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Improvement of Biometric Voter Registration System Through Real-Time Integration with National Civil Registry Systems: A Case Study of Kenya

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Abstract: To strengthen electoral integrity and transparency, the global electoral landscape is shifting towards the adoption of biometric voter registration (BVR) systems to curb duplicate registrations and voter impersonation. While effective in improving internal electoral security, their full potential is realized when seamlessly integrated with continuously updated national civil registry systems. Global experiences reveal varied integration models, successes, and persistent gaps. In Kenya, BVR system adoption marked a major step in electoral modernization. Although the current BVR system demonstrates advanced capabilities in biometric data capture and internal deduplication, it suffers from four key problems: it can register illegal (unverified) voters, retain deceased voters, capture mismatched details, and create duplicate entries. These problems stem from the absence of seamless, real-time integration with foundational civil registries that would enable the system to verify citizenship at the point of registration, systematically flag deceased voters post-registration, and instantly combat duplicate entries. This study developed an improved model of the BVR system whose core operation is integrated in real-time with the national civil registry systems to facilitate maintenance of accurate register of voters. The study applied Design Science Research methodology to formulate and evaluate the improved model architecture. A prototype was developed and tested with simulated data, demonstrating improved accuracy and efficiency in voter register maintenance. The findings offer both a practical solution for election bodies and a framework for designing robust, data-integrated systems in electoral contexts.

Keywords: biometric voter registration, electoral integrity, real-time data exchange, civil registry, voter roll accuracy

1. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of biometric voter registration (BVR) systems is transforming electoral processes worldwide, driven by the need to enhance electoral integrity and transparency while combating duplicate registrations and voter impersonation. Many countries capture multimodal biometric data such as facial images and fingerprints, with some also capturing iris scans and recording signatures.

In Kenya, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has deployed BVR since 2012, registering millions of voters and achieving significant improvements in internal deduplication. However, the system operates in isolation from foundational civil registries, limiting its capacity to verify citizenship at registration and to automatically remove deceased voters. Instead, these tasks rely on audits and manual cross-checks with the national civil registry systems. The institutional separation of these bodies contributes to systemic inaccuracies as highlighted by a 2022 KPMG audit that revealed extensive discrepancies, including deceased voters, duplicate records, and invalid identity details [1]. These gaps underscore the urgent need for real-time integration between BVR systems and the national civil registry systems.

The main objective of the study was to develop an improved biometric voter registration system model whose operation is integrated in real-time with national civil registry systems. Due to legal and privacy constraints, the implementation was limited to a proof-of-concept prototype to simulate the benefits of this kind of integration.

2. REVIEW OF EXISTING BVR SYSTEM MODELS

Biometrics refers to body measurements and calculations related to unique human characteristics. These technologies enable the automated identification or verification of individuals based on distinct biological and behavioral traits, commonly categorized into physiological (e.g., fingerprints, facial features, iris patterns, and DNA) and behavioral (e.g., voice patterns, gait, and signature dynamics). Biometric identification has emerged as a key tool in enhancing the integrity and transparency of electoral systems globally. The increasing adoption of BVR is largely motivated by the need to eliminate duplicate registrations, prevent multiple voting, and deter impersonation, thereby fostering public confidence in electoral outcomes [2].

There are two broad categories of voter registration system models used in various countries: *state-initiated*, and *self-initiated*. **State-initiated** (automatic) registration systems, such as the case of Estonia and Peru, use national databases to enroll eligible citizens proactively, improving inclusiveness and reducing administrative costs. Conversely, **self-initiated** registration systems, such as the case Brazil, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and India, rely on individuals to register themselves, which may uphold data privacy but risk excluding marginalized populations due to barriers like remoteness or lack of awareness. The choice of linkage model reflects broader policy concerns, balancing efficiency, privacy, and inclusivity, and requires proper legal, institutional, and governance frameworks for successful implementation.

