

Elections without Voters: Issues and Challenges of Voter Apathy in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Voter apathy is a worrisome dimension, worldwide. Nigeria has been experiencing a decline in voter turnout since the beginning of the fourth Republic in 1999. Ordinarily, voter apathy signifies low trend in democratic participation attract the interest of primary stakeholders and scholars in electoral enterprise, is given attention. This is because Nigeria polity is driven by end-means calculus thus; these political gladiators are predisposed to win at the expense of high voter participation to express the richness of democratic process. Apart from few democracies, with law on compulsory voting, Nigeria voters are apathetic to exercise their franchise but the reasons has multi-factorial technically, operationally and administratively by election management body EMB with mistrust and distrust in political process filled with economic hardship, corruption and violence. Generally, elections in Africa have notoriety for voter participation is expressed through casting of votes. Moreover, there is no benchmark on voters turn out to accept election, since political parties and their candidates are less concern with numerical strength of vote cast as they are with registered number of votes scored. Specifically, the paper attempts to identify issues associated with voter apathy through an insightful theoretical exposition, identify factors responsible for voter apathy in Nigeria and proffer measures adopted by stakeholders to stem the tide of voter apathy in Nigeria. The study adopted game theory and rational choice theory as the explanatory tool for voter apathy in Nigeria with documentary research design. The findings of the study reveals that weak institutions weak electoral jurisprudence nature of the party system, militarization of electoral violence, winner takes all syndrome, poor legal framework on votes turn-out, poor governance system and electoral technology are factors that engender voter apathy. The paper recommends that political institutions should be accountable, transparent and people-oriented to feel the pulse of voters. The electoral body should adopt more friendly-technology to reduce techno-phobia and engender seamless electoral processes. Electoral framework should be designed on voters turn-out sufficient for the declaration of election result. The influence of state power, militarization and violence of the electoral process should be minimized.*

Keywords: Elections, Voters, Voter Apathy.

Introduction

The phenomenon of voter apathy assumed a worrisome but less discoursed challenge of Nigeria electoral democracy. Since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, there has been consistent decline in voters' turnout which is a measure for voter apathy. The turnout of the voter despite the phenomenon of voter apathy has been on increase in every general election in Nigeria, this has attracted tangential attention. The Nigeria polity is driven and predisposed to "winning" "victory" based on the end-means calculus, the political party interest and their candidates are hell bent on winning election even without voters. They are less concerned with the numerical strength of voters responsible for their victory as well as the number that could give them victory at the poll. In all a winner will be declared from the rump of the voters that turned out during the poll, Nigeria politicians do not understand the rule of elections in Democracy. According to INEC \$IFES (2011) elections ensure representation of popular will for the legitimacy of political system. The low turnout or voter absenteeism denies false reflection of people's will, the wish of a minority negates the principles of liberal democracy and low voter turnout would produce an electoral outcome bereft of credibility & legitimacy. All over the world, voter turnout is an indicator on how citizen participate in governance of their country. High turn-out of voter is a sign of vitality of democracy (Solijonov 2016). Put differently, low voter turn-out define voter apathy and this denotes poor voters interest in the electoral process, without voters turnout, there can be no true elections that would reflect people's preference without democrats (Friedrich Ebert, 1871-1925). Voter apathy is a serious dimension in relation to voter registration, people register and collect their voters card and refuse to vote on election day. The interest of every citizen participation in electoral process as accentuated by Kura (2008), view the spread of re-democratization and the third and fourth democratic waves in which more than two third of African countries became democratic through the conduct of multiparty elections. Solijonov (2016) posit that the major reason for the growth is the end of the cold war, which stimulated democratic, process in regions formerly under Soviet influence and the emergence of multiparty elections across the African continent. The phenomenon has had a knock-on-effect on the voter population which has grown geometrically in proportion to the geometric growth of global population.

Problem Statement

There has been decline in voters turnout in Nigeria since 1990's, failing from 78% to 76% between 1940 and 1980, 70% in 1990s and 66% in 2011 to 2015 (Solijonovo 2016). In Nigeria, since the beginning of the 4th Republic the 6 elections of 1999 (52%), 2003

(69%), 2007 (57%), 2011 (53%), 2015 (43%), and 2019 (35%). It has been noted that 2003 and 2007 elections was adjudged by both local and international observers as most fraudulent elections in Nigeria history, as there were reported cases of ballot stuffing and inflation of voting figure. This has been tangential as the exception in international institute of democracy and electoral assistance (IDEA). The IDEA engages in research and publication tagged voters turn out data base (VTD), these provide inspirations and insights in the problem of voter apathy. The major lesson on decline of voters turn out is that few citizens consider elections as instrument for legitimizing political parties control over political decision making. This shows that citizen is not interested in political parties as bodies of democratic representation. Oloja (2022) states politicians make promises that hardly fulfill; people are tired and frustrated with elections as such elections do not deliver the type of leaders the people want and is regarded as fallacy of electoralism. An overview of the problem shows that it is a global issue, Africa and Nigeria inclusive; elections in Africa have acquired notoriety for not just fraud but concomitant effect of non-participation by voters (Karl, 1986). The character of African politics and governance is zero-sum, winner takes all syndrome constitute the macro-challenge. Anifowose (2011) posit that the possession of political power leads to economic power as those who hold positions in the power structure determine the allocation and distribution of scarce resources. This position aligns with Dudley's (1965) assertion that the short cut to affluence and influence is through money and money is politics. To get to politics there is always a price, to be a member of government party as an avenue to government patronage like contracts deals, appointment amongst others. Bayart (1993) refers the prebendal and rentier character of emerging democracies as "politics of the belly". These approximate the reality of Nigerian electoral political system with low participation of voters in electoral process over the years. Voter apathy is measured using demography of voter population, the number of registered voters and the rate of voters' turnout during 2011, 2015 and 2019 Presidential elections.

