's newspaper the *Daily Nation*'s headline on Tuesday 24 November 2020 read 'Trump takes leaf out of Uhuru, Raila playbooks.' In the content, '*Fungua server*' was mentioned. The author compared Trump's lead in the count only to suddenly be overhauled overnight by an influx of votes from Biden strongholds; then the Trump lawyers argued that the Biden votes were inflated through an algorithm embedded in the electronic vote counting machinery to Kenya's electoral KIEMS kits. The computer system used in the US elections in 2020 was owned by a foreign company with counting being done in Germany. The author states that 'At that point I half expected to hear Giuliani demand "*Fungua server*"'. That purported evidence was lifted direct from the Odinga election petition of 2017. On the above one ILubembz @iLubembz tweeted: 'Trump about to start yelling "fungua server"' (7 November 2020).

The Handshake: Implications of Electoral Transparency for Kenya's Democratisation Process

The handshake, as described earlier in this article as a public declaration to cease all hostilities and instead find a common ground in the interest of moving the country forward economically and politically after a flawed election, was meant to put Kenya back on its feet. Presidents Kenyatta and Odinga shook hands on 9 March 2018 at the steps of Harambe House, marking the end of the political differences that were fuelled by Odinga's defeat in two Presidential elections in 2017. However, politicians allied to the National Super Alliance (NASA) felt that this was betrayal and that Raila had not consulted. In as much as Kenyans perceived it an act of leaders putting their egocentric interests aside, there was an element of betrayal that was brought out by this sudden union.

Criticism over the handshake continues to prevail three years on. Machakos governor Alfred mutual recently noted that despite Mr Odinga being criticised, without the 'courage of the handshake', Kenya would be unstable and ungovernable, 'even for cowards who cower when the going gets tough' (*The Nation*, 9 March 2021). Criticisms of the handshake include: clamour for constitutional changes in the country through the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)[8] which was anchored on solidifying the country's unity and curing the winner takes it all mentality that is usually witnessed after every electioneering period.

Some Kenyan citizens believe that the BBI team squandered a golden chance to remedy electoral disorder by focusing on political power; while others believe that the handshake brought unity, but its brainchild BBI caused disunity. The Star newspaper (10 March 2021) reported that the constitutional reform proposals fall short of expectations and hardly guarantee peaceful elections, due to be held in seventeen months. Politician Martha Karua, speaking to Citizen TV stated that 'The Handshake distorted our democracy. The watchdog role of the minority party in Parliament has been distorted … It has brought intolerance and tension' (9 March 2021).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The above examples suggest that the nexus between technology deployed and Kenya's democracy is still at stake unless election policies are revised and implemented. The discussion above reveals that Kenyans have used ICT to hold discussions with the aim of influencing policy and decision-making in regards to the election process. While doing so, they have strived to hold the IEBC accountable to the flawed elections of 2017; albeit through satire, hence the Twitter chants via the hashtag #FunguaServer. Therefore one wonders: are low levels of public confidence in the Electoral Management Board correlated with the contentious application of electoral technology?

What is the future of digital technologies in democratic elections in Kenya? The potential impact of harnessing new technology in the twenty-first century and learning access to technological resources could be introduced in African states to curb the many challenges that came with digital technologies; the ease of manipulation of vote tallies, and unaccountability, such as unopened servers, to date.

Electoral conflicts in Kenya occur due to deeply rooted causes that re-emerge after every election. For peace-building to take place, Kenya needs long-term investments in capacity building and setting up structures that

can help prevent violent conflict. Digital technologies can offer this capacity by providing long-time structures and avenues for alternative discourse and community engagement with digital cultures that promote peace, fostering non-violent attitudes and behaviours.

Weak policy areas that have led to mismanagement of elections need to be strengthened by policymakers. The Kenyan government should invest in civic education to ensure it has an educated electorate to curb overdependence on technology; since technology is not the solution to electoral fraud, but factors such as ballot rigging, and violations of electoral law are issues that undermine political stability.

Kenyan citizens, sharing similar experiences with American voters, have raised numerous questions in the realm of public policy about the relationship between election administration practices, on the one hand, and the size and composition of voter turnout, on the other (Stewart III 2011).

Kenyans seem not ready to protect their democracy by harnessing the benefits of digital technologies. Controversies over the use of new voting technologies have and continue to be met with resistance; therefore policies guiding elections should give the mandate (to various interest groups) to decide which voting technologies should be made available to voters.

Notes

1. *Standard Media*, 27 November 2011, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000047306/use-of-ict-in-elections-will-deepen-democracy.

2. Martin Andago: presentation titled 'The Technological Face of Kenyan Elections: A Critical Analysis of the 2013 Polls', http://www.kenyalaw.org/LVI2014/docs/Technological_Face_of_Kenyan_Elections.pdf.

3. This system sought to: enhance transparency through electronic transmission of provisional results from the polling stations; display provisional results at the tally centres for all agents and officials and provide access to provisional elections data to media and other stakeholders in real time for broadcast. Joseph Sosi: 'What Kenyans need to know about the IEBC KIEMS kit and provisional election results transmission', *Standard Media*, 7 August 2017, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/ureport/story/2001250595/what-kenyans-need-to-know-about-the-iebc-kiems-kit-and-provisional-election-results-transmission.

4. The Nation Team: 'Raila Odinga disputes preliminary results', *Daily Nation*, 9 August 2017, https://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/Raila-Odinga-reject-preliminary-results/1064-4050768-lhhnykz/index.html.

5. Form 34A is the first form used to tabulate results of the presidential election. It is filled by the Presiding Officer after the counting of votes at the polling station. It contains details of the votes garnered by each candidate and then

details the total number of registered voters in that station, the rejected votes, the objected ones, the disputed and the valid ones. The candidate or their agents are then required to sign and ratify that the contents of that form are correct. Form 34A is handed over to the Constituency Returning Officer, who then fills Form 34B. It is used for the collation of the presidential election results. On it is indicated: the polling station code, the name of the station, the number of registered voters, what each candidate garnered and the number of valid votes cast (Ndirachu 2017).

6. At the wake of 9 March 2018, Kenyans woke to 'life-changing' news through a rather unexpected event. News that the key leaders, Raila Odinga, and Uhuru Kenyatta, who were at the helm of the divisive politics and hurling insults at each other were putting their differences aside and uniting through a 'handshake'. This was a public declaration to cease all hostilities and instead find a common ground in the interest of moving the country forward economically and politically. After a prolonged period of turmoil, Kenya was now back on its feet. However, politicians allied to the National Super Alliance (NASA) felt that this was betrayal and that Raila had not consulted. In as much as Kenyans perceived it as an act of leaders putting their egocentric interests aside, there was an element of betrayal that was brought out by this sudden union.

7. Originated within Soviet psychology in the 1920s with its roots in the cultural–historical school. Further founded as activity theory by Leont'ev and his students in 1974. Later applied and extended by Scandinavian researchers in mid-1980.

8. BBI's nine-point agenda: how to end ethnic division; inclusivity; how to solve polarising elections; safety and security; how to deal with corruption; how to deal with lack of national ethos; responsibility and rights; shared prosperity; enhancing devolution.

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The Role of ICT in Curtailing Electoral Fraud and Violence in Nigeria: A Study of the 2019 General Election in Lagos State

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Abstract

Elections can be described as the hallmark of democracy and integral for a democratic society to remain stable. However, electoral process in Nigeria has been marred with fraud and violence. Electoral violence and fraud remain a major threat to the stability of democracy in Nigeria. To reduce the occurrence of violence and fraud, INEC introduced the Smart Card Reader (SCR) which was used to verify the authenticity of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC). The use of ICT during the 2019 elections limited the extent to which political actors can intimidate or harass INEC officials to commit electoral fraud, it also reduced the number of electoral petitions and in Lagos State, there was a reduction in violence experienced during the elections.

Résumé

Les élections peuvent être décrites comme la marque de la démocratie et font partie intégrante de la stabilité d'une société démocratique. Cependant, le processus électoral au Nigeria a été entaché de fraudes et de violences. La violence et la fraude électorales demeurent une menace majeure pour la stabilité de la démocratie au Nigeria. Pour réduire les cas de violence et de fraude, l'INEC a introduit le lecteur de carte à puce (SCR) qui a été utilisé pour vérifier l'authenticité de la carte d'électeur permanent (PVC). L'utilisation des TIC lors des élections de 2019 a limité le pouvoir des acteurs politiques à intimider ou harceler les responsables de l'INEC à commettre des fraudes électorales ; elle a également réduit le nombre de recours électoraux, et dans l'État de Lagos, il a été noté une baisse des violences pendant les élections.

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Introduction

Elections remain essential in the transitory process from one civilian government to another (Adesote and Abimbola 2014). Elections can be described as the hallmark of democracy and integral for a democratic society to remain stable (Ojo 2007). Free, fair and credible elections are very important in a democratic society. A free and fair election empowers citizens to hold people in public offices accountable. However, holding public officers accountable in Nigeria has not been possible because of the irregularities in elections. Also, 'the democratisation of politics has been unsuccessful in arresting electoral fraud perpetrated by different political parties and megalomaniac politicians' (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018). Elections are democratic only if they are credible, participatory, legitimate, free and fair. Elections are therefore seen to have met these criteria when they are administered by a neutral authority; when the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud; when the police, military and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially; when contenders all have access to the public media; when electoral districts and rules do not grossly handicap the opposition; when the secret of the ballot is protected; when virtually all adults can vote; when procedures for organising and counting the votes are widely known; and when there are transparent and impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes (Diamond 2008: 25).

The electoral process in Nigeria has been marred with fraud and violence (Nwagwu 2016). Though violence has been a longstanding feature of the democratisation process in post-colonial Nigeria, its recent manifestations, especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic, has assumed unprecedented magnitude thus constituting a major threat to the survival democracy' (Adesote and Abimbola 2014: 140). Reif (2009: 5) defines election violence as any 'spontaneous or organized actions by candidates, party supporters, election authorities, voters, civil society, or other political actors that employ physical harm, intimidation, blackmail, verbal abuse, violent demonstrations, psychological manipulation, or other forms of coercion (or the threat thereof) aimed at disrupting, determining, hastening, delaying, reversing, or otherwise influencing an election and its outcome'.

One of the vital consequences of electoral violence and fraud is the negative effect it has on the public's perception and confidence in the electoral process (Alvarez, Hall and Hyde 2009). Electoral violence and fraud remain a major threat to the stability of democracy in Nigeria. After the 2007 General Elections, 1,527 petitions were lodged at the Court of Appeal (Ubanyionwu 2012) and 560 petitions were lodged after the 2015

General Elections (PLAC 2017). Some of the issues that led to the petitions were spoiled and invalid ballot papers which are grounds for invalidating elections, challenging the election and return of a candidate as Governor-Elect, and breach of regulations by a presiding officer. Section 138 of the Electoral Act, 2010 gives a candidate or political party which participated in the election the right to present an election petition. Therefore, an election may be questioned on any of the following grounds that:

- a person whose election is questioned was, at the time of the election, not qualified to contest the election;
- the election was invalid by reason of corrupt practices or non-compliance with the provision of this Act;
- the respondent was not duly elected by majority of lawful votes cast at the election;
- the petitioner or its candidate was validly nominated but was unlawfully excluded from the election.

To reduce the number of election petitions and irregularities, technology is used during the election process. The use of different forms of technology in the election process has been on the increase and Nigeria has not been left out. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was introduced in the 2011 Nigerian General Election to improve the electoral process and provide a credible, free and fair election. 'For ICT to play its roles creditably, effectively and efficiently, all technological devices in election administration should serve to enhance the cardinal principle of accuracy, accessibility, transparency and informed electorates. ICT (formal technology such as Smart Card Reader and Permanent Voters Card) has reduced the incidence of electoral fraud such as ballot box snatching, manipulation of the results, underage voting and multiple voting which has plagued Nigerian elections' (Ayeni and Esan 2018).

