

2027 and the Politics of Uploading Election Results Electronically

by Kabir Akintayo

When Nigeria first introduced the Independent National Electoral Commission's Result Viewing Portal (IREV), it was sold to the public as more than a digital upgrade. It was a promise of transparency, speed and a break from the dark history of ballot snatching, altered figures and controversial collation centres. That promise began under former President Goodluck Jonathan, whose administration midwived early electoral reforms aimed at restoring credibility to the ballot. It was sustained under President Muhammadu Buhari, whose government presided over the deployment of technologies such as the BVAS and expanded electronic upload of results. Today, under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the debate over IREV and electronic transmission has become one of the most emotionally charged political conversations in recent times—not because Nigerians suddenly fell in love with technology, but because trust has once again been tested. The 2023 general election marked a turning point. INEC had repeatedly assured Nigerians that results from polling units would be uploaded in near real time to the IREV portal. For many voters, especially young Nigerians voting for the first time; this was the assurance that their votes would be protected beyond the polling unit. But when presidential election results failed to appear promptly on IREV, confusion quickly turned into anger. While results for other elections trickled in, the delay in uploading the most consequential contest raised suspicions. To many Nigerians, it felt like a breach of trust. The system that was meant to guarantee transparency appeared selective, and that perception alone was enough to deepen public cynicism. In a country where confidence in institutions is fragile, the IREV delay did not just raise technical questions—it reopened old wounds about whether elections are truly decided by voters or negotiated behind closed doors.

Against this backdrop, the Senate's initial decision to reject real-time electronic transmission of results struck a nerve. Protests followed, largely driven by opposition figures and civil society actors who saw the move as a retreat from progress. For many of these protesters, this was not abstract activism. Some of the loudest voices were politicians who once belonged to the ruling party and had since crossed over to the opposition. Having operated within the system, they claimed to understand the “antics” of election manipulation—how manual processes, they argued, could be exploited during collation. To them, abandoning e-transmission felt like reopening a door Nigerians had struggled for years to close. Former Transportation Minister Rotimi Amaechi's presence at the National Assembly protest symbolized this sentiment. It was not just opposition-versus-government politics; it was insiders warning the public about a system they once helped run. The protests themselves were modest in number. There were no nationwide shutdowns or massive crowds. Yet their symbolism was powerful. In a democracy where apathy is common, even limited. In a rare U-turn, lawmakers rescinded their earlier decision and amended Clause 60(3) of the Electoral Act Amendment Bill. The new position permits electronic transmission of results to IREV, but allows manual collation using Form EC8A as a fallback where technology fails.

To supporters, it was proof that public pressure still matters. To critics, it was a compromise that solved little. Despite public enthusiasm for e-transmission, experts caution against blind faith in technology. Nigeria's digital history offers sobering lessons. From banking apps that trap funds for days, to nationwide examination glitches, to repeated national grid collapses, electronic systems in the country are far from fail-proof. Network outages, delayed uploads and power failures remain everyday realities, especially in rural communities. There are also concerns about cybersecurity. Hackers, weak software development, and poor government IT infrastructure raise fears that electronic systems could be compromised if not properly secured. Critics argue that a hacked server could be just as dangerous as a compromised collation officer. These realities form the backbone of the Senate's argument: that manual results must remain valid where electronic transmission is impossible. Political scientists warn that forcing exclusive reliance on technology without fixing infrastructure could create chaos if results cannot be declared promptly.

Beyond technology lies the deeper issue—trust. Many Nigerians no longer separate INEC from the government of the day. Fairly or unfairly, the commission is often viewed as an extension of the incumbent administration. This perception, shaped by past elections and court battles, fuels suspicion whenever discretion is left in official hands. The amended Clause 60(3), which allows INEC to fall back on manual results in cases of “communication failure,” has therefore unsettled opposition parties. To them, discretion is the problem. Ambiguity, they argue, creates loopholes that can be exploited. As the ADC and PDP have insisted, credibility does not rest on assurances but on clear, unambiguous guarantees that limit human interference. The Senate's current position attempts to walk a tightrope, acknowledging public demand for electronic transmission while recognizing Nigeria's infrastructural weaknesses.

By adopting both electronic and manual processes, lawmakers argue they have balanced idealism with realism. For some Nigerians, this compromise is an appeal to common sense. For others, it is a half-measure that still leaves room for manipulation. Yet one thing is clear: the debate has shifted power, however slightly, back to the people. The Senate's reversal, prompted by public outcry, and reinforced an important democratic lesson: even in a flawed system, citizen pressure can still force a rethink. In the end, Nigeria's e-transmission controversy is not really about servers, networks or portals. It is about confidence in elections, in institutions, and in the idea that democracy still belongs to the people. Until that confidence is restored, every amendment, every clause and every election result will continue to be scrutinized not just for what it says, but for what Nigerians fear it might hide.