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2.1 Integration of Biometric Voter Registration with Civil Registries

Estonia provides the most advanced example, maintaining a dynamic voters' roll directly linked to the national population register. Every change in an individual's civil status automatically reflects in the electoral register, eliminating the need for periodic voter list cleanups [3]. **Brazil** integrates its biometric voter database with the national civil identification system, enabling cross-verification of identities and minimizing fraudulent registrations [4]. In **Peru**, the National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (RENIEC) plays a central role in both civil registration and electoral processes, ensuring consistency between the two datasets [5].

In the African context, **South Africa** (self-initiated) verifies registrants against the civil registry at the point of registration but does not maintain continuous integration, resulting in a static roll that requires periodic updates [6]. **India** attempted to link its voter database with the Aadhaar system under the National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP). However, the initiative was halted following legal challenges over privacy violations and concerns about mass disenfranchisement [7]. In **Ghana** and **Nigeria**, incremental integration efforts have been made, but challenges persist in harmonizing datasets due to infrastructural, institutional, and legislative barriers [8][9].

Effective integration depends on robust legal frameworks that define mandates, data-sharing protocols, and privacy protections. Countries with comprehensive data protection laws and strong institutional coordination tend to achieve smoother integration [10]. Technically, interoperability between electoral and civil registration databases requires standardized formats, secure data exchange mechanisms, and reliable connectivity [11].

A critical component in secure data integration is Privacy-Preserving Record Linkage (PPRL), which enables matching records from different databases without directly sharing sensitive personal identifiers. Techniques such as Bloom filters, secure multi-party computation, and cryptographic hashing are widely used to achieve privacy in linkage processes [12]. PPRL ensures that electoral bodies can cross-check voter data with civil registry records while minimizing the risk of exposing personally identifiable information (PII) [13]. Its application is particularly relevant in electoral contexts where trust, compliance with data protection laws, and safeguarding of citizen data are paramount.

2.2 The Kenyan Context: Rationale for Integration

Kenya's BVR system, managed by the IEBC, operates independently from the civil registration system, creating legal and operational silos that hinder real-time verification of citizenship and mortality. This lack of integration has led to inaccuracies in the voter register, including duplicate entries, mismatched details, and deceased individuals [14], necessitating costly, reactive manual audits that erode public trust and fuel perceptions of fraud [15].

International examples highlight potential solutions: Brazil ensures accuracy through a unified biometric identity system; Estonia achieves real-time synchronization and public trust via its digital identity infrastructure; Peru's RENIEC maintains lifecycle integrity by updating voter data with every civil event. South Africa's model, linking separate civil and voter registries through defined interfaces, shows that effective coordination and legal mandates can also deliver a credible register.

Learning from these experiences, Kenya has a compelling rationale to adopt an interoperable, rights-based identity ecosystem. Real-time integration with national civil registry systems would enable eligibility validation at registration and automatic updates upon death or loss of eligibility, reducing inefficiencies and disputes. Such reforms could align with digital ID initiatives like Huduma Namba and NIIMS if implemented with strong privacy and accountability safeguards [16].

3. METHODOLOGY

The study applied Design Science Research (DSR) methodology [17] to formulate and evaluate the improved model through a structured three-phase software model development process: *model design*, *prototyping*, *testing and evaluation*. Each phase was meticulously planned and executed to deliver a robust user-centered solution.

The *model design* phase laid the foundation for the entire development process. It began with a comprehensive analysis of existing system documentation, including technical specifications, domain-specific requirements, and user needs. These insights were consolidated into a Software Requirements Specification (SRS) document, which served as a blueprint for the system's architecture.

The study hypothesized that two modifications (figure 1) would address the limitations of the current system:

i. Real-time integration with civil registry reference data to verify citizenship at the point of registration (a) and to continuously flag deceased voters for removal post-registration (b).
ii. Incorporation of a data tracking module (c) utilizing registration logs to track captured records and to synchronize registration kits to prevent multiple registrations.