Therefore, 'the need for the electorate to be sufficiently enlightened on the primary roles of ICT in election processes ought to be stressed elaborately' (Nwagwu 2016: 304). Electoral management that will prevent electoral fraud and violence before, during and after the polls as well as achieve governmental legitimacy is of utmost importance to scholars, policymakers and the electorate (Kolawole 2007; Adesote and Abimbola 2014). It is on this premise that the use of ICT was introduced in the electoral process by the Electoral Management Body (EMB) of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Electoral violence is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The First Republic in Nigeria (1960–66) collapsed due to incidents of violence perpetrated by politicians in the 1964/65 General Election. Historians

and political scientists recall the incident tagged as 'Operation We-ti-e'; literally meaning 'Operation spray it!' in the Western Region of Nigeria where notable politicians and their supporters were killed in broad daylight. This largely caused the first military coup of 15 January 1966. With civil rule returning in 1979, politicians resorted to electoral violence and fraud again during the 1983 General Election. The electoral fraud allegedly perpetrated by the National Party of Nigeria in Ondo State led to three days of killings and arson; this was part of the reasons the military took over on 31 December 1983 (Ojo 2018).

The first General Election conducted by a civilian government was in 2003; this election is said to have been the most corrupt and violent election ever conducted in postcolonial Nigeria (Kurfi 2005); 'characterised by different types of electoral fraud which ranged from ballot stuffing, intimidation, killing, and assassination among others. The election was a triumph of violence' (Adesote and Abimbola 2014: 144). The 2007 General Election was no different as it had massive electoral malpractices such as intimidation of voters, declaration of results where elections were not held, and inflation of voting results (Animashaun 2008). IFES-Nigeria recorded 967 incidences of electoral violence during the 2007 election period which included eighteen deaths (IFES-Nigeria 2007). The 2011 General Elections were considered partially fair by international and local observers when compared to the 2003 and 2007 General Elections, but this election experienced electoral violence and fraud during pre-election, election and post-election periods (Adesote and Abimbola 2014).

This article seeks to examine if the use of technology has reduced and/or had a positive impact on the Nigerian electoral process especially as regards violence and voter fraud.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:
- Examine the role of ICT in reducing multiple registration.
- Examine how ICT has curtailed false voter identity.
- Examine how ICT helped track incidence of violence.

Research Questions

- How has ICT reduced multiple registration in Nigeria?
- What ways have ICT curtailed false voter identity during election?
- How has ICT helped track incidence of violence during the election period in Nigeria?

Electoral Violence and Fraud in Nigeria Since 1999: An Overview

Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 was a result of two futile attempts by General Sani Abacha and General Ibrahim Babangida to transition to democracy. The electoral processes in the 1999 General Elections were more acceptable than the electoral process of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018).

The presidential candidate of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, General Muhammadu Buhari, described the 2003 General Election as the most fraudulent since Nigeria got independence (Odeh 2003). INEC officials were also involved in various electoral misconduct such as forgery of results, falsifying results, unlawful possession of ballot boxes and ballot papers and sharing unused ballot papers with party agents for financial rewards (Ezeani 2005). Nigerians hoped that the 2007 General Elections would be different with more credibility and transparency, but the election was not different from the 2003 General Elections as it was riddled with irregularities, fraud and violence which resulted in 1,250 election petitions (Omotola 2010).

Despite the improvements made for the 2011 General Elections by INEC by introducing ICT to the electoral process, there were still incidences of violence and fraud albeit small compared to previous elections. These included voter intimidation, underage voting, multiple voting, snatching of ballot boxes by party thugs and falsification of results (Oladimeji, Olatunji and Nwogwugwu 2013). The results of the Presidential election led to post-election violence in which lives were lost including members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The National Democratic Institute (2015: 6) stated that the 'violence … caused over 800 deaths and substantial destruction of property'.

Prior to the 2015 General Elections, pre-election, election and post-election violence rocked the country killing one police officer and injuring four at a rally in Rivers State; politicians were kidnapped, campaign vehicles were burnt, and some campaign convoys were stoned including the convoy of the sitting President Goodluck Jonathan (Egobueze and Ojirika 2017). The 2015 elections had issues with inadequate security personnel with some supporting a political party by helping rig the elections and INEC officials getting harassed in some registration centres (Kalu and Gberevbie 2018).

ICT in Elections in Nigeria

INEC, with the intention of improving the outcome of the 2011 General Elections, introduced more digital technologies which were used to curb electoral fraud. These included the Smart Card Reader (SCR) which was

used to verify the authenticity of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and the intending voters' identification (Orji 2017). The 2011 General Election voters register was Nigeria's first electronically compiled register that helped in the production of the PVCs used for the 2015 General Elections. The use of SCRs ensured that electorates only voted in polling units where they registered. The use of SCRs in the 2015 General Elections reduced the occurrence of electoral fraud. Although the use of SCRs was not without hitches such as poor internet connection, non-verification of voters' fingerprints, rejection of PVCs, and inadequate knowledge of the use of the PVC and SCR by INEC officials and voters, the use of these technologies gave the electorate confidence in the electoral process and made it difficult for politicians to rig the elections (Nwagwu, Onah and Otu 2018).

Manipulation by political actors in Nigeria slowed down the adoption of ICT in all areas of the electoral process as Nigerian politicians view elections as a 'do-or-die' affair and would kick against any idea that would reduce the possibility of rigging the elections; illiteracy and inadequate infrastructure also pose a challenge to the full implementation of ICT in Nigeria's electoral process (Aderounmu 2018). The use of ICT in Nigerian elections has stopped multiple registrations by the electorates (Ejikemejombo 2015). The Automated Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) was introduced during the 2015 General Elections to identify similar fingerprints on the 2011 General Election register (Ayeni and Esan 2018).

A study conducted in 2016 showed that electorates believed that use of the SCR during the 2015 General Elections eliminated multiple registrations and the use of the PVC reduced multiple voting (Nwagwu 2016). Due to the use of ICT in the 2015 General Elections, 'the rate of electoral fraud was minimised to its barest minimum. This checkmated post-election violence' (Nwagwu 2016: 315). The successful conduct of the 2011 General Election was a great contrast to previous elections which were characterised by mismanagement and fraud. The use of AFIS in the 2011 General Elections removed 800,000 people for multiple registration (Aziken 2015).

In March 2015, the Chief Press Secretary to the INEC Chairman (Idowu 2015) released a press statement stating that its decision to deploy SCRs for the 2015 General Elections had four main objectives which were:

1. To verify PVCs presented by voters at polling units and ensure that they are genuine, INEC-issued (not cloned) cards.
2. To biometrically authenticate the person who presents a PVC at the polling unit and ensure that he/she is the legitimate holder of the card. Although, the Commission, in agreement with registered political parties, had provided in the approved guidelines for the conduct of the 2015 elections that where

biometric authentication of a legitimate holder of a genuine PVC becomes challenging, there could be physical authentication of the person and completion of an Incident Form, to allow the person to vote.

3. The SCRs provide disaggregated data of accredited voters in male/female and elderly/youth categories – a disaggregation that is vital for research and planning purposes, but which INEC until now had been unable to achieve.

4. The SCR sends the data of all accredited voters to INEC's central server, equipping the Commission to be able to audit figures subsequently filed by polling officials at the Polling Unit and, thereby, be able to determine if fraudulent alterations were made.

Table 1: Technologies used by INEC from 1999 to 2016 for elections

S/N	Year	Voter Registration	Days For Registration	Data Captured	D-Base	Accreditation/ Voting	Result Collation
1	1999	Pen/Sheets and Typewritters	14 Days	Basic details no picture or finger prints	NIL	NIL	NIL
2	2003	Optical Magnetic Recognition Form (Omr Form) *Automated Finger Prints Identification System (Afis)	10 Days	Basic details and finger prints only	YES	NIL	NIL
3	2007	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) *(Afis)	4 Months	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	Electronic Voters' Register (EVR)	Excel Sheet/ E-mail
4	2011	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) *Afis	21 Days	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	Electronic Voters' Register (EVR)	Excel Sheet/ E-mail
5	2015	*Direct Data Capture Machine (Ddcm) *Improved Afis/ Business Rule	Continuous Voters Registration (CVR)	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	*EV *INEC Voters Authentication System (IVAS)/ Smart Card Reader (SCR)	Election Transparency Administration And Collation (e-TRAC)
6	2016	*Ddcm *Improved Afis *Business Rule	Continuous Voters Registration (CVR)	Basic details, photograph, and finger prints	YES	*EVR *IVAS	*Electronic-Collation Support (E-Collation) *e-TRAC

Source: Ayeni and Esan (2018)

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the diffusion of innovations theory, also known as innovation diffusion theory. It was first popularised by Everett Rogers in his 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers describes an innovation as 'an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption' (1983: 12). Diffusion is 'the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system' (Rogers 1983: 5).

According to Rogers, four main elements influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. The theory posits that 'potential users make decisions to adopt or reject an innovation based on beliefs that they form about the innovation' (Rogers 1983).

This work propounds that Nigeria's decision to adopt the use ICTs was fuelled by its observation of the positive results/success achieved by other nations that had made the adoption earlier. This decision was made after the conclusion of the innovation-decision process described by Rogers (1983: 20) as 'the process through which an individual (or other decision-making unit) passes from first knowledge of an innovation to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision', with steps outlined thus: (1) knowledge, (2) persuasion, (3) decision, (4) implementation, and (5) confirmation (Figure 1).
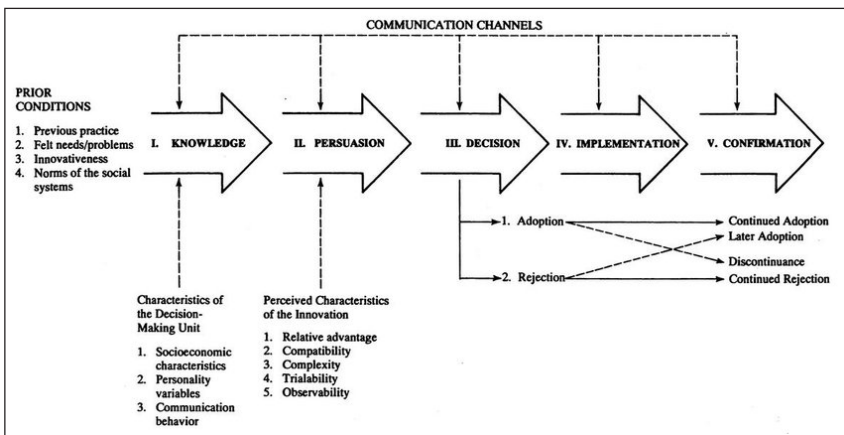

Figure 1: Model of stages in the innovation-decision process
Source: Rogers (1983)

The central goal of adoption of these technologies was problem-solving, necessitated by the constant issues faced before, during and after previous elections. The knowledge and persuasion steps of the above process had to produce conclusions that satisfied this question – would it be reasonable to assume that adopting these technologies would minimise the issues for which innovation was sought, and by what degree? The answer had to be satisfactory based on what had been observed of its use in other countries. The decision, implementation and confirmation steps involved testing these technologies to be certain that factors unique to Nigeria would not strongly affect their efficiency. The fact that technologies worked well in the election cycles of other countries was not conclusive evidence that they would work in Nigeria.

An example of a factor to consider was the ease of use. If the technologies were too complicated for the INEC staff to use, especially since INEC is known to use ad hoc staff who might not necessarily have the experience, exposure or expertise to operate complex technologies, then it would have been counterproductive to adopt the technologies. The impact of these technologies would only be felt if INEC staff could learn to use them within a short period of time, especially the ad hoc staff usually enlisted and trained within weeks of the elections.

Methodology

This study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. Use was made of secondary data. Data was collected using records and data from INEC and NGOs that observed the elections. The results of the study were analysed using content analysis.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In Lagos, there were twenty Local Government Areas (LGAs), 245 Registration Areas (RAs), 8,462 Polling Units (PUs) and 6,570,291 registered voters for the 2019 elections. 5,531,389 PVCs were collected before the General Elections, ensuring a PVC collection rate of 84.18 per cent for the state (INEC 2020) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Presentation of data
Source: INEC (2020)

INEC's official report of the elections in Lagos highlighted the following:

1. Violence and disruption of electoral processes were recorded during the Presidential/National Assembly elections in the Okota area of Oshodi-Isolo.

2. The electoral officer of Eti-Osa was also held hostage by men of the Nigerian army during the Presidential/National Assembly elections, just as two Registration Area Technical Support (RATECHs) were detained by the military in Agege and Mushin LGAs.

3. There were also issues bordering on the usage/non-usage of SCRs: a total of 13,325 SCRs were deployed to all the PUs and voting points in the state with 300 SCRs as back-ups. While SCRs were used in almost all the PUs and voting points in the state, there were a few PUs and communities where their use was resisted. In such places, the Commission's stipulated regulations and guidelines were fully enforced.