Conceptual Clarifications

Election

Election is a periodic mechanism for selecting and recruiting leaders to occupy position of authority seats in legislative and executive branch of government. According to Harrop and Miller (1992), election is an expression of preferences by the governed aggregated and transformed into a collective decision on who will govern, stay in office or who should be thrown out or who will replace those who have been thrown out. Nnoli (2003), states that election is the process of choice agreed upon by group of people that enables them to select a few people out of many to occupy one or a number of authority position. In the view of Held quoted in Madubuegwu et al (2020), election is the competition of votes among political parties, it is the process where voters decide among competing political party candidates who to select to occupy position in government. Such choice is possible in a democratic environment conducive enough to voters for free, fair and credible exercise of their franchise. The concept lacks two major values as follows: instrumental and operational values. Elections provide indicators of social and political change, on the other hand, it speaks of the procedures, deliberate strategies and efforts that are organic to its function.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, election is the process of choosing a person or a group of people for a position especially a political position by voting. It is also an occasion during which people officially choose a political representative or government by voting. Election as a concept refers to periodic, time-lag, cycle, regularity; from instrumental perspective is choice or preference which involves choosing or selecting between alternative parties or candidates in an election. A combination of the features of election as a process allow organization, society or country at periodic intervals to choose representatives, parties or persons who would hold legislative or executive positions in government. According to Ujo (2010) election has undergone social changes in procedure from the ancient Greek method of direct-participation to the Roman Republic using plurality of tribes, the medieval church electoral system ranks and superior (government elites) to the inception of liberal democracy based on consent franchise and representative principle. Thompson (1998) outlined electoral principles as regular election, uniform procedure, rights to vote, right to contest election, fair procedure for counting ballot; access to polling station, right to nominate candidate, free and secret vote, acceptance of results and security against fraud (Kuenzi & Lambright, 2005). The participation is expressed through voting in an election as it were impossible for every citizen to participate directly in governance. Reichely (1992), states that elections are fundamental to any political system based on the principle of democracy and republican government where all eligible voters participate as the ultimate source of authority. Elections are imperative in post-modern state as a means through which voters influence public policy and exercise the rights and obligations of citizenry.

VOTER

Voter is a person or citizen of a country who has a right to vote or be voted for in an election (franchise). According to INEC (2019), the rights of a voter include right to voters' card, right to secrecy of ballot and right to vote for his or her choice or be voted for. From the above concept, it has been noted that a voter is not an exploitative instrument or object or pawn in the hands of politicians. If the rights of a voter is abridged or denied, the voter may react in many ways these include a decision to stay away from exercising those rights, loss interest and non-participation.

Voting is the practical expression or manifestation of the citizen' participation and involvement in the electoral process in a democratic setting, Justice Uwais electoral reform report recognize the importance of free and fair election. Free and fair election is the mechanism for exercising the principle of sovereignty of the people and requirement for good governance in a democracy. According to Agu, Onyekwelu & Idike (2013), voting require little efforts but a civic responsibility, in which the contrary is the case in Nigeria and other countries as voters decline in voters turn-out.

Voter apathy

Voter apathy refers to actions taken by a voter to express disillusion, resentment, and disinterest by declining to vote during an election. Put differently, voter apathy lack interest among voters in the election in a representative/liberal democracy. This phenomenon is most acute in jurisdiction where voting is optional unlike where voting is compulsory. On the other hand, this is not the case in countries (such as Australia). Voter apathy describes the aspect of voters behaviour captured by non-voting in an election. Cloud (2021) refers to voter apathy as individual not voting in elections because they feel like their participation will not make a difference. The voters do not think their votes will be counted and will count due to rigging and manipulation of the electoral process. Phenomenally, voter apathy occurs when eligible voters do not vote in public elections due to disillusion with the political process and politicians in general. It is a form of political depression where voters feel helpless and are unable to influence important events. From the foregoing, elections have become the major route through which people express their choice of leadership in a liberal democracy; electoral participation has become one of the main indicators of democratic performance (Agu, Idike and Onyekwelu 2013). Voter Apathy is lack of consent in a democratic and political process, it symbolizes democratic exclusion. The major challenge to avoid principle of democracy is voter apathy and this has become a recurring political phenomenon since the birth of democracy in the 4th Republic from 1999 – 2019. The insignificant number of Nigeria voting population in Nigeria during elections doubt that the principle of liberal democracy espouses majority rule.

Perspectives and phenomenon of Voter Apathy

The phenomenon of voter apathy arise as result of multi-factorial tendencies, the impact are contextual and region specific of political institutions responsible (Leighley and Naglar, 1992). According to this perceptive, those with available resources, socially and financially most likely participate politically (Norris, 2002). In other words, people with scarce resources are passive participant in the political parties; citizens in Sub Saharan Africa pursue short term interests through electoral participation as opposed to generalized long term interest. The character of the political institutions in Africa provides crisp explanation on the behavior of the citizens towards elections. According to Bratton & Van de walle (1997), political parties in Africa are known for organizational weakness and poor institutionalization, as neo-patrimonialism is a dominant arrangement across African countries. This explains why ideology is not a factor as party attachment and affiliation are shallow in Nigeria political space is a reflection of this assertion. Some members of political parties pay little or no fees but expect patronage and perks since they are easily mobilized during election and demobilized when they are denied of these perks and crumbs.