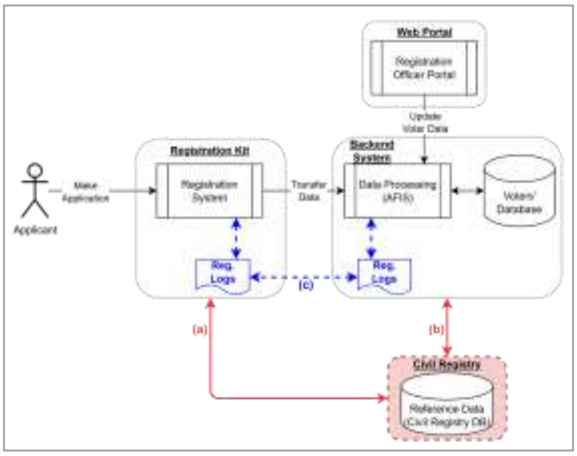

Figure 1. The Current System with Proposed Modifications

Upon completion of the design phase, the study progressed to *prototype development*, transforming the conceptual model into a working software application. The prototype was built using the Microsoft .NET technology stack, specifically: C# for application logic and SQL Server for data storage. A user interface was developed to simulate core tasks, gather feedback, and validate system behavior. This iterative loop between design, implementation, and user feedback was key to refining the solution and ensuring it met user expectations and operational needs.

As a final phase, we conducted *model functional testing and evaluation* using dummy data to simulate key test scenarios. The scenarios focused on three critical aspects: citizenship verification; voter existence and eligibility; and data traceability across the system. Test data represented three types of citizens: those with valid IDs and had not registered, those attempting to register using IDs of deceased citizens, and those with non-existent IDs.

The final analysis showed great improvements in error reduction, data quality assurance, and user satisfaction. These outcomes validated the model's value proposition and demonstrated its potential to significantly enhance the integrity of the BVR process.

4. THE IMPROVED BVR MODEL

The improved model, dubbed ***iBVR***, enhances the legacy BVR system by introducing robust data integration, identity validation, and data integrity mechanisms.

4.1 The Architecture of the Improved Model

Central to this design is an **Integration Layer** that bridges external civil data sources and the internal BVR components to facilitate both pre-registration identity verification and post-registration cleansing of voter rolls, especially with regard to deceased voters.

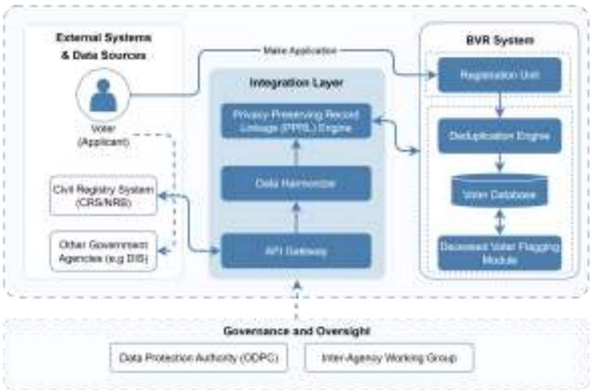

Figure 2. The iBVR System Architecture

The improved model architecture comprises three major domains: *External Systems and Data Sources*, the *BVR System*, and an *Integration Layer* governed by a Data Protection Authority (e.g., ODPC in Kenya) or an Inter-Agency Working Group to ensure data protection, regulatory compliance, and coordination among participating agencies.

The Integration layer is composed of an *API Gateway*, *Data Harmonizer* and a *Privacy-Preserving Record Linkage (PPRL) Engine*.

- *API Gateway* is the secure entry point that accepts incoming requests, authenticates and routes them to the right processing units to fetch the necessary data.
- *Data Harmonizer* standardizes and reconciles data from multiple formats and schemas into a common structure to ensure consistency within the integrated architecture.
- *Privacy-Preserving Record Linkage (PPRL) Engine* matches voter registration data with civil registry data using secure, non-reversible cryptographic techniques such as hashing or encryption to protect personally identifiable information (PII). It determines if the applicant is already registered, deceased, or otherwise ineligible, and ensures that only valid and matched records are processed further.