4. Other issues and challenges faced during the General Election include:

   • Nonchalant attitude and lack of commitment of some transport union drivers;

   • Lack of sufficient data for persons living with disabilities for distribution of assistive device;

   • Attacks on poll officials, snatching of election materials by thugs and hoodlums in some LGAs;

   • Corrupt inducements of voters with impunity;

   • Absence of an adequate number of security personnel in some PUs and registration centres.

According to independent observer IRI/NDI (2019: 21), INEC addressed the challenges of the 2015 election related to the SCRs 'failing to recognize fingerprints in many instances, leading to the manual verification of a significant number of voters' by enhancing the 'smart card reader software to better recognize voters' fingerprints.' There were also innovative steps powered by INEC 'in the Ekiti and Osun off-cycle elections to recapture fingerprints on the spot with the smart card reader if a voter's PVC was correctly validated but the reader could not recognize the fingerprints. Citizen observer groups noted that the smart card reader's technological enhancements overall meant that fewer voters were turned away from the polls than in previous general and off-cycle elections.

The 2019 elections saw a rise in all post-election petitions, from 663 in 2015 to 807 election petitions (AllAfrica 2020). Despite this rise, it is important for some context to be added in order to understand the possible reasons for this. It was reported that there were over 640 incite cases stemming from disgruntled contenders following the completion of party primaries (Imosemi, Taiwo and Nzeribe 2019). This could be a possible explanation for the rise, with many issues leading to the elections that were beyond the scope of the role of ICT. Political scientist, Ibrahim Sani Musa, stated his belief that it had more to do with the attitude of politicians, rather than valid flaws of electoral reforms (AllAfrica 2020). This is further strengthened by the Supreme Court's observation that 'no matter how well the regulatory authority conducts an election, there are complaints' (Olufunso 2019).

Abdul Mohammed, a law lecturer, also stated his belief that certain politicians come up with petitions in order to 'keep their supporters together' (AllAfrica 2020). Hamid Ajibola Jimoh Esq, a lawyer, added his own perspective that the rise in the 2019 election petitions was 'proof that Nigerian electorate are becoming more democratic in electing their political leaders' (*ibid.*).

Whichever view one decides to adopt, it is clear that the increase in petitions does not automatically translate to inefficiency on the part of ICT. In truth, the evidence suggests exactly that. Of the 807 petitions submitted, 582 were dismissed, 183 withdrawn by the petitioners, thirty for re-run election and twelve for issuance of certificates of return (Oyekanmi 2019).

In addition, it can be concluded that the trust of the electoral stakeholders in the integrity of the process, due in no small part to the infusion of ICT, has certainly made them more willing to state their disagreements through official channels rather than resorting to violence. While this is not particularly provable, the trends certainly suggest it.

Independent observers at EU EOM (2019: 14) noted that 'INEC made efforts to strengthen integrity in the process through making the use of smart card readers mandatory to accredit voters. Measures specified in INEC's guidelines included stopping polling in case of malfunction until a new smart card reader is provided, or the process postponed to the next day. In addition, polling would be cancelled in polling units where there was over-voting, with more votes than people recorded on the smart card readers.'

Role of ICT in Reducing Multiple Registration

INEC's use of ICT in the registration process included the capture of biometric data which was embedded into the PVCs that would be collected later as well as an automated fingerprint identification system (EU EOM 2019). These were put in place to minimise incidences of multiple registration of voters, which is one of the well-known irregularities in Nigerian elections. This was evident back in 2011 and ICT was introduced and had an almost instant impact. The removal of 800,000 people, from the database (Aziken 2015), who were products of multiple registration, not only showed the scale of the irregularities from past elections but also the fact that this was indeed a huge problem.

The General Elections in 2015 saw a repeat of ICT's impact, leading to a further reduction in incidences of multiple registrations and multiple voting (Nwagwu 2016). Despite the milestones and progress record, the ICT infusion still had its critics. There were those who believed that it could all be manipulated to favour one party over the other, ensuring multiple voting on one side (Assibong and Osanisi 2018).

According to Peters (2015), critics of the technologies deployed opined that card readers could be compromised such that a pre-selected winner could be favoured with manipulated removal of purported multiple registrations or incidences of multiple voting, leaving legitimate voters of the opposition disenfranchised. This view told its own story of the distrust that always existed for the electoral process and its stakeholders, due to the way previous elections had gone.

For the 2019 elections, more progress was made. According to INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, the technology deployed by the body 'drastically reduced incidences of electoral malpractices' and 'research has revealed that the usage of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in election has eliminated incidents of multiple registrations' (Sobechi 2019). He further stated that multiple registrations are 'one of the main political tools for rigging elections' in the country and added that 'a review of the ICT system in Nigeria has shown that the introduction of

Electronic Voters Register (EVR), Automatic Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) and Smart Card Reader (SCR) have reduced multiple registration and multiple voting' (*ibid.*). This is confirmation of the role that ICT has played in reducing multiple registrations and multiple voting in Nigeria.

ICT and Curtailing of False Voter Identity

The independent observers at IRI/NDI (2019: 28) noted that

> 'PVCs were verified using the smart card readers and names were checked against the voter register. In most cases when fingerprints were not verified by the smart card readers, voters' details were checked in the voter register, as prescribed by the guidelines.'

According to them,

> 'smart card readers were functioning in most polling units. In the few instances where they malfunctioned, the problem was immediately reported and voting was suspended until the smart card readers were replaced' (IRI/NDI 2019: 31).

There were widespread positive reports about the card reader during the elections, with ad hoc staff interviewed on the ground stating their satisfaction with how efficiently it worked and how helpful the presence of the RATECHs had been in the event of rare malfunction (Olukomaiya 2019).

The role of ICT in curbing false voter identity in the 2019 elections in Lagos is clear. A lot of the complaints regarding ICT following the 2015 elections, as mentioned earlier, had to do with the SCRs malfunctioning (Assibong and Oshanisi 2018), thereby causing either a suspension of voting at a PU or the sole use of the voter register. INEC fixed this problem by sending RATECHs to all RAs, to sort out any issues regarding malfunction and the presence of the RATECHs proved to be a masterstroke (Olukomaiya 2019). The inclusion of the double process – card reader verification and voter register verification – also massively minimised the incidences of fraud.

To reach a conclusion about ICT's role in curbing false voter identity and voting, one must examine the differences recorded, by percentage, regarding court-ordered re-run elections due to electoral fraud or irregularities. The 2015 General Election held in 1,490 constituencies (excluding the sixty-eight constituencies in FCT where elections were not due as was the case in 2019), and the number of court-ordered re-run elections that held were in eighty constituencies (5.37 per cent) made up of ten Senatorial Districts, seventeen Federal Constituencies and fifty-three State Constituencies across fifteen States of the Federation (Oyekanmi 2019). In contrast, the

2019 General Election was held in 1,558 constituencies nationwide. The number of court-ordered re-run elections that were held consisted of only thirty constituencies, representing just 1.92 per cent of the total number of constituencies (Oyekanmi 2019). This drop in percentage of court-ordered re-run elections from 5.37 to 1.92 is clear evidence of ICT's impact and the progress this electoral reform has ensured between 2015 and 2019.

ICT and Tracking Incidence of Violence

The independent observers at IRI/NDI (2019: 28) noted that 'the overall environment was peaceful and that polling officials generally adhered to voting procedures' and that 'the atmosphere at closing and counting remained calm and orderly, with polling officials mostly following procedures outlined in INEC guidelines'.

The above was true for most polling units, with the only incidences of violence in Lagos noted earlier as follows (INEC 2020):

- Violence and disruption of electoral processes was recorded during the Presidential/National Assembly elections in the Okota area of Oshodi-Isolo.
- The electoral officer of Eti-Osa was also held hostage by men of the Nigerian army during the Presidential/National Assembly elections, just as two Registration Area Technical Support (RATECHs) were detained by the military in Agege and Mushin LGAs.

This consolidated the gains made regarding the incidence of violence in the 2015 elections where ICT's significant impact was noted and acknowledged (Nwagwu 2016: 315). For the most part, it eliminated many of the reasons that typically lead to violence at PUs. In the instances where violence did happen, it was perpetrated by political thugs who sought to disrupt the voting exercise (Shaban 2019) rather than voters disgruntled with the process or practices at the PUs.

Such violence could not have been prevented by ICT or any other factors beyond human security measures. It would be unreasonable to expect ICT to completely eliminate violence. What is clear, however, is that it has strengthened integrity in the electoral process and made the most of the reasons for violence at PUs to be eliminated, as noted above.

Conclusion

The findings in this study show that ICT played a significant role in curtailing electoral fraud and violence in Nigeria. The impact made in 2015 was consolidated in the 2019 election cycle, along with improvements that strengthened the process. The drop in the percentage of court-ordered re-

run elections between 2015 and 2019 is evidence that the process was indeed strengthened, and that the rise in petitions did not automatically translate to a worsening ICT-driven process or the impact of ICT being diminished.

The rise in petitions might have a correlation with reduced violence, and one explanation for this could be that those disgruntled with outcomes of the elections sought legal redress rather than settling for violence. This would further confirm that ICT's deployment in Nigeria's elections, has significantly impacted how people respond to elections outcomes. Furthermore, one only has to look at the number of petitions dismissed: 582 of 807 petitions, a whopping 72 per cent of all petitions, to confirm that a great percentage of the petitions were either without merit or couldn't be proven to be merited.

According to the findings of this study, ICT played a significant role in reducing multiple registrations and voting, curtailing false voter identity and tracking incidence of violence. While some of these impacts were evident in the previous two election cycles – 2011 and 2015 – the impact of ICT in the 2019 elections certainly confounded a lot of the critics of electoral technology infusion in Nigeria.

The adoption of ICT, especially the SCR, in Nigeria was initially met with mixed reactions, and still remains a subject of debate. However, the progress recorded in the electoral system since its introduction trumps the recorded challenges it has posed in the past. The use of ICT limits the extent to which political actors can intimidate or harass INEC officials to commit electoral fraud because the digital technologies used for elections limit the influence of human manipulation.

This was quite evident in the 2019 General Elections. In the coming years, the implementation of ICT across all stages of the electoral process including the collation of results is bound to further reduce fraud and violence during elections in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:
- The Electoral Commission is to make adequate consultation and carry out sensitisation on all technologies to be used during elections in the future;
- Thorough training of officials;
- Frequent updating and re-examination of equipment.

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Digital Technologies and Election Management in Zimbabwe: Pseudo-democratic Transition and Contorted Delirium?

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Abstract

This article examines the extent to which the adoption of biometric voter registration in election management in Zimbabwe has appeared a phantom on the horizon regarding democratisation. While the emergence of digitalised election management brought with it expectations of credible electoral processes and outcomes in a country with a history of rampant electoral malpractices in manually managed processes, the phenomenon is yet to yield positive results regarding democratisation in Zimbabwe. Despite the shift from manually managed electoral process to a digitalised approach, the quagmire of irregularities has persisted in Zimbabwean elections. This is largely attributable to the trajectory of governance in Zimbabwe which appears to militate against the exploitation of the opportunities presented by digital technologies in democratising elections in the county. This said, the conclusion drawn from this article is that the configuration of political power, particularly issues of the breach of the democratic principles of separation of power and separation of personnel, are disingenuous to technology-induced democratic transition to credible elections. Secondary research was used to obtain data for this article as data were gathered from books, journal articles, newspaper articles and institutional reports.

Keywords: digital technologies, election management, biometric voter registration, democratic elections, Zimbabwe

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Résumé

Cet article examine dans quelle mesure l'adoption de l'enregistrement biométrique des électeurs dans la gestion des élections au Zimbabwe est apparue comme un fantôme à l'horizon de la démocratisation. Alors que l'émergence de la numérisation de la gestion des élections a suscité des attentes quant à la crédibilité du processus et des résultats électoraux dans un pays avec une histoire de mauvaises pratiques électorales rampantes au cours du processus géré manuellement, le phénomène n'a pas encore donné de résultats positifs en matière de démocratisation au Zimbabwe. Malgré le passage d'un processus électoral manuel à une approche numérique, le bourbier des irrégularités persiste encore lors des élections au Zimbabwe. Cela est largement attribuable à la trajectoire de la gouvernance au Zimbabwe qui semble militer contre l'exploitation des opportunités présentées par les technologies numériques dans la démocratisation des élections dans le pays. Cela dit, la conclusion tirée de cet article est que la configuration du pouvoir politique, en particulier les questions de violation des principes démocratiques de séparation du pouvoir et de séparation du personnel, sont peu propices à une transition démocratique induite par la technologie vers des élections crédibles. La recherche secondaire a été utilisée pour obtenir des données pour cet article, car les données ont été recueillies à partir de livres, d'articles de journaux et des rapports institutionnels.