Jose (2021) described this type of political culture as parochial political culture, this type of political socialization is where citizens are apathetic towards government structure, its functions and its functionaries thus leading to poor participation on the part of the people.

Socio-Cultural Context of Voter Apathy

According to Nnoli (1978), Kuka (1993) and Thomson (2000), the socio-cultural environment encompasses the ethnic and religious behavior of the citizens cum voters wrote extensively on the manifestation of religion and ethnic behavior in Nigeria,s elections. The mobilization along ethno-regional lines proved to be the most effective manner of winning election, Nigeria responded to 1960s ethno-regional constitution by voting their respective “cultural brokers” charged with capturing resources and bringing them back to the regional communities. Religion enters political arena not just for spiritual and moral reasons but for instrumental imperative as well. It is in the context of this that Campbell (2010) opined that Nigeria elites use religion and ethnic rivalries to advance their particular agenda, as shared religious identity serves as a means of forging political alliances among numerous ethnic group. Kuka (1999) argued that Nigerian politicians are divided by contending ideological presentation of their party manifestos spend much energy to build religious largesse. Ethnic cleavage in Nigeria electoral politics is not of recent origin, according to Nnoli (1977), ethnic politics posits that in 1953, the NCNC, AG and NPC had become is associated with ethnic groups and regions (East, West and North).this covertly and overtly use of ethnic symbols and ethnic conflict of interests is a means of mobilizing support for their selfish interest.

Ethnicity has been a strategy for wining political power through intensive mobilization by ethnic homeland marked the fundamental principle of the state policy through provisions on federal character principle and quota system. These tendencies tear apart the trust and confidence of the electorates since they align with parties and candidates of their various ethnic and religious cleavages. Attempts over the years to tame the tide of ethnic and religious mobilization have so far failed as political elites resort to this phenomenon without integrity. Electoral integrity as it concerns elections respect a wide range of global standards and norms enshrined in international treaties, protocols and food practices. Such principles include but not limited to equal opportunity and rights for citizens to participate in electing leaders, guarantees freedom, opinions, expression, peaceful assembly and association. On the contrary, Kofi Annan quoted in (Olehi, 2021) state the obstacle to election integrity as weak rule of law, weak protection of voters rights, insufficient resource deny future opportunities to election losers and equal political participation.

Institutional Perspectives of Voter Apathy

These institutions include election management body, political parties, legal framework, government and governance system, election technology and economy. According to Mabogunje (1995), every system of governance is based on institutions within

which various appropriate activities take place. Institutions are conceptualized in terms of operational, instrumental, and structural roles that impact the choice of a voter in an election like INEC as a democratic institution.

The choice a voter makes is shaped on the character of socio-political environment and public institution involved in managing electoral process and factors imposed on the voter themselves. Harrop & Miller (1992) argue that voter's choice is conditioned and restricted in a way government design electoral system and organize the conduct of elections of their ideologies belief system and political attachment. The character of political parties in Nigeria states that they regard themselves as mere instruments of accessing state power and resources by the political elites (Animashaun (2002). In the words of former US, political parties is a mere conspiracy to seize power. Orji (2014) state that politics in Nigeria is dominated by one strong national organized party with a sitting president since 1999, but internal democracy within that dominant party has been operating in a low level, Consequently, election of party officials and candidates are controlled by few individuals known as (god fathers). However, youths, women and other groups are shut-out of the game, the candidates selected are not popular choice of the people and citizens surrender their franchise and sovereignty to the ruling class. Election technology is as good as the person behind it, it can fail, while manipulation resulting in systematic error and delayed transmission of results can underline the integrity of the process and credibility of the electoral outcome (MPF 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts rational choice theory and game theory as the framework for the paper as propounded by Burn et al (2016), Burns & Roszkowska (2005), Elster (1989), Granovetter (1985) and Hodgson (1986) on the premise that human actors are social and human centric. This multi-disciplinary dimension cuts across economics, politics, psychology, sociology serves as indicator of political behavior. Electoral behaviour is multi-factorial bestriding socio-economic, political & psychological spheres. Adam Smith is acclaimed as the father of rational choice theory and the postulation is embedded on the idea of invisible hand moving free market economy in 1970s with self-interest and the invisibility hand theory (Smith 2003). The theory posits that individuals use their self-interest to make choices that will provide them benefit. Also, people weigh their options and make choice that will serve them best, this include rational actors, invisible hand, and self-interest. From the foregoing, it has been noted that the options of voting and non-voting by voters in an election calculated on interest calculus is the more reason why voters vote and why they do not vote in an election. Rational choice theory is predicated on the gain or loss of voting and not voting, people do not always make rational decisions. According to Enelow and Hirich (1984), rational choice theory assumes that voters recognizes their self-interest and evaluate alternative candidates and cast their vote for the candidate must favourably on the basis of self-interest. Voting is an instrumental decision for achieving an end, a political goal not done to please one's spouse or impress one's friend. For instance, a choice not to vote in an election is due to bad governance may be irrational but it is better to vote for a party with a prospect of good governance. However, voters are moved into choice and decision based on emotions and sentiments like religion, ethnic ties and kinship affiliations are displayed in North-west by voters in 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. The turn-out and votes for President Buhari were in threshold of 45% - 50% whereas in South East, South West, and South South were below 40% (INEC Reports 2015 and 2019). According to Ebenezer (2021) voters do not vote if they perceive the likelihood that their vote will not influence the outcome of the election