The BVR system backend includes a *Deduplication Engine*, a *Voter Database*, and a newly introduced *Deceased Voter Flagging Module*.

- *The Deduplication Engine* prevents multiple registrations using biometric comparisons.
- *The Deceased Voter Flagging Module* continuously checks synced civil registry data to update the status of deceased individuals, ensuring the voter roll remains current.

4.2 Model Behavior

The BVR system comprises three primary units: the Registration Unit, the Data Processing Unit, and a Web Portal. Figure 3 illustrates the modifications (labeled 1–4) to the existing internal system workflow:

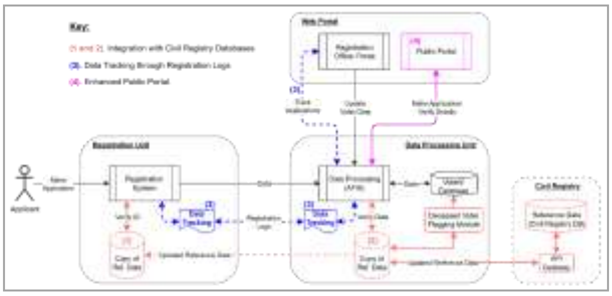

Figure 3. The Improved BVR System Model Workflow

These enhancements improved the system in the following ways:

i. *Civil Registry Integration with Registration Unit (Label 1):* Upon entry of an ID number, the system queries the civil registry in real-time. If the identity is valid, personal details are auto-populated, reducing manual entry errors. The Registration Officer (RO) then captures the applicant's biometrics, contact information, and electoral area. Before submission, biometric verification checks are performed as a final identity validation step. This eliminates ghost IDs, improves data accuracy, and reduces registration time.

ii. *The real-time integration with the Data Processing Unit (Label 2)* to enhance the detection and flagging of deceased voters, enabling the RO to act promptly unlike in the current system, which relies on post-registration audits.

iii. *Data Tracking Modules (Label 3):* The introduction of data tracking modules allowed traceability of records from registration to database entry, enabling the detection and recovery of lost data. These modules also prevented duplicate registrations by synchronizing data across registration kits in real-time.

iv. *Enhanced Public Portal (Label 4):* Though not explicitly shown on the architectural diagram, the public-facing portal was also upgraded to allow voters to initiate registration requests, track registration status, and review submitted registration data. The aim was to improve transparency and support logistical planning, especially for diaspora registration.

The Registration Unit is deployed both via field kits and the web portal. An applicant presents an identification document (national ID or passport) and the Registration Officer (RO) initiates a search to determine if the ID exists in the voter register. If found, it means the voter is already registered and the process is halted. If not found, the system queries the civil registry to verify the document. Only verified identities proceed. The system then auto-fills applicant details, and the RO captures biometrics, contact information and assigns an electoral unit selected by the applicant.

The final data is shown to the applicant for verification and confirmation via biometric authentication before submission. A registration number is issued upon successful submission.

This registration process can be expressed mathematically in the steps below:

Let's denote the following:

$\boldsymbol{u}$: applicant's voterID.

$\boldsymbol{R}$: set of registered voterIDs.

$\boldsymbol{A}$: set of civil registry reference IDs.

$\boldsymbol{V(u)}$: a function that returns true if the applicant confirms their details.

Steps:

If $\boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{R}$, then terminate.

If $\boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{A}$, then terminate.

If $\boldsymbol{V(u)}$ = false, then terminate.

If $\boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{A}$ and $\boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{R}$ and $\boldsymbol{V(u)}$ = true, then register voter: $\boldsymbol{R} \leftarrow \boldsymbol{R} \cup \{\boldsymbol{u}\}$.