Mots-clés : technologies numériques, gestion des élections, inscription biométrique des électeurs, élections démocratiques, Zimbabwe

Introduction

This article examines the extent to which and why the adoption of digital technologies in election management in Zimbabwe has not culminated in averting challenges associated with electoral fraud in the country. This is against the backdrop that the emergence of digital technologies as key elements of election management processes has brought hope for the democratisation process in most African states and beyond. The anticipation was that digitalising election management was a step forward in terms of guaranteeing the credibility of electoral processes and outcomes on the continent where electoral malpractices are rampant. In the Zimbabwean context, the advent of digitalised election management, characterised by reliance on biometric voter registration (BVR), has remained disingenuous to the envisaged role of digital technology in minimising electoral fraud.

The above is not to imply that digital technologies are not *sine qua non* to the democratic culture of conducting credible elections. The problem appears to evolve around the political culture, governance structures and

political organisation in Zimbabwe since 1980. In Zimbabwe, election management institutions, procedures, regulations and personnel serve as agents representing the interests of the governing political party at the expense of democratic values. Hence, the emergence of digital technologies for election management in Zimbabwe appears to be a phantom on the horizon for the democratic process in the Southern Africa state.

In spite of the above, issues of the digital technologies and election management nexus with democratic evolution in the Zimbabwean context have not received sufficient scholarly attention; yet the politics of electoral management dominates Zimbabwean electoral lexicons. With a history of controversy and contestation of the voters' roll and results, elections in Zimbabwe had not been perceived as the mainstay of democracy until the adoption of the biometric registration system in September 2017. At this juncture, it suffices to highlight that the digitalisation of voter registration in Zimbabwe brought hope for the democratisation process in the Southern African state.

The anticipation was that digitalising voter registration was a step forward in terms of guaranteeing the credibility of the electoral process and outcome in a country where electoral malpractices are rampant. Nevertheless, the adoption of the BVR system seems not to have led to the envisaged role of digital technology in minimising electoral fraud in Zimbabwe; at least in the 2018 elections in which the biometric registration system was used for the first time. This is not to imply that digital technologies such as the BVR system are not *sine qua non* to the democratic culture of credible election management.

There is a two tier explanation to this phenomenon. On the one hand, the problem appears to revolve around the trajectory of political culture, governance structures and political organisation in Zimbabwe. This trajectory has its roots in the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 2000 to challenge the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). How the emergence of the MDC changed the democratic course in Zimbabwe is discussed in the section that historicises dynamics of voter registration in the country. What is important at this juncture is to illustrate that in the Zimbabwean context, election management institutions, procedures, regulations and personnel serve as agents of the governing political party.

On the other hand, it is crucial to highlight that the dynamics of the political system in Zimbabwe are largely influenced by the government's ostensible desire to survive the imperialist onslaught and regime change agenda largely fomented by the United Kingdom (UK) and the United

States of America (USA). Therefore, it can be argued that the closure of political space in Zimbabwe and elements of undemocratic governance thereof can best be comprehended as means to an end; survival vis-à-vis the legacy of a history of subjugation. With the main opposition political party, the MDC, having alleged links with neo-imperialist forces and pursuing a regime change agenda, it is not surprising that ZANU PF took an Afro-radicalist stance characterised by electoral hegemony to remain in power and safeguard the sovereignty of the state. While this can be dismissed as propaganda, it could also be a reality driving authoritarian politics in Zimbabwe.

Theorising the digitalised election management–democratisation nexus in Zimbabwe

The theoretical foundations of this article combine assumptions of the principal–agent and bounded discretion approaches. Both theories belong to the category of delegation approaches. The two were selected because they illuminate the dynamics of the implications of the configurations of authority, organisational structures and power on digitalised election management processes vis-à-vis democratisation in Zimbabwe. The principal–agent theory is inclined to the state sovereignty maximising tendency that results in the government as the principal with exclusive appointing authority influencing political decisions and outcomes undertaken by the agents appointed by the principal (Gailmard 2012: 3; Lenz 2012; Healy and Malhotra 2010; Achen and Bartels 2002; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Borrowing from this approach, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and other electoral institutions as agents managing elections operate consistently with the wishes of the appointing authority.

Like principal–agent theory, bounded discretion theory argues that the state will not delegate institutions unless they serve its interests (Ginburg 2004). Hence, the shift for democratic purposes to digitalised election management in Zimbabwe remains a pseudo-democratic transition as long as there is no separation of powers between the election management body, personnel and procedures on the one hand and the government on the other hand. More so, it remains contorted delirium due to the fact that as long as the Zimbabwean government maintains its nationalistic-cum-Afro-radicalist stance justified in terms of safeguarding national sovereignty, reliance on a biometric registration system or even full scale digitalisation of elections might always encounter governance-related limitations. This is attributed to the spirit of self-determination to insulate the concomitant implications of the traction of the neo-imperialist agenda.

Contextualising the Digitised Election Management–Democratic Elections Nexus

At this juncture, it is essential to conceptualise the dynamics of the digitalisation of election management which has taken the form of BVR in the Zimbabwean context. BVR denotes the process of utilising biometric technology to capture the unique physical features of an individual such as fingerprints, iris and facial scans, among others, in addition to demographic data of the voter for identification purposes (Holtved 2011: 4). Reliance on biometrics such as fingerprints helps ensure a clean voters' register by eliminating multiple registrations and multiple voting (Gelb and Diofasi 2016: 1).

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2017: 10) maintains that 'a credible voter register confers legitimacy on the electoral process'. It can therefore be argued that the use of biometric technology in elections enhances the principle of 'one man one vote' and improves the credibility of elections and the democratic electoral process thereof. Thus far, most countries in the region have achieved relative success with this approach. However, successful elections also rely on a host of political and administrative processes that, while procedurally correct, may not result in well-conducted elections or even acceptance of the results by electoral stakeholders.

On a broader scale, even administrative and procedural 'success' may fail to satisfy demands for more popular, rather than merely procedural, participation in the political process (Pottie 2010). However, the GENKEY Report (2016: 4) underscores that BVR in the African context is usually let down by the poor quality of data capture at the registration stage which results in the existence of duplicated voters in the register. While this may resonate with the Zimbabwean context, it can be argued that biometric voter technology is a foreign technology that is relatively new to Zimbabwe. Hence, it can be expected for ZEC to have made mistakes in the initial phases of the system. Following this background, it can be argued that the deployment of these digital technologies in election management in Zimbabwe is a new phenomenon and the extent to which they have minimised electoral irregularities and malpractices in the interests of democratic elections should be aggregated.

The concept of democratic elections emanates from the principle that sovereignty is bestowed in the people; people are entitled to the rights to choose the government, take part in governmental affairs and the conduct of public affairs (Merloe 2009: 1). As the mainstay of democracy, elections

are envisaged to reflect the will of the people as well as accountability, inclusivity and transparency in terms of the electoral process. It is essential at this point to highlight that while democratic elections are internationalised, there are ulterior motives to this system. According to Gathii (2000: 70), the system is an appendage of the West who are architectures of the good governance doctrine which is used as a machination to influence national governance processes of the Third World in order to pursue the former's political interests. Going by this argument, it can be argued that this partly explains why the way Zimbabwean elections are conducted reflects some degree of scepticism to the extent that the ruling party whose background is revolutionary treats opposition parties as enemies of the state pursuing a neo-imperialist agenda.

To this end, even though the emergence of digitalised election management such as the BVR system brought expectations of credible electoral processes and outcomes on the continent with a history of electoral malpractices in manually managed processes, the phenomenon has not added much meaning to democratisation in Zimbabwe. This is attributable to the trajectory of governance in Zimbabwe that appears to militate against the exploitation of the opportunities presented by digital technologies to hold credible elections in the country. Apart from these internal governance dynamics in the Southern African state, the modalities of international governance, particularly neo-imperialist tendencies associated with democracy and elections, appear to influence the ruling party in Zimbabwe to resort to undemocratic electoral practices designed to safeguard sovereignty. The next section partly explores the evolution of this trend.

Digitalised Election Management: Biometric Voter Registration in Zimbabwe

The adoption of the BVR system in Zimbabwe was largely influenced by political circumstances around the electoral malpractices that have characterised the country's political landscape since 2000. To comprehend the trajectory of BVR in Zimbabwe, it suffices to briefly explore the pre-BVR political antecedents and challenges in the country. A discussion of elections in Zimbabwe almost always tempts one to start from the 2000 elections when a formidable opposition in the form of the MDC emerged to challenge the electoral hegemony of ZANU PF. This is so because a bulk of the patterns and features pertaining to the dynamics of political culture of absolute sovereign rule, the ZANU PF dominated electoral landscape, and attitude and behaviour towards opposition parties are traceable from the turn of the new millennium.

With the onset of multi-party politics in Zimbabwe at the turn of the millennium, the trajectory of election management in Zimbabwe has depicted a trend of democratic deficit whose concomitant implications have hindered the assistance of digital technology in democratic evolution. While digitalised election processes such as biometric registration do not necessarily determine the legitimacy of elections, the extent to which these processes have altered the institution of elections raises questions regarding the changes brought and challenges posed by digital technologies in election management in Zimbabwe. Consequently, issues pertaining to the legitimacy, credibility and trust of election systems, practices and outcomes in Zimbabwe are controversial as they invite varying ideological standpoints.

The Biometric Voter Registration System–Democratic Elections Conundrums in Zimbabwe

Like previous elections since 2000, the contestation of the 2018 election results in Zimbabwe was a product of a political system riddled with deliberate and unprecedented democratic deficit and authoritarian practices. The practices are best comprehended as deliberate because the way the political system is configured is designed to use all means to consolidate the power of the governing political party. Hence, the adoption of the BVR system ideally to minimise electoral malpractices has appeared illusory in ending the problem of election rigging in Zimbabwe. This explains why the 2018 elections have illustrated Russel and Zamfir's (2018: 4) argument that even though digitalised voter registration minimises the scope of human error, it is not watertight and does not bring instantaneous solutions to insulate electoral fraud in a corrupt political environment. This argument summarises the quagmire in Zimbabwe that has rendered the reliance on digital technology in election management worthless in shifting towards democratic elections.

Moreover, it suffices to question with concern the rationale behind the advocacy for the adoption of digital technology in election management by particularly Western European powers including the USA, UK and France, among others, as well as Euro-North American institutions such as the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN). When the Zimbabwean government adopted the BVR system in 2017, the UNDP was the leading entity to partner with the government on training and funding logistical issues. This concern could be allayed by the view that these state and non-state actors are aligned to the neoliberal school of thought that perceives democratic elections as a panacea to peace and security. Be that as it may, neoliberal democracy is regarded as a threat

to the sovereignty and welfare of Third World countries. The following dynamics illuminate the factors that have militated against the strength of digitalised voter registration in Zimbabwe.

The legacy of ZANU PF's electoral hegemonic influence is the starting point in the illumination of how the political system in Zimbabwe has hindered the contribution of digital technology to improving the credibility of elections. It suffices to highlight that this electoral hegemony has its roots in the configurations of power and closure of political space since the 1980 elections in Zimbabwe in order to maintain and perpetuate a one-party psychology (Jinadu 1997: 2; Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 122). The authoritarian system in Zimbabwe was compounded by the adoption in 1979 of the Gukurahundi policy which is a chauvinistic, commandist and dogmatic policy designed to annihilate the opposition (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 133). For the Gukurahundi policy and closure of political space to materialise in consolidating ZANU PF's undemocratic tendencies, the bureaucracy which is involved in the conduct of elections such as ZEC was politicised. The system was made more vicious and complex with the emergence of the MDC in 2000. Hence, due to this political power system, technological solutions such as BVR used in the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe fell short of improving the capability of ZEC to plan and conduct the elections democratically.