Game theory is a variant of rational choice theory along with assumptions of players' common knowledge to predict utility maximizing decision by allowing players to predict their opponent's strategies. Game theory is used to conceive social situations among competing players and produce optimal decision for independent and competitive actors in strategic setting. This is largely attributed to the work of mathematician like John Von Neumann and Economist Oskar Morganstern in 1940s and developed extensively by other scholars in 1950s. the tenet of game theory include players, decision maker within the context of the game, gain, strategy a player will take in a given sect that arise within the game. The situation within which actors take decisions or play out games define a given culture, social structure, social relations and norms. In modern science, social activity flows with the dynamics of the society and its structure not outside of it. Burns & Roszkowska (2016) describe social embeddedness as dependent rationality, choice and interaction including strategic type of action constituted and regulated on the basis of social relations among actors, cultural and institutional frame is where interaction took place.

Methodology

The paper explore data from qualitative data collected from published and unpublished materials were sourced from INEC, Nigeria, IDEA, EIE, IFES, textbooks, newspapers, election observation reports, journal publications, internet and Info graph data that relate to voter apathy. to locate trends on challenges of voters apathy in Nigeria within the study period. The paper dwells on the findings, discussions mainly on the causes of voter apathy with conclusion and recommendations. From the quantitative angle, some findings based on voters turn out during 2011, 2015 and 2019 presidential elections as in the Table 1 below were captured in South East zone recorded low turnout of voters in 2015 election due to high level of militarization and violence. For instance;

Abia State: 2011 (77%), 2015 (29.7%) and 2019 (17.8%),

Anambra State: 2011 (57.5%), 2015 (29.7%), and 2019 (25.5%),

Ebonyi State: 2011 (47.9%), 2015 (36.7%) and 2019 (17.8%),

Enugu State: 2011 (32%), 2015 (24%) and 2019 (23%),

Imo State: 2011(83%), 2015 (41%), and 2019 (26%).

Out of the five states, Imo State recorded the highest percentage of voters turnout, while Enugu State recorded the lowest percentage of voters turnout due to excessive militarization, violence by ethnic militia (IPOB), due to political marginalization over time. The high level of illiteracy and poverty in Ebonyi state is a challenge that informed low turn out of voters (voter apathy).

In North West, voters turnout rate were:

Kaduna State: 2011 (55.8%), 2015 (49.1%), and 2019 (43.5%)

Kano State: 2011 (53.1%), 2015 (43.1%), and 2019 (36.0%)

Kastina State: 2011 (72.3%), 2015 (52.1%), and 2019 (50.1%)

Kebbi State: 2011 (56.4%), 2015 (49.1%), and 2019 (44.4%)

Jigawa State: 2011 (56.6%), 2015 (59.1%), and 2019 (54.9%)

Sokoto State: 2011 (40.1%), 2015 (52.1%), and 2019 (48.7%)

Zamfara State: 2011 (51.7%), 2015 (52.5%), and 2019 (34.8%)

The voter turnout shows that Kano state even with its high voting population were low due to nonpresidential aspirant from the state during the period. There were reported cases of violence in 2019 presidential election. Other states from the zone were on average of 50% because of their support for the candidacy of Muhammed Buhari during the period. In 2011, the vice presidential candidate Namdi Sambo from Kaduna State of Peoples Democratic Party influenced voters turnout during the period.

In North East zone, the voters turn out rate were:

Adamawa State: 2011 (49.9%), 2015 (43.6%), and 2019 (43.6%)

Bauchi State: 2011(63.9%), 2015(50.6%), and 2019 (43.1%)

Borno State: 2011 (56.6%), 2015 (28.6%) and 2019 (41.2%)

Taraba State: 2011 (55.3%), 2015 (43.9%) and 2019 (47.7%)

Yobe State: 2011 (45.3%), 2015 (45.6%) and 2019 (42.9%)

The level of voter apathy in the zone is 55% on the average irrespective of Boko Haram Terrorists. This explains why the candidacy of Atiku Abubakar of Peoples Democratic Party of voter's turnout was still low. The level of illiteracy and poverty is high in the zone since they lack interest in elections, electoral violence was a challenge in the zone.

In the South West zone, the table reveals as follows:

Ekiti State: 2011 (34.2%), 2015 (38.8%) and 2019 (43.3%)

Lagos State: 2011 (31.8%), 2015 (25.1%) and 2019 (17.8%)

Ogun State: 2011 (28%), 2015 (32.7%) and 2019 (25.3%)

Ondo State: 2011 (30.1%), 2015 (38.8%), and 2019 (32.2%)

Osun State: 2011 (39.6%), 2015 (48.1%) and 2019 (43.8%)

Oyo State: 2011 (33.3%), 2015 (39.6%) and 2019 (30.4%)

The rate of voter apathy was high compared to voters population, the average voter turn out is around 30% during the period under study. Lagos State experience electoral violence as a challenge of voter apathy. The South West zone has no presidential candidate during the period; ethnicity is a major factor in the behavior of voters in Nigeria, many voters in Lagos travel to their home states during elections

In the northern central zone, the table shows the rate of voters turn out as follows:

Benue state: 2011 (43.8%), 2015 (37.8%) and 2019(30.8%)

Kogi state: 2011 (42.7%), 2015 (32.5%), and 2019(33.6%)

kwara state: 2011 (85.9%), 2015 (39.1%), and 2019(30.8%)

Nasarawara: 2011 (41.9%), 2015 (42.3%), and 2019(37.8%)

Niger State: 2011 (46.8%), 2015 (46.8%), and 2019 (37.5%)

Plateau State: 2011 (63.5%), 2015 (50.6%) and 2019 (24.2%)

Plateau State is on average voter turnout of 60% during the 2011 and 2015 elections but declined to 24.2% due to electoral violence and communal crisis during 2019 election. Voter apathy in Benue State is attributed to clashes between farmers and herdsmen, while in Niger State witnessed spate of electoral violence that led to setting INEC office ablaze in Suleja LGA.

In South South zone, the table reveals the voters turnout as follows:

Akwa Ibom State: 2011 (76.2%), 2015 (62.5%) and 2019 (28.5%)

Bayelsa State: 2011 (44.3%), 2015 (61.4%) and 2019 (36.4%)

Cross River State: 2011 (63.2%), 2015 (40.8%) and 2019 (29.2%)

Delta State: 2011 (68.8%), 2015 (62.8%) and 2019 (31.0%)

Edo State: 2011 (35.5%), 2015 (31.7%) and 2019 (27.0%)

Rivers State: 2011 (74.8%), 2015 (68%) and 2019 (47.5%)

Rivers State witnessed high level of voters turnout in 2011 and 2015 elections because President Jonathan is from the zone, ethnic politics influence voters behavior, Bayelsa, is the home state of President Jonathan was created out of Rivers State. There low turnout in 2019 presidential election due to the electoral violence that claimed peoples live and disrupt electoral process. Edo State, witnessed

voter apathy to the average of 60% during the period, Akwa Ibom State's low voter turnout in 2019 presidential election was attributed to high scale electoral violence and killings in some parts of the state.

TABLE 1: NIGERIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (2011, 2015 & 2019): VOTERS RATIO ON VOTERS APATHY

S/N	STATE	2011				2015				2019			
		RV	V.T	%	BAL	RV	V.T	%	BAL	R.V	V.T	%	BAL
1.	ABIA	1524841	1188333	77.9	336508	1387844	142189	29.7	975655	1793861	36156	17.8	1432300
2.	ADAMAWA	1816094	907706	49.9	908388	1682907	733748	43.6	949159	1959322	874920	43.6	1084352
3.	AKWA IBOM	1616873	1232395	76.2	344478	162789	1013604	62.5	608174	2119727	675677	28.5	1444050
4.	ANAMBRA	2011746	1150239	57.5	854507	1788536	687431	35.8	1098105	2389322	675273	25.5	1713645
5.	BAUCHI	2521614	1610094	63.9	911520	2502609	1266320	50.6	1236289	2453512	1073336	43.1	1380176
6.	BAYELSA	591870	506693	44.3	185177	590676	362677	61.4	228002	921821	344277	36.4	577584
7.	BENUE	2390884	1047709	43.8	1343175	2340718	868406	37.1	1472312	2391276	786069	30.8	1605207
8.	BORNO	2080957	1177646	56.6	903311	2570349	735119	28.6	1835230	2319434	987290	41.2	1332144
9.	CROSS RIVER	1148486	726341	63.2	422145	1145112	446061	40.7	699051	152915	611033	29.2	1051882
10.	DELTA	2032191	1398579	68.8	633612	20444	2044372	62.8	2023928	2719313	891647	31.0	1827666
11.	EBONYI	1050534	502890	47.9	1000245	102001	374344	36.7	645667	1392931	391647	17.8	1001284
12.	EDO	1655776	621192	35.5	1034584	1593488	505136	31.7	1088352	2150127	604915	27.1	1545212
13.	EKITI	764726	261858	34.2	502868	688950	294871	42.8	394079	889919	395741	43.3	504178
14.	ENUGU	1,303155	814009	32.5	489146	1313128	1323403	24.1	1002122	1393568	452765	23.2	2740803
15.	GOMBE	1318377	770019	58.4	548358	1208927	515002	42.6	693925	1385195	604240	41.6	780955
16.	IMO	1687293	1409830	83.6	277443	1672666	700847	41.9	1971819	2037569	585741	26.0	1451828
17.	JIGAWA	2013974	1140766	56.6	873209	1814547	1072397	59.1	742150	2104889	1171801	54.9	933088
18.	KADUNA	3905387	2569963	55.8	1335424	3743815	1838321	49.1	1905602	3861033	1757868	43.5	2103165
19.	KANO	5027297	2670095	53.1	2357202	4751818	2048033	43.1	2703785	5391581	2006410	36.0	3385171
20.	KASTINA	2126898	1639532	72.3	497366	2080046	1083704	52.1	996342	2210422	1128865	50.1	2081557

NIGERIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2011, (2015 & 2019): VOTERS RATIO ON VOTERS APATHY (CONTINUED)