Putting it all together:

$$\begin{cases} \text{Terminate} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{R}, \\ \text{Terminate} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{A}, \\ \text{Terminate} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{V(u)} = \text{false}, \\ \boldsymbol{R} \leftarrow \boldsymbol{R} \cup \{\boldsymbol{u}\} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{A} \text{ and } \boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{R} \text{ and } \boldsymbol{V(u)} = \text{true}. \end{cases}$$

Figure 4 below illustrates the workflow described above:

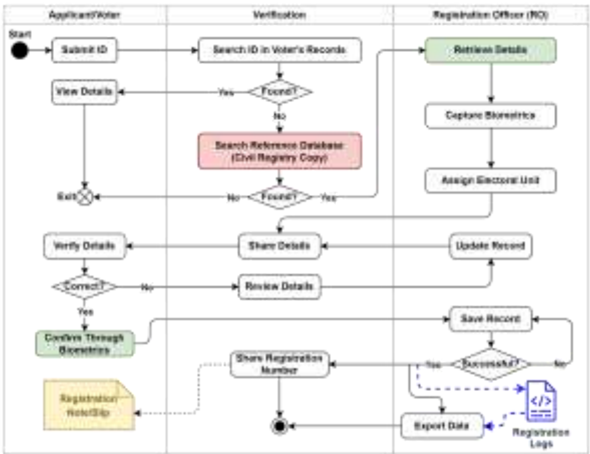

Figure 4 Registration Unit Workflow

Post-registration, the RO transmits the data and accompanying logs to the Data Processing Unit, where deduplication is performed on the biometrics. Duplicates are flagged for review, and clean records are added to the master database. The logs are used by the RO to track all the registration data from the registration unit. The voters' database is continuously synchronized with the civil registry, allowing the system to automatically flag and remove deceased voters.

We express this process mathematically as follows:

Let's denote the following:

$\boldsymbol{u}$: applicant's record voterID.

$\boldsymbol{M}$: master database

Steps:

If $\boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{M}$, then reject the record.

If $\boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{M}$, then add record to the master database: $\boldsymbol{M} \leftarrow \boldsymbol{M} \cup \{\boldsymbol{u}\}$.

Putting it all together:

$$\begin{cases} \text{Reject the record} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{u} \in \boldsymbol{M}, \\ \boldsymbol{M} \leftarrow \boldsymbol{M} \cup \{\boldsymbol{u}\} & \text{if } \boldsymbol{u} \notin \boldsymbol{M}. \end{cases}$$

Figure 5 below illustrates the workflow described above:

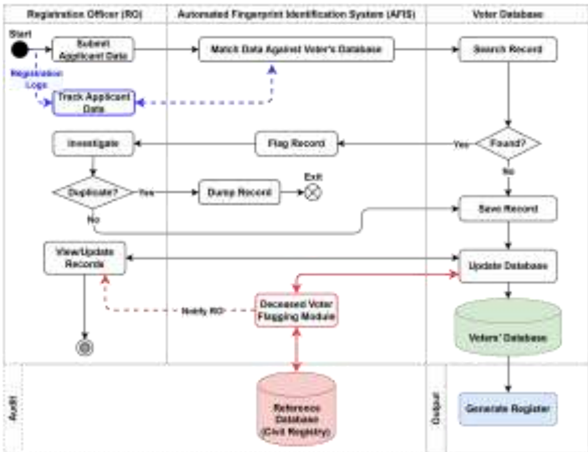

Figure 5. Data Processing Unit Workflow

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a final phase of the model development process, we designed test scenarios around the gaps under study to facilitate testing and evaluation of the functional improvements of the model. Based on the dummy test data, the model prototype was tested, and the test results are shown in table 1 below:

Table 1. Model Test Results

Test Scenario	Steps	Expected Result	Actual Result
Register a voter *Existing ID*	Input valid format ID with an existing number	System accepts	System accepted
Register a voter *Random string*	Input random string as ID	System rejects	System rejected
Register a voter *Non-existent ID*	Input valid format ID with non-existent number	System rejects	System rejected
Register a voter *Duplicate ID*	Input previously used ID	System rejects	System rejected
Register a voter *Deceased ID*	Input valid ID of a deceased voter	System rejects	System rejected

Test Scenario	Steps	Expected Result	Actual Result
Test for *Deceased voter*	Mark a record as deceased in the civil registry reference data	System flags deceased voter	Flag raised
Delete a record of an already registered voter *Missing records*	Attempt to delete a registered record	System flags missing record	Flag raised
Data tracking	Register voter and verify in the final register of voters	All records should be present.	All data present

The results validated the model's operational effectiveness across all tested scenarios. The system exhibited strong performance in enforcing input validation, preventing fraudulent registrations, ensuring complete data traceability, and flagging deceased voters. These capabilities collectively strengthen the integrity and trustworthiness of the biometric voter registration process, laying a strong rationale to adopt an interoperable, rights-based identity ecosystem.

6. CONCLUSSION

Kenya's journey to enhance its biometric voter registration system through integration with the civil registry is a critical undertaking for strengthening democratic processes. The analysis of international experiences reveals that while the benefits of such integration improved accuracy, efficiency, and inclusivity are substantial, they are inextricably linked to significant risks, particularly concerning privacy, security, and potential disenfranchisement. The core challenge in Kenya, where the civil and voter registers are managed by separate bodies, necessitates a holistic and meticulously planned approach that transcends technical solutions.

The experiences of Estonia, Brazil and Peru demonstrate the profound advantages of a unified or closely integrated foundational identity system that inherently supports electoral integrity from the point of birth registration to continuous updates. South Africa's case highlights the need to move beyond batch-based verification toward proactive, real-time identity synchronization to ensure continuous roll accuracy and reduce administrative burdens. Conversely, India's Aadhaar-EPIC integration offers stark warnings about the perils of pursuing integration without robust data protection, transparent governance, and a clear understanding of the human impact. Ghana and Nigeria's fragmented system further underscores that political will alone is insufficient without comprehensive technical interoperability and an empowered data protection framework.

The persistent data discrepancies identified in Kenya's 2022 voter register audit underscore that the current operational model, relying on post-registration cross-matching, is inherently inefficient and prone to inaccuracies. Achieving a truly accurate, inclusive, and credible voter register requires moving beyond reactive data cleaning to a proactive, continuous verification model. The study demonstrated that with a real-time integration with civil registry, the improved model tremendously reduced the inaccuracies in the voters' register. The study noted that while the integration is technically feasible, more importantly it demands addressing the underlying institutional, legal, and policy misalignments that create data silos and erode public trust.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are put forth for Kenya to effectively integrate its biometric voter registration system with the civil registry:

i. Establish a comprehensive legal and policy framework for data sharing between government agencies.

ii. Invest in interoperable technical architectures for secure real-time data exchange between government agencies and prioritize system modernization and capacity to address disparate data management systems and operational capacity gaps.

iii. Implement robust data governance and privacy-by-design to ensure that all technical solutions and operational processes for data integration are designed from the outset with privacy and data protection as core principles.

iv. Foster inter-agency collaboration and accountability through joint technical working groups comprising representatives from relevant agencies, tasked with developing, implementing, and overseeing the data integration roadmap, ensuring continuous coordination and problem-solving.

v. Adopt phased implementation approach to integration, starting with pilot projects for specific functionalities (e.g., deceased voter flagging) to test systems, refine processes, and build inter-agency confidence before full-scale deployment.

By adopting these recommendations, Kenya can leverage technological advancements to build a more accurate, efficient, and credible biometric voter registration system as demonstrated in the improved model prototype, while simultaneously safeguarding citizen rights and strengthening the foundations of its democratic process.

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