Notwithstanding the adoption of the BVR system as part of the broader electoral reforms envisaged to extinguish electoral irregularities in Zimbabwe, the planning and conduct of the 2018 elections still left a lot to be desired. One of the shortcomings of the biometric system, as it was employed in Zimbabwe, was the reluctance by the government to institute comprehensive supporting political and legal reforms. According to the Election Resource Centre (ERC) (2018) report, the elections were conducted without an appropriate legal framework due to the government's reluctance to align the biometric system with the provisions of the 2013 Constitution which emphasise the independence of ZEC, among other provisions.

The delays in the collation and announcement of results was understood against this background (BBC 2018). Resonating with the ERC Report, Sibanda (2018) maintained that improving the credibility of elections in Zimbabwe required the BVR system to be accompanied by appropriate administrative, legislative and political reforms. Even though headway was made with the adoption of Statutory Instrument 85 of 2017 to legalise and legitimise the biometric system, not much was done to transform the electoral system and subsequently minimise the double registration and inaccuracies that were inherent in the voter register.

Hence, the BVR system that was expected to solve the problem of ghost voters in Zimbabwe's electoral democratic evolution ended up creating a bigger problem in the context of the inaccurate voters roll. According to Zenda (2018), the adoption of the BVR system was welcomed by Zimbabweans as a solution to the manipulation of the voters roll which the ZANU PF party usually uses to rig elections. More so, the adoption of the BVR system coincided with the dawn of the Mnangagwa administration in November 2017 which inaugurated the illusion that the post-Mugabe government was instituting genuine transition to democracy including the conduct of democratic elections. As reality dawned, it became apparent that the transition from Mugabe to Mnangagwa illustrated more continuity than change (Southall 2017: 90), which Maromo (2017) describes as 'Mugabeism without Mugabe'.

To substantiate the above claims, it can be argued that the existence of 250,000 ghost voters found in the 2018 voters roll, which Beardsworth (2018) observed to be either invalid, wrong entries or statistically improbable, illustrates the magnitude of the electoral democracy deficit in Zimbabwe in spite of the digitalisation of voter registration. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network Observation Report (ZESN 2018: 43) also highlighted the existence of 77,814 statistically improbable voter details in the 2018 voter register. However, this is not to imply that the BVR system is not panacea to electoral democracy. What appears to be cause for concern is the configuration of power structures and processes in Zimbabwe's political system.

In resonance with the issues raised by other observer missions, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Election Observer Mission (SEOM) Statement (2018: 8) raised the inaccuracy of the voter register as one of the discrepancies that characterised the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe. In addition to the SADC report, the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to Zimbabwe Preliminary Statement (2018: 4) raised the concern of ZEC's failure to allow independent and proper audit of the voter register as one of the discrepancies of the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe. Given the pan-African brotherhood and solidarity that define relations between and among African states, one would have expected SADC and the AU to endorse the electronic voter register used in the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe as credible as they did with the previous manually managed register.

A theory was therefore generated by Zimbabweans that the two African regional institutions have a tendency to endorse elections in the country because of the legacy of pan-Africanist brotherhood that bind African states. However, the 2018 elections have defied these odds. The distinction between

the 2018 elections and the previous ones is the use of the BVR system in the former. It can therefore be argued that digitalised voter registration has made it easier on the part of the observer missions to unearth voter register discrepancies in Zimbabwe. Apart from voter register problems, the pan-African institutions illuminated ZEC's lack of independence.

Therefore, it suffices to underscore the lack of independence of ZEC as the primary source of the undemocratic predispositions that impeded the role of BVR in conducting credible elections in 2018 in Zimbabwe. The point of departure in ZEC's lack of independence is the composition of the personnel of the Commission vis-à-vis the appointing authority thereof. ZEC is composed of a chairperson and eight commissioners appointed by the head of state in consultation with the Judicial Service Commission.

It can be argued that the involvement of the head of state in the affairs of the election management body compromises the independence of the Commission and the subsequent execution of its mandate in a transparent and open manner. Consequently, the lack of independence of ZEC was cited as one of the contributing factors to the shortcomings and irregularities in the registration of voters for the 2018 elections (EUEOM Report 2018; ERC 2018). It is against this political background of the manipulation of procedures and institutions in Zimbabwe that BVR could not enhance the credibility of the voters' roll in the 2018 elections.

In continuation of the above, the manipulation of procedures and institutions that are supposed to conduct democratic elections illuminates the politicisation of election management in Zimbabwe. The EUEOM Report (2018) raised the issue of the envelopment of former security personnel in the election management institution arguing that this compromises the capability of ZEC to carry out its duties impartially and independent of the government and military interference. What the EUEOM Report highlighted is indeed a worrisome phenomenon in election management in Zimbabwe. In the 2018 elections for instance, former military officer Utloile Silaigwana was appointed as the acting chief election officer and on 1 July 2019 he was named the substantive chief election officer.

While there is nothing wrong in giving a former soldier such a responsibility, the history of Zimbabwean politics has shown that the members of defence forces, including the retired, once paid allegiance to ZANU PF. Be that as it may, it suffices to illuminate the self-determination drive that piques the ruling party to act and behave the way it does. Interference in institutions such as ZEC and democratic practices such as BVR cannot therefore be understood independently of the strategy to check and extinguish the neo-imperialist advances in the country.

The same can be said in relation to how the ruling party relates to all other state institutions including the police, judiciary, intelligence services and media as they form a formidable force to consolidate the power base of this political party. Exploring this undemocratic yet necessary connection, Matyszak (2017: 3) maintained that ZEC operates as an appendage of the ruling party whose conduct of elections and non-compliance with electoral laws are either ignored or facilitated by the courts. At this juncture, it suffices to make reference to how the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe decided the *Chamisa v Mnangagwa and Others* case in which Justice Malaba chose to ignore the issue of the ghost voters in the 2018 voters roll which was part of the fulcrum of the contestations (Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe: Judgment in *Chamisa v Mnangagwa and 24 Others* CCZ 42/18). The case illustrated the complex connection between the Zimbabwean bureaucracy and the extent to which the connection has militated against the role of digital technology, albeit in the 2018 elections, in deterring electoral malpractices.

The political culture of intolerance towards democratic elections by the Zimbabwean government further undermined the capacity of the BVR system to strengthen electoral democracy. Chikerema and Chakunda (2014: 57) argue that by monopolising agents of political socialisation, the ruling party in Zimbabwe has promoted a political culture of intolerance to democracy. This resonates with Makumbe (2009: 2) who maintains that Zimbabwe has since 1980 been drifting away from democracy towards authoritarianism. If these arguments are anything to go by, it is not surprising that digitalised voter registration was carefully deployed in a manner that does not plug all the loopholes for manipulating elections in favour of ZANU PF.

These include failure to avail the voters roll in time for inspection, the existence of duplicate and ghost voters, as well the lack of verifiability, traceability and transparency of the results that were finally announced. These dynamics of electoral democratic deficit in Zimbabwe, even in the presence of digital technology, confirm Sanusi and Nassuna's (2017) assertion that electoral processes in Africa are repositioned to benefit incumbent political parties. While the trend to appear intolerant towards democracy is indeed worrisome, it can be argued that approaching elections with caution the way the ZANU PF does is a direct product of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2006: 11) observes to be influenced by the legacy of the long history of imperialism.

Apart from technical related modalities, the use of BVR was exploited by state security agents, military personnel and ZANU PF activists as an intimidation and voter mobilisation strategy to influence decision-making of rural voters. To illuminate how the BVR system was manipulated for voter mobilisation, Zenda (2018) observed the politicisation of the system

by ZANU PF militia who projected the narrative that voter registration was a requirement to benefit from government food aid and farming inputs. An Al Jazeera post-election review conducted by Mhaka (2018) also unearthed voter intimidation tactics by the 5,000 soldiers deployed in the rural areas in Zimbabwe by propagating the narrative that if one votes for the opposition the BVR system will detect it and such people will be punished.

The above facilitated voter intimidation and, the outcome of the elections and the instability that followed. While the politicisation of election processes can be justified on the basis of what Niels (2008: 142) calls pan-African resistance to neo-colonialism, it can be argued that elements of power hunger and deep state are prevalent in Zimbabwean politics. Hence, efforts to consolidate power and state capture by manipulating even digitalised voter registration could be disguised as the safeguarding of sovereignty against the threat of neo-colonialism.

While the deployment of digital technologies has been associated with deterrence of electoral malpractices by proponents of the technologies, the technologies have not eliminated certain pre-election and post-election biases. For instance, digital technologies cannot deter voter intimidation, vote buying and unequal access to state media for campaigning as is evident in the Zimbabwean political context. Mhaka (2018) raised concerns pertaining to these malpractices in the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe. This adds to the observation on Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire by Gelb and Diofasi (2016: 15) that incumbent governments may exclude certain groups of people from participating in elections by limiting registration centres to areas where the ruling political parties have support. In the case of Zimbabwe, state-sponsored intimidation and torture of opposition leaders and their supporters are rampant (Moyo 2013). Having said the above, this research intends to explore how this and other political and structural factors have impeded the effectiveness of election technology in deterring election manipulation in Zimbabwe.

According to Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis (2018: 1398), in some cases digital technologies involved in voter registration, voter verification and result transmission can guard against electoral malpractices and boost public confidence. This resonates with Gelb and Diofasi's (2016: 13) observation that election technology reinforced voters' trust in electoral processes in Ghana in 2012 with the conceived reduction in electoral fraud. On the contrary, the deployment of BVR, verification and electronic transmission of results have not altered voter perception of the electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Against this background, this research seeks to analyse the dynamics associated with political systems in Zimbabwe and

their correlation with making the functional operations of election digital technologies disingenuous with democratic transition.

At face value, it can also be argued that digital technologies have promoted pseudo-democratic practices by letting power concentrate in the hands of the few political elite. According to Yard (2010), election technologies risk transferring power 'away from the many' into the 'hands of the few'. Yard's argument resonates with the situation in Zimbabwe whereby the incumbent government as the appointing authority appears to delegate to institutions such as ZEC personnel who are biased towards preferences of the ruling party. Hence, power is centralised in the hands of the head of state and management of electoral processes is done partially resulting in allegations of electoral fraud.

Be that as it may, it is not the election technology that results in the concentration of power in the hands of the few, but the configurations of political structures and power in the Zimbabwean political systems. It is these dynamics in the Zimbabwean context that this research intends to juxtapose with efforts at using election technologies to fix election manipulation with a view to enhance democratisation endeavours.

The long-term sustainability of digitalised election management has also been put into question. Logistical and organisational challenges relating to reliance by Electoral Commissions in Africa on the funding, equipment and expertise provided by resourced state and non-state actors highlight heavy dependence on foreign aid (Envrensel 2010). Making observations on these challenges with reference to the phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Akumiah (2010) questioned the long-term sustainability of the digital revolution in election management (see also Evrensel 2010). While dependence on funding, expertise and technology could result in the interference with election management by aid providers, this research, although acknowledging and recognising this problematic, focuses on the trajectory of how, why and to what extent digital technologies have appeared disingenuous to democratic transition to credible elections in Zimbabwe.

Suggestions for the Future of Digitalised Election Management in Zimbabwe

The point of departure in making policy and practical suggestions for the future of digitalised election management is an explanation for the rationale for digitalising election management in Zimbabwe. Like in other parts of the world, vote rigging revolving around voter registration, vote counting and results transmission necessitated the switch from manual electoral processes to digitalised ones. The inquiry that can be made therefore pertains

to whether or not technology is the solution to undemocratic elections in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

Answering the above question should not be done independently of the international political economy of elections, political ideas and solutions, including election technology, to African problems. To this end, it can be argued that the proliferation of election technology in Africa is associated with capitalist machinations to prescribe solutions to the world for the purposes of maximising profits since election technology is developed largely in the capitalist world.

Be that as it may, it suffices here to explore the rationale for digitalising in the first place vis-à-vis the sustainability of retaining the traditional manual process in Zimbabwe. No matter what theory is generated to criticise digitalised election management, digital technology is a panacea to democratic elections in Zimbabwe. Electoral contestations that have been experienced since 2000, whose concomitant implications have undermined peace and security in the country and the Southern African sub-region, substantiate this. The major problem has been around the voter register which has been found infested with ghost voters. Even though the adoption of the BVR system did not solve this problem, at least in the 2018 elections the continued use and improvement of this system coupled with legal and political reforms, including the independence of ZEC, could go a long way in improving democratic elections in Zimbabwe.