S/N	STATE	2011				2015				2019 *			
		RV	V.T	%	BAL	RV	V.T	%	BAL	R.V	V.T	%	BAL
21.	KEBBI	1638308	924099	56.4	714209	1459725	715,265	49.1	744,460	1802697	835238	44.5	967459
22.	KOGI	1316840	561780	42.7	755058	1305533	417,771	32.5	887,762	1640449	578733	33.6	1129716
23.	KWARA	1152361	414754	85.9	737607	1125035	438,764	39.1	686,271	1401895	489482	34.6	912413
24.	LAGOS	6108069	1945044	31.8	4163025	5426391	1,356,598	25.1	4,069,793	6313507	1196490	17.6	5117017

25.	NASARAWA	1389308	694527	41.9	694781	1291876	555,507	42.7	736,369	1509481	613720	37.8	895761
26.	NIGER	2175421	1019167	46.8	1156254	2427081	1,091,374	42.3	1,335,707	12375568	911964	37.5	1463604
27.	OGUN	1941470	543715	28	1397755	1796024	592,688	32.7	1,203,336	2336887	613397	25.3	1723490
28.	ONDO	1616091	4856837	30.1	1129254	1472237	574,172	38.8	898,065	1812567	598586	32.2	1213981
29.	OSUN	1293967	512714	39.6	781263	1318120	632,697	48.1	685,423	16724729	732984	43.6	941745
30.	OYO	2592140	863544	33.3	1728596	2487132	994,853	39.6	1,492,279	2796542	905007	30.4	2791535
31.	PLATEAU	2259194	1411117	62.5	848677	2082725	1,062,190	50.6	1,020,535	2423381	107404	24.2	1,349,339
32.	RIVERS	2479231	1854116	74.8	625115	2466977	1,677,544	68	789,433	3115273	2678167	47	537106
33.	SOKOTO	2267609	909808	40.1	1357801	2113698	1,120,260	52.7	993,438	1895266	695017	48.7	945159
34.	TARABA	1336221	739065	55.3	597156	1280728	563,520	43.9	717,208	177105	756111	47.7	1020994
35.	YOBE	1373796	622115	45.3	714106	120332	1,203,332	45.6	553,533	649,799	601051	42.9	764862
36.	ZAMFARA	1824316	942679	51.7	881637	802301	425,220	52.5	377,081	1717128	616168	34.8	1100960
37.	FCT	943473	390894	42.2	545379	892628	330,272	35.6	562,356	1335015	467734	33.6	867231

SOURCE: INEC (2011), INEC (2015) & INEC (2019)

*Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (2019)

KEY: RV = Registered Voters

VT = Voters Turn Out

Findings and Discussions on Voter Apathy

The causes of voter apathy are multi-factorial ranging from institutional, social cultural, economic, ecological and technological factors based on findings from the study.

Militarization of elections and electoral violence: elections in Nigeria have become a weapon of politics in the country. Violence has become the weapon of imposition of unpopular candidates for executive and legislative positions on the vulnerable electorate. State sponsored aggression reached its zenith during presidential elections and off season electoral cycle. During Edo state governorship election of September 2020, 31,000 policemen 8 commissioners of police, 70 patrol vehicles, personnel of the navy, army, immigration, NDL and EFCC were deployed (Daily Sun September 21st 2020). Ake (1998) and Ibeanu (2012), argue that state deploys excessive force to quell electoral violence orchestrated by government to exert monopoly of the polity to resist opposition parties and the citizens. This phenomenon has colonial and neo-colonial character of Africa states with hegemon of absolute monopoly of violence. The state enjoys total power to unleash violence on helpless citizens opposed to support their autocratic and authoritarian tendencies. The activities of state security actors are hang over of colonial and neo colonial mentality has negatively propped up non- state security actor. For instance, indigenes People of Biafra, IPOB, Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta MEND, ODU People's Congress, OPC, Boko Haram and other secessionists group were formed as a counterbalance to suppress and oppress tendencies of state actors.

The long term repercussion of the situation has been the pollution of democratic space with scare mongers' violence and killing especially in Borno State (2015), River State (2015 & 2019), Bauchi State (2011) presidential elections. During these elections the state emptied security barracks to ensure the victory of the party in power as they salivate the impulses of the incumbent government with direct consequences that voters retreat to the safety of their homes. On the other hand, during the Kogi and Bayelsa states governorship elections of Nov 16, 2011, 32,300 policemen and 31,040 policemen respectively were deployed. It is thus an irony that the number of security personnel deployed to an election appears to outnumber the voters for that election. The 2019 Elections took place in a complex security environment with insurgencies in the North East Zone-Boko Haram & Islamic State of Western African Province, ISWAP, agitation for independence by some groups in the South Eastern Zone and the farmer-herders conflict in the Middle Belt, kidnapping, and banditry (EUEOM 2019). In the same vein incident of violence against electoral staff, damaged the process, parties and security agencies did not protect citizen's right to vote safely from intimidation. The PDP national chairperson's press release on March 1, 2019, speaks on the effect of militarization during election particularly killing of innocent citizens was obvious, suppression of voters either they were scared or chased away in South South and South East (EUEOM 2019:13). In Akwa Ibom, INEC officials were subjected to attack and harassment. About 98 smart card readers were destroyed by hoodlums in 2019, Inec staff were abducted and held hostage in Essien Udim, Eket and Itu Local Government Area. In Lagos State, the electoral officer of Eti-osa Local Government Area, was held hostage by men of the Nigeria Army, just as two Registration Area Technical Support

Staff (RATECHS) were detained by the military in Agege and Muslim Local Government Area. Also, hoodlums alleged to be members of OPC burnt electoral materials and chased away voters during the 2019 presidential election. Three INEC offices were burnt down: Isiala Ngwa South LGA Abia State, Quan Pam LGA in Plateau State, INEC State Office, Awka, electoral material for 100 polling units, 4,600 Smart card readers were destroyed. In Ikwere LGA of River State, military invaded INEC office leading to inconclusive election.

