

Assessment of Voters' Attitudes in the Aftermath of the 2023 General Election in Anambra State

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Abstract

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria, encompassing the presidential, National Assembly, and, at the state level in Anambra, gubernatorial by-election contexts, were conducted under a reformed electoral framework anchored in the Electoral Act 2022, which introduced the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and mandated electronic transmission of results. This paper assesses voters' attitudes in Anambra State in the aftermath of the 2023 general election, examining how the conduct, technology, and outcomes of the election shaped citizens' perceptions of electoral credibility, trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and broader political efficacy. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of political efficacy theory and expectancy-disconfirmation theory, and a qualitative synthesis of election observation reports, survey-based political attitude studies, and documented post-election commentary, the paper examines voter attitudes across four dimensions: perceptions of technological reliability, particularly regarding BVAS and result transmission; trust in electoral administration; satisfaction with electoral outcomes; and subsequent political engagement disposition. The paper finds that while the introduction of BVAS technology initially raised voter expectations regarding electoral transparency, documented technical difficulties and delays in results transmission on election day contributed to a disconfirmation effect that measurably dampened post-election trust in electoral administration among segments of the Anambra electorate, notwithstanding variation in attitudes linked to individual voters' preferred candidates' outcomes. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening technological reliability, transparency in electoral communication, and civic engagement mechanisms to rebuild and sustain voter trust ahead of subsequent electoral cycles.

Keywords: Voter attitudes, 2023 general election, Anambra State, electoral credibility, political trust

1. Introduction

Nigeria's 2023 general elections represented a significant test of the country's reformed electoral framework, introduced under the Electoral Act 2022, which established the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter verification and mandated the electronic transmission of polling unit results to INEC's centralized result viewing portal. These reforms were widely presented, both by INEC and civil society election observers, as measures intended to enhance the transparency, credibility, and public trust associated with the Nigerian electoral process, following decades of documented concerns about electoral malpractice, result manipulation, and voter disenfranchisement.

Anambra State, with its historically active civic culture and closely contested political landscape, provides a useful setting in which to examine how these reforms, and the broader conduct of the 2023 elections, shaped voter attitudes in their aftermath. This paper assesses voters' attitudes in Anambra State following the 2023 general election, asking: how did the conduct and technological administration of the 2023 election shape Anambra voters' trust in electoral institutions, satisfaction with outcomes, and subsequent disposition toward political engagement?

The paper proceeds as follows: section two reviews relevant literature on electoral trust, technology-enabled election administration, and post-election voter attitudes in Nigeria; section three presents the theoretical framework; section four outlines the methodology; section five discusses findings across four dimensions of voter attitude; and section six concludes with recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Electoral Reform and Technology in Nigeria

The introduction of BVAS and electronic result transmission under the Electoral Act 2022 has been extensively documented in the literature as a significant technological intervention intended to reduce opportunities for voter impersonation and result manipulation that had characterized earlier Nigerian election cycles. Pre-election studies and civil society assessments generally reported cautious optimism regarding these reforms, while also flagging concerns about the

adequacy of technical infrastructure, network connectivity in various parts of the country, and INEC's operational capacity to implement the new system nationwide without significant disruption.

2.2 Post-Election Voter Trust and Satisfaction

A broader body of comparative literature on post-election voter attitudes documents a well-established "winner-loser gap" in electoral trust, whereby supporters of winning candidates or parties report significantly higher levels of satisfaction with, and trust in, electoral processes than supporters of losing candidates, independent of the objective conduct of the election itself. This literature also documents the significant role of perceived procedural fairness, distinct from substantive outcomes, in shaping post-election trust, suggesting that transparent and consistent administration of voting and counting procedures can moderate the winner-loser gap even where outcomes are contested.

2.3 The 2023 Election in Anambra State

Election observation reports and post-election assessments specific to the 2023 general elections in Anambra State and the South-East region documented mixed experiences with the newly introduced technology, including instances of BVAS malfunction, delays in results upload to the INEC result viewing portal, and localized disputes over collation processes. These documented irregularities occurred alongside broader regional political dynamics, including the electoral performance of the Labour Party candidate in the presidential election, which enjoyed substantial support in Anambra and the wider South-East, a factor that existing literature on the winner-loser gap suggests would have independently shaped subsequent voter satisfaction and trust assessments among the Anambra electorate.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on political efficacy theory, which distinguishes between internal political efficacy, an individual's belief in their own capacity to understand and participate effectively in politics, and external political efficacy, the belief that political institutions are responsive to citizen input. This distinction is useful for disaggregating voter attitudes following the 2023

election into those concerning individuals' own electoral participation experience and those concerning broader institutional trust in INEC and the electoral system.