More so, there is a need to adopt full scale digitalisation of election management in Zimbabwe. Full scale digitalisation denotes adopting election technology at all stages of elections including voting, tabulation, counting and results transmission. Had digital technology been adopted at all stages in Zimbabwe, assessing its contribution to democratic elections could have been easier because the areas of contention invoked could have been technically verifiable. However, digitalising all aspects of elections is a mammoth task given the financial costs involved. When Zimbabwe adopted the BVR system, UNDP and the EU provided financial aid to augment the government's financial capacity.

Apart from financial constraints, the risk of software hacking or manipulation of technology to the advantage of one candidate cannot be eliminated in digitalised election management. With technologically advanced states such as the USA being susceptible to manipulation of digitalised elections, as in the case of the alleged Russian manipulation of the USA electoral process, less developed states such as Zimbabwe could be worse off with election technology. Nevertheless, the benefits of election technology outweigh its disadvantages.

For instance, the BVR system can be credited for improving trust in the electoral process in Zimbabwe. The increase in the rate of participation of youth in elections in Zimbabwe can be invoked to substantiate this claim. According to a survey by Bratton and Masunungure (2018) (also see Bratton 2014), the BVR system increased the rate of youth voter registration from 57 per cent recorded in 2013 to 73 per cent in 2018. Prior to the 2018 digitalised voter registration phase, voter apathy amongst the youth had become rampant due to mistrust in the manually managed process. The increase in the rate of youth registration can be attributed to the trust the youths placed in digitalised voter registration in Zimbabwe. Hence, the further innovation in Zimbabwe's electoral system by adopting full scale election management could further strengthen democratic elections in the country.

Even though election technology has its challenges, it should be understood and accepted as a relevant twenty-first century solution to twenty-first problems in Zimbabwe. In this day and age, all aspects of life and society are digitalised. This extends to elections. Be that as it may, reforming the electoral system in Zimbabwe outside the context of digitalising election management is like musing without instruments.

This is because digitalising election management provides an effective way for political competitors and the citizenry to check and verify the accuracy of election data (Pran and Merloe 2007: 21). Adding to this assertion, Magaisa (2017) maintains that the BVR system offers more precision in the verification process which would reduce the turning away of voters. In the final analysis, it can be argued that it is imperative to adopt full scale digitalised election management in Zimbabwe.

It is imperative to accompany full scale election management digitalisation in Zimbabwe with policy and legal frameworks as part of wider electoral reforms. This entails having the correct administrative system, the right value system and political will to make this work. Even though it appears that there were more political factors to undermine the BVR system in the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe, the underlying factor is the absence of electoral reforms to complement the biometric system. As a recommendation for the future, there is an urgent need to adopt policy and legal reforms prior to embarking on full scale digitalisation of elections in the country. This is against the background of the politicisation of electoral processes in the country in the pursuit of authoritarian politics that are ideologically justified along anti-imperialist explanations.

While there is a need to guard against neo-colonial tendencies associated with the Western machination of digitalising election management, there is also a need to check and limit the power hunger-induced authoritarian

ideology propagated by ZANU PF. To deal with this quagmire, a balance should be struck between national interests and democratic reforms. This calls for political will on the part of the government to institute policy and legal reforms that make ZEC an independent election management body and liberalisation of the Zimbabwean political environment.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that the partial digitalisation of election management in Zimbabwe has appeared disingenuous to the envisaged role of election technology in minimising electoral fraud. This is attributable to the trajectory of political power configurations and ideological issues in Zimbabwe. Discrepancies such as the existence of 250,000 ghost voters in the 2018 voters' roll, failure by ZEC to avail the voters' register on time for verification, and the BVR intimidation strategy were influenced by these power politics dynamics in Zimbabwe. While the existence of issues such as margin of error in the voters' roll is inevitable, the existence of 'ghosts' in the voter register can arguably be attributed to a deliberate strategy to reposition the electoral process in favour of the incumbent political party. To leave no stone unturned, it suffices to stress the argument that the Zimbabwean government's quagmire to counter neo-colonial advances is also at the apex of the seemingly undemocratic practices in the way the electoral machinery operates.

From the above, it can be argued that the clash between democratisation in the context of reforming the electoral system by digitalising elections through adopting BVR and pursuing a political strategy hinged on survival has made the adoption of biometric registration a pseudo-democratic transition and contorted delirium. The adoption of the technology in the Zimbabwean context emanated from the contention that ZANU PF has undue influence on the electoral process and outcome, including in the constitution of ZEC, the voting calendar, voter register, and funding of the infrastructure for the conduct and transmission of election results. This influence, it has been maintained, has been giving the political party undue advantages over their opponents.

In the end, the manual electoral processes came in for blame for compromising the credibility of the electoral process and outcomes. The solution to this was espoused as adopting electoral reforms including digitalising voter registration. However, with adoption of the BVR system, the question that still lingers is: do digital technologies have the capacity to limit electoral fraud at the level of voter registration and manipulation of

final counts and to ensure popular will is exercised? This question cannot be comprehended independently of how the electoral body and election support institutions and procedures in the country in question are organised and structured.

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Interrogating the Cost of Digital Technology and Trust in Elections in Africa: The Nigerian Perspective

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Abstract

The adoption of technology in electoral democracy in Africa has been on the increase. The introduction of technology has its positive consideration but it also comes with cost and trust implications, which is a paradox. This study is a descriptive work which made use of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Election administration theory was adopted. To improve on the use of digital technologies, Africans should be mindful of the failure of digital checks and balances that often render an electoral process even more vulnerable to rigging than it was before. In designing new systems for election management, this article argues that Africans should look inward and integrate the new technologies into relevant environmental and cultural settings in order to reduce the cost while improving on the trust of electorates.

Keywords: elections, digital technology, democracy, cost, voting

Résumé

L'adoption de la technologie dans la démocratie électorale en Afrique est en pleine croissance. L'introduction de la technologie a ses aspects positifs, mais elle s'accompagne également de coûts et de problèmes de confiance, ce qui constitue un paradoxe. Cette étude est un travail descriptif qui a utilisé une analyse qualitative et quantitative. La théorie de l'administration électorale a été adoptée. Pour améliorer l'utilisation des technologies numériques, les Africains doivent être conscients de l'échec des contrôles et des équilibres numériques qui rendent souvent un processus électoral encore plus vulnérable à la fraude qu'il ne l'était auparavant. Dans le

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cadre de la conception de nouveaux systèmes de gestion des élections, cet article soutient que les Africains doivent faire un examen interne et intégrer les nouvelles technologies dans des contextes environnementaux et culturels pertinents afin de réduire les coûts tout en améliorant la confiance des électeurs.

Mots-clés : élections, technologie numérique, démocratie, coût, vote

Introduction

The crux of every true democracy is achieving a free and fair election. In the last two decades, there has been an astounding global craze in the deployment of digital technologies in the conduct of elections – a trend that is pellucid in Africa and Asia. Obviously, the twenty-first century is truly the golden age of technology where technology has revolutionised so many aspects of our lives and humanity including the conduct of elections. The United States of America, for instance, introduced their voting technology in the late nineteenth century to make elections more accurate, while in 2002 the US congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and created the U.S Election Assistant Commission to distribute nearly US$ 3 billion in federal funds to update state and local voting systems. In Africa, roughly half of all national-level elections now involve the use of digital equipment of some form, most notably biometric voter registration/identification and electronic results transmission (Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis 2018). In the words of Lord Malloch-Brown, many of the democratic challenges faced around the world are the same for rich and poor countries alike. As of 2013, thirty-four of the world's low- and middle-income countries had adopted biometric technology as part of their voter identification system like in Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal and Mauritania varying degrees of successes in improving transparency in their elections. Nigeria has equally had a history of poorly conducted elections which in most cases ended in violence and loss of lives. This has created profound scepticism amongst the citizens about the utility of the entire electoral democracy. During the 2015 election in Nigeria, there was the deployment of biometrics to identify, register and verify voters and this initially brought trustworthiness and reliability. In 2007, M2SYS technology (Which is a global biometric identification management company that provides biometric identity management software and hardware) provided the Nigerian government with 10,000 fingerprint scanners and biometric software to help register over 20 of 71 million

voters for their biometric voter registration exercise. The cost of these items alone, the registration process and the cost of the entire electoral process in Nigeria have been overwhelming.

Between 1999 and 2018, the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) received N730.99 billion as budgetary allocations. In 1999, the electoral expenditure started at N1.5 billion, increasing to N29 billion in 2002, N45.5 billion in 2006, N111 billion in 2010, and coming down to N87.8 billion in 2014. In 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari also presented a budget of N242 billion for the elections. Painfully, most of the huge funds spent in these elections by INEC are unaccounted for; neither are they reflected in the system, as the elections are often poorly conducted. The 2015 Afrobarometer survey report on the Nigerian election record reported that Nigerians held mixed views of INEC. Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of the voters believed that INEC was 'ready to conduct credible free and fair election' but overall trust in the institution was limited, with only 35 per cent saying they trust INEC 'somewhat' or 'a lot' (Daniel, Mbaegbu and Lewis 2015). Elections, obviously, are important and indispensable elements of modern representative government and for democratisation. This is because elections are a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office and make a fundamental contribution to democratic governance. Accordingly, 'elections are so clearly tied to the growth and development of representative democratic government that they are now generally held to be the single most important indicator of the presence or absence of such government' (Nnoli 2003). The main questions remain: why does the procurement and use of these expensive digital technologies not guarantee more trust from the electorate? Do Nigerians still have confidence in the electoral authorities and the quality of the electoral process?

ICT-driven elections and not ICT-aided elections where huge resources are invested in the procurement of the ICT equipments making the cost of elections high have become the norm in Africa. This study problematised the cost of the use of digital elections in modern day democracies in Africa, while evaluating the impact of adoption of digital technology in electoral management on the integrity of electoral outcomes and seeking to answer why, despite digitalisation of electoral management, the integrity of electoral outcomes has not been enhanced and such outcomes still remain contested in many African countries, while also suggesting possible ways of improving on African elections to achieve true and robust democracy.

Methodology

The data for this article was derived from a descriptive research that utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected key respondents based on purposive sampling technique. In all, thirty respondents (comprising ten INEC officials and twenty electorates) were interviewed and they all differently participated in three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The selected sample was based on expertise, active and non-active participation in the political process in Nigeria. Survey method was applied where FGDs were conducted with some key INEC officials and in-depth case studies from some selected zones in the country on the happenstances during the elections. The cost variables were identified and sources of funding for the elections were cross-tabulated with the election budgets and cost management practices of INEC between 2011 and 2019 when digital technology was introduced into the electoral process in Nigeria. This was supported by the fact that the Cost of Registration and Elections (CORE) examines the cost management practices, such as procurement arrangements for equipment, services and supplies.

The CORE project equally uses two analytical tools to examine election costs: case studies which provide dynamic analysis of election finances, while the survey results reported the baselines and quantifications. The Afrobarometer surveys were utilised in eliciting more concrete information on elections conducted across Africa. Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than thirty countries in Africa. Their data have been a valuable resource for Africa's development. Drawing from recent Afrobarometer survey data covering more than thirty countries across Africa's main geographical regions, we found that Africans want open elections and, for the most part, think they are getting them. More importantly, popular support for elections is the perceived freedom and fairness of the balloting process (Bratton and Bhoojedhur 2019). The information produced by Afrobarometer is expected, at the end of the day, to be helpful to policymakers, analysts, activists, investors, donors, teachers and scholars, as well as average Africans who wish to become more informed and engaged citizens. Deductive and content analysis was utilised for data analysis.

Theory of Electoral Administration

Election administration, according to this theory, is analysed as a mechanism through which elites can manipulate the political system to maintain power and ensure elite renewal. It is also the administrative procedure used for casting votes and compiling the electoral register and a key site of struggle between elites and citizens for power. Electoral administration is just one set of electoral institutions subject to rule-making – the procedures used to allow citizens to register and cast their votes. Jean-Jacques Rosseau in 1712 in his concept of the 'social contract' postulated that sovereignty not only originates in the people but it continues to stay with them in the civil society. People give their consent to vest their sovereignty in the 'general will' which represents their own higher self. Again, there has been an enormous international investment in elections and electoral management round the world, as the professionalisation of elections has been set as a priority by key commissions such as Kofi Annan's Global Commission on Elections.