The Nigeria Situation Room (2019) gave a gory picture of electoral violence in Nigeria 4th Republic Elections: 2003 elections (100 people were killed), 2007 elections (300 people were killed), 2015 elections (106 people were killed), and 2019 elections (626 people were killed). Akinyemi (2021) reported that 25 people were killed on day of the 2019 presidential elections. Although this data is conflicting, it shows the level of carnage and blood shedding during the presidential elections. Voters intimidation, ballot box snatching contributed to general voter low turnout translated as voter apathy. National voters turnout rate declined 43.7% 2015 to 35.6% 2019. Worst of it all the IPOB issued statement that voters in the South East should boycott the 2019 elections which according to it against the goals and objectives of the actualization of the Biafran nation

Institutional and Organizational Weakness: election management body, EMB hitherto was structurally and organically established to be at the whims and caprices of the government in power. This is evidenced by the provisions of Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended which grants the President the powers to appoint the Chairman, members of the commission and resident electoral commissioners. It is expected that an incumbent president to be apolitical in the appointment of these officers. In this type of scenario, the appointees are prone to moral quandary. State Institution put themselves in overbearing roles on behalf of partisan interest (Nigeria Situation Room: 2019). Most EMBs in developed countries lack proper institutional infrastructural framework and therefore acquiescence to the government in power INEC spends stupendous resources in planning, procurement, and overreaching programmes and promises which often time do not approximate to reality. For instance, the 2011 General Elections in some states were postponed by a week. Abia, Ebonyi, Kano etc. In 2015, the General Election was also delayed by one week due to untardiness in the procurement and logistics preparation. Similarly, the 2019 presidential election was postponed by one week from Feb 16th 2019 to Feb, 23rd 2019 owing to delay in arrival of sensitive material to the states. Every activity of the commission comes with a great loss to the voters. Nigerians are naturally nomadic, travelers, (particularly the Igbos). Those who travelled from their place of work or business to cast the voters were pushed beyond reach economically, psychologically and physically. All INEC leadership are faced with the challenge of the nature of the organization must accomplish. Other issues of institutional or organizational weakness are voter’s access to polling units in Nigeria. INEC (2021) revealed that there is inadequate polling units available to voters, due to population growth, demographic shifts and new settlements, overcrowding of polling unit during election this led to disruption and violence thereby leading to apathy. The problem of accessibility where some polling units are located at flung areas, highly contested areas all this discourage voters from voting.

Table 2: Registered Voters and Access to Polling Units in Nigeria (2011 TO 2019)

S/N	Year	No of Reg. Voters	NO OF PUS	Reg. Voters/Pu	% Turn out
1	2011	73,528,040	119,973	612.8	53.68
2	2015	67,422,005	119,973	700.1	35
3	2019	84,004,084	119,973	700.1	35.66

Source: INEC (2021:10)

The table reveal high population of voters for polling unit is a factor in voters turn-out with particular reference to 2015 to 2019 General Election in Nigeria.

Challenges of Election Technology: the introduction of modern technology in electoral process posed a lot of challenges that affected voter behavior during the period under review. The aim is to reduce rigging, ballot box stuffing, multiple registration and other electoral malpractices by the public, but in operational terms the use of technology like SCR and DDC machine for voter registration and accreditation were associated with machine failure, break down and delays precipitated by human and machine errors. Voters enrollment and capturing, transfer and replacement, took hours, and days even months to mix-up. For instance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iwella revealed how voters suffered from electron fatigue; she was able to collect her permanent voter card on March 16, 2015 long after the original Feb, 14 2015 presidential elections at Umueda Isingwu Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia State (Okonjo, 2018). INEC 2019 general election revealed that out of 84,004,084 registered voters only 72,775,502 registrants collected their permanent voters card leaving 11,228,582 uncollected PVCs (INEC 2019) The process did not offer hope, trust, confidence and transparency for what ordinarily would be the civic responsibility by the voters. Every procedural step of the electoral process was unfriendly, alienator, yet the voter is expected to pass through this process to enable them exercise their franchise. The melo-drama is a caricature as captured in “Things around your Neck” a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Adichie 2014). Election management is calibrated in time-lines months, weeks, days and hours, that if breached or kept end up in shutting or

disenfranchising voters, thus engendering voters apathy. EUEOM (2019) observed that PVCs were delivered to incorrect offices and some were not available due to late printing, thus resulting in frustrating voters in the process and some disenfranchisement.

Economic challenges: economy is the basic foundation of political choice and decision making, in a situation of economic adversity expressed in the form of poverty, unemployment, high inflation and a regular payment of salaries and wages, thus lack of basic means of sustenance, voters hardly participate in the electoral process especially in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. Hence, the main focus of the average voter would be on how to meet their economic needs as lack of this affect socio-economic growth and wellbeing of the citizen in areas such as education and literacy through which political awareness and civic education is acquired. According to the World Bank, the Nigeria Poverty rate for 9 years were 2018 (92%), 2015 (90.8%) 2012 (97.7%), 2010 (91.9%). Similarly, the National Bureau of Statistics “2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria” Report, states that of 40% Nigeria population, about 83 million live below poverty, Economic alienation breeds political alienation which expresses itself in political powerlessness, isolation and estrangement. Under such environment, power is removed from the people who are in the actual sense the main holder of power.