This is complemented by expectancy-disconfirmation theory, originally developed in consumer satisfaction research and subsequently applied to political and public service contexts, which holds that satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an experience is shaped not by the experience in isolation but by the gap between prior expectations and the outcome actually experienced. Applied to this paper, expectancy-disconfirmation theory helps explain why the heightened expectations generated by the introduction of BVAS technology may have amplified, rather than moderated, voter dissatisfaction where technical performance fell short of those expectations on election day.

4. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design based on a desk review and thematic synthesis of election observation reports from accredited domestic and international observer groups, INEC post-election communications, survey-based political attitude studies, and documented post-election commentary and analysis specific to Anambra State and the 2023 general election. Thematic analysis is applied to organize the review around four dimensions of voter attitude: perceptions of technological reliability, trust in electoral administration, satisfaction with outcomes, and subsequent political engagement disposition. This approach is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the inquiry and reliance on documented secondary evidence rather than original survey data collection.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Perceptions of Technological Reliability

The evidence reviewed indicates that Anambra voters' initial expectations regarding the BVAS system and electronic result transmission were generally favourable prior to the election, reflecting broader civil society messaging about the reforms' anti-manipulation potential. However, documented instances of technical malfunction and delays in results upload during the election itself appear to have produced a disconfirmation effect, consistent with expectancy-

disconfirmation theory, in which the gap between anticipated and actual technological performance generated disproportionate voter frustration relative to what might have been expected from a system with more modest pre-election expectations.

5.2 Trust in Electoral Administration

Findings suggest a measurable erosion of trust in INEC's administrative capacity among segments of the Anambra electorate following the 2023 election, linked particularly to perceived inconsistencies between the promised real-time electronic transmission of results and the delays actually experienced. This finding aligns with the external political efficacy dimension of the theoretical framework, reflecting a diminished belief among affected voters that electoral institutions performed as responsively and transparently as anticipated.

5.3 Satisfaction with Outcomes

Consistent with the winner-loser gap documented in the broader comparative literature, satisfaction with the 2023 election outcomes among Anambra voters appears to have varied significantly according to individual voters' preferred candidates' performance, with supporters of the Labour Party's presidential candidate, who performed strongly in Anambra and the South-East, generally reporting different satisfaction patterns than supporters of other parties. This variation underscores the importance of disaggregating post-election attitude assessment by prior political preference rather than treating the electorate as a homogeneous bloc.

5.4 Political Engagement Disposition

Finally, the findings point to a complex and somewhat divergent pattern in post-election political engagement disposition, with some segments of the electorate reporting increased scepticism toward future electoral participation linked to perceived institutional unreliability, while other segments, particularly younger voters mobilized during the 2023 cycle, appear to have retained a heightened baseline level of political interest and engagement relative to pre-2023 patterns. This divergence suggests that the 2023 election's aftermath in Anambra State produced neither uniform disillusionment nor uniform mobilization, but a mixed legacy contingent on individual voters' specific experiences and prior political orientation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has assessed voters' attitudes in Anambra State in the aftermath of the 2023 general election, finding that the introduction of BVAS technology and electronic result transmission shaped voter expectations in ways that, when not fully met in practice, contributed to measurable erosion of trust in electoral administration, moderated by the winner-loser gap linked to individual voters' preferred candidates' performance. The findings underscore the importance of managing technological expectations carefully in future electoral cycles, given the demonstrated capacity of unmet expectations to amplify, rather than simply reflect, voter dissatisfaction.

The paper recommends: first, INEC should prioritize demonstrable improvements in the technical reliability and contingency planning for BVAS and result transmission systems ahead of subsequent elections, alongside transparent, real-time communication with the public regarding any technical difficulties encountered; second, civil society and civic education programmes should work to calibrate public expectations regarding electoral technology in ways that are accurate rather than overstated, to reduce the risk of disconfirmation-driven dissatisfaction; third, targeted trust-rebuilding engagement should be directed at electorate segments reporting the sharpest post-election disillusionment, to mitigate risks of long-term political disengagement; and fourth, further empirical research, including direct survey-based measurement of Anambra voters' pre- and post-election trust and efficacy levels, is recommended to more precisely quantify the attitude shifts identified in this paper.

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