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights spent approximately €307 million on over 700 projects relating to democracy promotion between 2007 and 2010, much of which was spent on electoral assistance. In Nigeria, managing elections by INEC has been faced with a hurricane of interests from politicians, Electoral Commissions and also the public. Hence instead of the frontiers of democratisation expanding, elections are seem to have become a tool used to limit the democratic space (Ake 2000). The Nigerian government equally has been spending incredible sums of money to fund INEC in the administration and conduct of elections but the elections are always marred with a lot of irregularities. Delivering well-run elections is therefore important to ensuring that public money is spent well.

Problems with the delivery of elections are not uncommon and found in established democracies alongside electoral autocracies and transitioning democracies (Toby 2020). The performance of electoral management bodies in the conduct of elections can make the difference between an election that is accepted with an orderly transition of power and an election result that is challenged with ensuing problems of violence or societal instability. Defects in electoral management and their widespread reporting can quickly ebb away at public confidence in democratic institutions. And studies have revealed that in a number of high profile elections, administrative errors in election administration can compromise faith and trust in democratic institutions. Moynihan (2004), suggested that some high technology solutions to election administration may be error prone. Even though the

Nigerian government is relying so much on electronic voting, they should be wary of the fact that electronic voting systems have been criticised for being 'unsafe' or prone to hacking. If this is the case then such election administration could compromise the integrity of the election. As Massicotte, Blaise and Yoshinak (2004) note, there is 'no unique way to conduct free and fair elections'. On that note, Alvarez and Hall (2006) suggest that problems with the implementation of election administration can be understood through a principal–agent approach.

It is of note that electoral cost, fraud, violence and rigging, no matter the yardstick, normally negate the norms and values of democracy and hence do not advance electoral democracy and trust by the electorate (Afolabi 2011). Rousseau, Sim, Ronald et al. (1998) see trust as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another. Levi (1998) points out the perception that government is untrustworthy is a function not only of its failure to fulfil promises but also of evidence that government agents distrust those from whom they are demanding cooperation and compliance. According to Yang (2005), in order to improve on citizens' trust in government, one has to improve on government's trust in citizens. He argues further that trust is not a piece of knowledge that can be imparted, but has something to do with habit, mindset and root.

Literature Review

Nature and Cost of Elections in Nigeria

Searching for an effective electoral process has taken a long time in Nigeria and been an integral part of the transition to democracy. Today, many electoral management bodies (EMBs) around the world have resorted to the use of new digital technologies with the aim of improving on their electoral processes. These technologies range from the use of basic office automation tools such as word processing and spreadsheets to more sophisticated data processing tools, such as database management systems, biometric voter registration machines, optical scanning and geographic information systems (ACE project, 2018). It has been observed that most technological solutions cost significantly more than the equivalent manual processes that they replace. In Nigeria, the nature, costs and type of elections conducted in recent times are creating a kind of scepticism among Nigerians about the essence of electoral democracy.

The electoral history of Nigeria since independence in 1960 has been on a persistent downturn accompanied by huge human and material losses

in the electoral process. Equally, conducting elections in Nigeria has been high-cost coupled with political instability fuelled by an electoral process in crisis. The situation is such that both the politicians and the electorates have continued to perpetuate the worst forms of political processes which are characterised by incidences of political violence, snatching of ballot boxes, electoral malpractices, rigging both at political party levels and General Elections, and vote-buying. For instance, the problems associated with the first post-independence national election of 1964 and the 1965 Western Region election culminated in the 15 January 1966 coup which was characterised by a wide range of violence and killings. Subsequent elections in Nigeria have not fared better. Okonjo (1974) has provided one of the most compelling accounts of the historical processes of state formation in Nigeria. This account locates the dynamics of the character of politics in the post-independence years in at least two sets of interrelated factors. The first was the deep division and tension between the colonial administrators on the relationship that should exist between the North and the South after the amalgamation of the two protectorates in 1914. The second was the desire of the British to secure and preserve the Nigerian nation state as a safe haven for British economic and political interests in the postcolonial years. To these two, we must add a third dynamic which originated from the interaction between the first two – the failure of the colonialists to produce an indigenous ruling class with the economic credentials needed to support and push its envelope of political power after independence in 1960.

The 1979 elections that saw the emergence of Mallam Shehu Shagari as a civilian president was criticised by international observers as having been also massively rigged. The 1983 election, four years later, was marred by corruption, political violence and polling irregularities; resulting to another military regime seized power citing electoral malpractices as one of its reasons for overthrowing the civilian government. The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, three elections conducted during this period of ten years of Nigeria's democracy, were criticised by many as being far from free and fair. In fact, the election of April 2007 was conducted by the then electoral body, INEC. Perhaps the freest and fairest election in the history of Nigeria was the 12 June 1993 election where late Moshood Abiola emerged the winner but was later annulled by the then Nigerian President, General Ibrahim Babangida. During those periods, INEC, a body established for conducting elections in Nigeria had employed a number of innovative approaches to improve election management in the country. As years passed by, INEC introduced more sophisticated approaches including the use of modern

technologies in order to meet international standards. In recent times, there has been an outstanding and remarkable increase in the use of digital technologies in the conduct of elections, especially in Asia and Africa.

In Africa, roughly half of all national-level elections now involve digital equipment of some form, most notably biometric voter registration/identification and electronic results transmission (Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis 2018). The newly introduced digital technology is seen and believed to be a fix, and able to compensate for the state's weaknesses, shun malpractices and achieve free, fair and credible elections. But the extent to which that has been achieved is still questionable. Consequently, it is most appropriate to call attention to the processes and the tools of managing elections in Africa and Nigeria in particular. An examination of the character of elections in Nigeria must thus deal with these issues, not simply in a theoretical sense but more in terms of the way in which they have functioned over the period. It is particularly important in this regard that such an examination deals with not one but all elections that have occurred in the context in order to discover underlying dynamics and thus to be sure that in suggesting the way forward, it deals, not with symptoms but with causes (Iyayi 2004). Analysis of official documents of INEC's budgetary allocations has shown that the elections cost have been soaring since the country's return to democracy in 1999. From 1999 to 2018, INEC had received a total of about N730.99 billion as budgetary allocations from the federal government (Abdallah 2018). The pre-election phases and election management costs are always enormous. In the 2019 election alone for instance, a total of about N189.2 billion was the expended on INEC alone while most Nigerian citizens are living on less than one dollar a day.

'Core' Cost of Elections in Nigeria 2011–19

Nigeria with UNESCO's 2020 estimated population of about 200 million is the most populous black nation in the world. The enormous land mass covering up to thirty-six states and 774 local government areas makes the cost of conducting elections very high. Also, the absence of a liberal culture and the intense competition for state power, with election-related violence, increase the cost of elections. Electoral cost is used to mean the main expenses that go into election preparation and execution. This include: voter registration, boundary delimitation, the voting operation, counting and transmission of results, dispute adjudication, voter education and information, campaigning by political parties and candidates, and vigilance or oversight by party representatives and domestic or international

observers. It differs from country to country depending on the make-up of the economy. Election costs entail fixed costs which are the category of costs that are concerned with the expenditure on the ordinary functioning of an electoral administration; these costs are incurred independently of the occurrence of elections in a given year. Then we have the variable costs which include those related to the actual conduct of elections. Almost the entire budget for a specific election consists of variable costs. A distinction is also made in the literature between integrity costs and core costs (CORE Project). This distinction may be essential for an adequate understanding of the funding of elections. Integrity costs are generally concerned with expenditures on things like the security arrangements for registration and polling places. They are those costs, over and above the core costs, that are necessary to provide safety, integrity, political neutrality, and a level playing field for an electoral process. They may also include funding for international personnel serving as part of the electoral administration; tamper-resistant electoral materials necessitated by a low level of trust among contenders; long-term electoral observer missions; intensive voter education campaigns; and election publicity and so on. Then those costs routinely associated with carrying out elections are designated as core costs. They have to do with voter lists, voting materials, competence among polling officials, voter information, and organisational and logistical arrangements. Core costs are assumed to be fixed while the integrity costs are incurred when special and often unexpected expenses are required to ensure that the process works efficiently. The CORE Project evaluates budgets of EMBs in order to identify budgeting practices and techniques that influence cost control and transparency and identifies the revenue sources for funding the administration of election processes. Some cost effectiveness can be expected in political party finance by filling the legal vacuum prevailing in so many countries on issues such as expense limits and disclosure regulations (Lopez-Pintor and Fischer 2005).

Core costs as a whole tend to increase rather than decrease independently according to the degree of democratic consolidation especially in the areas of personnel and advanced technology. One main cause of this in emerging democracies is the sheer institutionalisation of a permanent professional electoral administration, which in most countries is a bureaucratic organisation in the form of an Electoral Commission independent of the executive branch. We are going to discuss the core costs of some election years between 2011 and 2019 in Nigeria when the use of digital election started.

Table 1: Attributes and examples of electoral core, diffuse, and integrity costs

Attributes	Core costs	Diffuse costs	Integrity costs
	Core costs are the type of cost that covers the basic costs of the election. For instance the basic costs of voter information, printing of ballot papers, voting, counting, and transmission of the results. The core costs are usually identifiable in the budget of the EMB or other authorities responsible for other electoral tasks during the election. Again, it may be difficult to integrate and quantify the core costs if they are split between several agencies.	Diffuse costs are the costs of those support services for electoral events provided by other agencies. These include services like the police, voter data provided by civil registration agencies, logistical support provided by the government, such as transportation and venue, statistical IT services, and payment of teachers and other support staff and polling officials. It may not be possible to separate other election related costs. They may equally be difficult to quantify as they are often contained within the general budgets of several agencies.	Integrity costs can be categorised into those additional costs made to ensure the integrity of the fragile electoral processes. These include the use of security measures like the indelible ink and tamper-proof containers, external processing of electoral registers, and special security papers for printing ballot papers. Election-related costs of international peace keeping missions. Political equity costs such as funding of party campaigns, and media monitoring.

Source: http://aceproject.org, accessed 5 July 2019

A Breakdown of the Various Costs of General Elections in Nigeria 2011–19

Table 2: 2011 General Election in Nigeria

No.	Amount	Expended on
1	N66.3 billion	Recurrent expenditure
2	N56.6 billion	Capital expenditure
Total	**N122.9 billion**	

Source: Idowu (2011)

In the 2011 General Election, a total of N122.9bn was spent on the conduct of the election but initially, N131.4 billion was budgeted. The breakdown is in Table 2 above.

This was a budget for 73.5 million eligible voters where N33.5 billion was budgeted to be used in the procurement of Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs). But in 2012, N 2.6 billion was finally approved for the production. The figure in the above estimate includes both direct and indirect expenses. The direct costs include voter registration (including the purchase of 132,000 direct data capture (DDC) machines), voting operations (materials, logistics and training), the counting and transmission of results, and voter education and information (Anaro 2011).

Table 3: 2015 General Election budget

No.	Amount	Expended on
1	N15.6 billion	Presidential/Governorship runoffs
2	N14.1 billion	Honorarium for ad hoc staff
3	N10.5 billion	For electoral hazards
4	N8 billion	For ballot papers
5	N6 billion	Ad hoc staff training
6	N5 billion	For ballot boxes
Total	**N59.2 Billion**	**For INEC budget alone**

Source: Daniel, Mbaegbu and Lewis (2015)

From Table 3, a total of N108.8 billion was approved for the conduct of the 2015 General Elections. The INEC expenditures are included in Table 3.

Table 4: The 2019 General Election budget

No.	Amount	Expended on
1	N80 million	Procurement of ballot boxes
2	N65 million	Ballot papers for 29 governors
3	N28 million	Payment for election workers
4	N35 million	For printing of ballot boxes
5	N4,361,970	For printing of result sheets
6	N1 billion	For printing of stickers, t-shirts and pamphlets
7	N850 million	For eventualities
8	N500,000.00	Procurement of kits and accredited election observers
9	N630 million	To monitor primaries across the country
10	N4.2 billion	National security advisers
11	N12.2 billion	Department of state services
12	N3.5 billion	Nigerian immigration services
13	N1000 per day	For feeding 2.7 million workers nationwide

Source: Akinkwuotu and Aluko (2019)

This is the breakdown of 2019 General Election expenditures. A total of about N242,445,322,600 billion was approved.