Socio-cultural factors: Politics of ethnicism, religion and clientellism inform the political behaviour of most African voters. Ethnic and clientist appeals are factors than pragmatic appeals that shape participation and voting behaviour of the electorate. Wantchekon (2003) reveal that the electorate was moved to clientist appeals than programmes enunciated by political parties. In Nigeria, during 2011 and 2015 general elections where two dominant political parties fielded President Goodluck Jonathan of PDP from southern region of the country and Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and later All Progressive Congress in 2015. The turn-out of voters reflected that the region of the candidates. 2019 Presidential election recorded low turn-out in South East with Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi States witnessing low turnout.

Identity politics was shown during the period and this caused de-participation, non-challant, due to despondency and frustration.

Weak party system: there are contradictions in the policies espoused by political class and their political parties. They are bedeviled by structural deficiency in party management, little wonder, politicians switch parties in the name of decamping. The president and governor are the leaders at the various levels of government; hence the leadership structure of the party is under the stronghold of the incumbent executive. Political primaries are hijacked and manipulated in favour of the president or governor, d their cronies and money bags to the detriment of people’s choice. Accordingly, the electorate perceives them as self-serving, corrupt, dishonest entities who easily sacrifice public good for personal class gain. Put differently, the result is democratic disaffection; decline in to additional forms of participation, party membership recruitment and voting. Furthermore, the phenomenon of elite consensus also rob the voter of the right to freely choice in candidate of their choice, a cardinal principle of liberal democracy.

Poor Governance and Governmental performance: The character of political officer holders and government is a major factor in the behaviour of voters in terms of participation or non-participation in elections. There is a wide gap between the political and ruling class and the citizens undergirded by lack of accountability. In Nigeria, politicians are elitist, showy, stand offish and tin god in character. They see the citizens as mere tool and instrument for ascension to power – a ladder discarded after being used to climb to power. Political office holders rarely visit their constituents in the thick of office except during campaign and electioneering period. They are urban based, live in the nation and state capitals. They feather their own nests, make no attempts to attract development projects to their people other than disempowerment in the name of empowerment of the people through sharing of wheel barrows, shovels, knives, sewing machines of all which are instruments of poverty. Indeed, Nigeria politicians are weapon of poverty. A typical politician is heralded with convoy of SUV, limousine and all categories of automobiles as they smark through poor roads into their mansions in cross opulence in the midst of poverty, they are inaccessible, physically and visually with attributes to corruption, deceit and unfulfilled campaign promises (Akinyemi, 2020). According to Kostadinova (2003) poor governance and governmental performance depresses turnout in developing countries but stimulate turn-out in developed countries. In other words, election serves as a referendum on the performance of political office holder and government in power. Governance in Nigeria is a Zero-sum game producing leaders as winners and electorates as absolute leaders. According to Jose (2021), this pseudo-reality has shaped voters behaviour during election cycle thus eroding the moral zeal to vote. As political power become avenue for primitive accumulation of wealth. The richer class are the political class constitute themselves as emperors and vampires in a system bereft of inclusive democracy.

Challenge of election adjudication and dispute resolution: one major factor that engender voters apathy is the role of judiciary in election dispute resolution. The appointment of members of Election Tribunal Members are constituted by Heads of the Judiciary appointed by an incumbent President based on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council in turn expect those appointed to do their bidding. It would be recalled that a sitting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Walter Onnoghen was booted out of office by President Buhari on January 2019, a month to the presidential election, on suspicion that he is too independent minded and might not appoint tribunal Judges that are willing to give favourable judgment to the ruling party. According to EU (2019), suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria undermine security of tenure, damage Judicial independence and compromise division of powers as the act do not follow due process. Some people lack confidence on the role of Judiciary in electoral dispute resolution became clear when the victory of PDP elected governor in Imo State was upturn by the Supreme Court in favour of APC candidate who came fourth in the governorship election. The apex took upon itself the statutory role of INEC by collating and announcing the winner of the election. Acts of this nature dampen the zeal and enthusiasm of voter in election participation thus breeding voter

apathy. According to Iredia (2022); the nullification of some election results by the judiciary has shown that the declaration of winner do not conclude the election process until the judiciary settle election dispute. To be sure, election litigation and dispute resolution in Nigeria, is complex even as period usually lengthy for instance, electoral legal framework provides 180 days for the adjudication of pre-election petitions in 60 days in-case the matter goes up to the Appeal Court. In the same vein, it provides 180 days post-election petition and 60 days for ruling at the appellate court thus engendering mistrust and fear of possible miscarriage of Justice.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections signified the nature of the problem thusly made each electoral cycle an “election without voters”. The scenario calls for institutional and administrative reforms to address the quagmires thus change the narrative by holding political office holders and government accountable.

There should be a legal threshold on the number of voters turn-out that qualifies an election as credible and satisfies the numerical and majority principle. Doing so confers true mandate to the winner of election.

It is imperative that the deployment of technology should be human centric in particular, the requisition and collection of permanent voters card, PVCs should be simultaneous. Artificial intelligence should be matched with human intelligence. Provision should be made for more inclusivity by widening the choice of voters in the face of impunity by political parties in the election of candidates during their primaries.

INEC should engage the heads of the judiciary in order to fashion a fit for purpose electoral jurisprudence to avoid unwholesome encroachment of the statutory roles of the commission.

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