These figures vary according to different versions of reports. But it has been observed that the 2019 General Election had an increase of about N69 billion compared to the 2015 election budget. This expenditure was widely criticised by the head of Transparency International, Musa Rafsanjani, where he said that the expenditure was so high irrespective of the fact that most of the facilities used for the 2015 elections ought to be utilised.

Analysis

Nigeria, with an estimated population of about 200 million people, is an enormous land mass covering thirty-six states with 774 local government areas. This expansiveness make the cost of conducting elections high with so many implications. Again, the absence of a liberal culture, ethnic cleavages and intense competition for state power, and election-related violence increase the cost of election in the country. The high costs of these elections are often justified on the basis of initial high costs of putting infrastructure and personnel into place. The Nigerian government, for instance, approved the above tabulated estimated sums for the INEC expenditures alone between the year 2011–19 when GDP was worth US$ 397.30 billion in 2018, annual GDP growth rate -13.77 per cent, and GDP per capita

$2,396.30. This is quite ironical. Due to logistics problems, the first scheduled 2019 Presidential Election was postponed for one week and this postponement is estimated to have cost the economy $2.2 billion. The report said Nigeria's election agency spent about $625 million in the country's 2015 General Elections. In Kenya, for instance, the 2007 post-election mayhem saw growth rates fall from 7.1 to 1.7 per cent in 2008. Despite holding one of Africa's most expensive polls in 2017, the economy also shed 1 per cent of GDP due to disputes and prolonged electioneering (Dahir and Kazeem 2019). Nigeria's $625 million was spent on funding expenditure that included information technology systems and infrastructure; maps and voter lists preparation; training for returning officers and field and special events staff. Taking a comparative analysis of other developed countries with less population, Canada, for instance, spent $375 million on electoral expenditure where 17.5 million voted. The United Kingdom spent about £113 million during its 2010 parliamentary elections in which 45.6 million voted. £28.6 million was the cost of distributing candidates' mailings, and £84.6 million for the conduct of the poll (Abdallah 2018). These figures expose the amount of money lost across the world only for the conduct of elections by the electoral management bodies.

It is a paradox that irrespective of the huge sums spent on elections in Africa, the integrity of electoral outcomes has not been enhanced and such outcomes still remain contested.

Nigerian Constitution and Election Financial Regulatory Framework

The framework governing political campaign finance in Nigeria is the Electoral Act. According to section 91(2) and 91(3) of the Electoral Act, the maximum election expenses to be incurred by a candidate at a presidential and governorship election shall be one billion naira only in elections. But the extent this Act is adhered to is questionable in the Nigerian electoral system. The Nigerian elections are regulated by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended). However, the political regulation has been repeatedly defined and redefined since the 1999 transition to civil rule. By 2019, the country had several versions of the Electoral Act, viz. 2002, 2006 and 2010. The Electoral Act 2006, drawing on section 226 and 227 of the 1999 Constitution, expands the functions of INEC to include:

- conduct of 'voter and civic education',
- promotion of 'knowledge of sound democratic election processes', and
- conduct of 'any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 Constitution or any other law/Act of the national Assembly'.

INEC is funded directly by a federation account under the current procedure of funding the Commission directly from the consolidated Revenue Fund. The Commission is able to prepare its budget for approval, and thereafter it is disbursed directly to the Commission through the Independent National Electoral commission fund (INEC Fund) which was introduced in the 2006 and 2010 Electoral Acts. It is the establishment of this fund that helps the Commission to directly manage the usage of these funds. But in order to ensure adequate financial accountability, the Commission's budget is presented to the relevant committees of the National Assembly. This committee is also mandated to report to the office of the auditor general of the federation at the end of the year (Electoral Act, 2010). In the area of procurement of electoral materials, they are also expected to comply with the due process requirements through the Bureau of Monitoring, Prices and Intelligence Units (BMPIU). INEC, in turn, is expected to submit a report to the National Assembly.

Above all, it has been observed that the cost of politics is increasing by the day and is in upward trend when compared with the First Republic in Nigeria. INEC acknowledged this development when they reviewed the legal limits of election expenses because the amounts specified in the Electoral Act 2006 were doubled in the Electoral Act of 2010. This poses a question on the essence of electoral regulatory frameworks.

Summary

In essence, this work is novel given the fact that Nigeria and many other countries of the world have resorted to the use of digital technology as the preferred mechanism of conducting elections. Although the use of digital technology is supposed to guarantee electoral integrity, it is dependent on the limits of the technology deployed because these technologies can fail and are prone to being compromised. It is equally true that technology has revolutionised almost all aspects of our lives, like services, lifestyles and living standards but the issue of elections has been left behind especially in the aspect of boosting adequate participation and reduction of cheating in our electoral process.

In the 2011 General Election in Nigeria, the cost of the election was quite high. For instance INEC received a whopping N87.7 billion ($576.9 million) for the registration of about 70 million voters over a period of three weeks using biometric devices. During former Goodluck Jonathan's campaign, Abbah, Abdulhamid, Agbese et al. (2011) noted that the average cost of hiring the helicopter for his campaign was about N1.5 million per hour. The President's campaign team rented the helicopter for trips costing

an average of N20 million for each day it was used for the campaign (Buchanan and Sulmeyer 2016). The television and radio advertisements, where a three-hour live coverage on the National Television Authority (NTA) alone costs up to N10 million, a full-page colour advertisement on a national daily costs N450,000–N500,000, while the *Guardian Newspaper* put the cost of a wrap-around advertisement at N25 million. These things come under the core costs and are spent almost on a daily basis during the election period. Pat Utomi (a former Presidential aspirant of the Social Democratic Mega Party, SDMP) had complained that President Jonathan's campaign cost about N100 million a day. This is taxpayers' money which could have been used for developmental purposes. These patterns of expenditures are repeated in every election year.

The 2019 General Election conducted in Nigeria employed the use of digital technology but declaration of results in some states as inconclusive. To buttress this point, in some voting centres, it was reported that the card readers malfunctioned and were unable to identify voters. There were also outright abuses of their usage in some areas. These experiences suggest that these technologies are liable to increase popular suspicion of manipulation, and encourage complacency towards traditional forms of election oversight. Unfortunately, the country was deprived of the opportunity of taking advantage of this successful achievement to launch itself on the road to true democracy by the class that is interested in perpetuating itself in power (Abubakar 2015). In essence it can be seen that the concept of elections or the vote and the processes associated with it are seen to lie at the heart of a system of representative democracy. The other elements are the guarantee of civil and political liberties and the existence of an institutional arrangement or government whose function it is to maintain the aforementioned elements through, among other things, the rule of law (Iyayi 2004). As an index of the culture of politics in a context, these benchmarks also indicate that the integrity of the electoral process has major implications for the level of economic and social development that are possible or attainable in that context (Fayemi, Jaye and Yeebo 2003). As Ake (2001) had pointed out, both the failure of development and the failure to put development on the agenda in Africa are largely attributable to political conditions and lack of proper management of our elections.

Analysis so far presented in this article shows that, elections are generally expensive globally. This is common during election periods where the incumbents, individual contenders and emerging political parties embark on a spending spree as they try to impress voters and the public with big promises and their commitment to their welfare. Many years ago, and

especially from 2002 when the prospect of the 2003 elections emerged on the horizon, many voices expressed great hopes that given the historical experiences of the past, the incumbent governments in power would work to ensure that the elections would be conducted in such a way that they would lead to a strengthening of the prospects of representative democracy in Nigeria. Literature shows that politicians and political parties renege and renounce on their macroeconomic commitments and promises aftrer elections. They tend to expand the economy during election campaigns by pumping a lot of money into it in an attempt to woo myopic, illiterate and poor voters, although the long-term results are sub-optimal. This behaviour and actions in the end might provoke inflation when they are financed by deficit budgeting (Krause 2005). This situation is further aggravated by the cost of elections. Again in poor and most developing countries, a lot of the spending during election seasons goes into vote buying, ostentatious expenses like erecting expensive bill boards, printing of party dresses, party posters, settling rivalries and other unnecessary campaign processes. These usually involve the use by incumbents of public resources to gain an advantage over opponents in an intense competition for power. The introduction of digital technology into election management in Nigeria, for instance the use of card readers, the biometric system and a host of other new inventions as means of achieving these, strives for entrenchment of a true democracy. The experience of the 2019 General Election in Nigeria was not quite encouraging. But technology is not always the problem; the problem lies in having the right administrative system. A good administrative system will bring about good management of the entire system. Trust has to equally be there for it to be productive because this is a terrain which we don't have control of. Finally, we should also be conscious of the African environment, and develop our own knowledge production that will suit our environment instead of expensive imported technologies.

Recommendations

Nigeria's democracy is nascent, having emerged from more than three decades of military rule, which eroded many of the society's liberal values. The nature of the liberal culture has created intense competition among various ethnic groups and parties for control of state power and election-related violence, thereby increasing the cost of elections. In the light of the above, therefore, this work makes the following recommendations.

Irrespective of the above challenges facing the adoption of digital technology in our electoral systems, Nigeria must find ways of surmounting

these challenges and improving on the electoral systems. First, there must be a provision for enforcing the Electoral Acts. In Nigeria, the Uwais Commission had recommended the establishment of an electoral offences commission where electoral offenders can be punished to reduce electoral malpractices like flagrant violations of campaign spending limits as enshrined in the Electoral Act. For instance, in 2014 when twenty-one Governors donated N1.05 billion to their party ahead of the 2015 elections (David, Manu and Musa 2015), Section 91(2) of the Act reads:

> An individual or other entity shall not donate more than N1 million to any candidate.

Sub-section 10 of the same section adds that a presidential candidate

> who knowingly acts in contravention of this section commits an offence and on conviction is liable to a maximum fine of N1 million or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both (Electoral Act, 2010).

There is flagrant and reckless abuse of this section of the Electoral Act not only in Nigeria but across Africa. This makes its enforcement of the regulatory laws very necessary and urgent.

In the area of the use of digital technology in our elections, it is pertinent to know that cyber or digital elections offer some new and interesting possibilities in the conduct of our elections in Africa especially in the area of transparency, credibility and success of our elections. Irrespective of its cost, it is still far better than our previous manual electoral processes. There is high cost and vulnerability in the use of digital technology across the world. This stems from the fact that while cyber operations probably are more scalable than other previous efforts at electoral manipulations, election manipulation is less scalable than other kinds of cyber operations. Therefore:

- Nigeria and most African countries are undoubtedly playing from an underprivileged terrain. But above all, an improved e-voting pattern should be enhanced irrespective of being pernicious and negative in appearance and other shortcomings. The first issue is bridging the digital divide in order to bridge the gap between the urban and the rural areas. At the same time, there exists also the fear that there is an existing risk of hackers manipulating a voting machine in favour of a particular candidate. This is an obvious attack on integrity. The risk of the tabulation system has been already demonstrated in some cases. Like in Ukraine in 2014, where attackers deleted key files from the Election Commission's vote tallying computers a few days before the election forcing officials to rely on backups (Clayton 2014). Also, the 2013 hackers in the US caused the Associated Press's Twitter account to report that there had been a bombing in the White House and President Obama had been injured. These are challenges associated with the use of digital technology.

- For an e-voting system to survive, adequate network is always a barrier, especially in rural areas. There should be an alliance between the government and network providers on improving network services which will go a long way to reducing the costs of procuring electoral materials. Like it was said previously, the high cost of elections is justified on the cost of putting infrastructures and structures in place (like ballot boxes, excessive campaigning, registration costs etc.).

- Again, research has shown that more states have switched over to optical scanning systems after a wake of voting machine failures in 2000. This is also recommended for African countries because this is a situation where a voter marks a paper ballot that also serves as evidence for later verification. The major challenge in this area is that registration of digital technology is still very low in some parts of Africa. Paradoxically, some critical elections, such as Great Britain's referendum on leaving EU, were counted entirely by hand (Domonoske 2016).

- Another new invention is the use of 'Instavibe' in our electoral process. Instavibe is easy, mobile, incredibly fast live opinion gathering for groups of any size if we are to credibly take on the more ambitious projects. As voting becomes a frequent and functionless part of people's lives, it may lead to entirely new forms of election and decision-making process. Above all, Africans must explore a new pattern that will suit our peculiar environment and system, reduce the enormous cost and boost our nascent democracies. These investments in technology must be owned locally while our legal framework should be strengthened to enable us know where and how these technologies can be applied in our electoral process to reduce contention, lack of trust, and questioning.

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