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ABSTRACT

This study inquires into, and surveys opinion of Nigerians on some of the factors that influence low voters' participation and apathy in the Nigerian electoral process. This study made use of data elicited from respondents' of the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State, Nigeria. The exercise was undertaken against the backdrop of common desire of Nigerians for the attainment of credibility in the country's electoral process, which would facilitate the consolidation of democracy obtained by legitimacy. The subject of discussion has been if the political behaviour and susceptibility of the Nigerian electorates are supportive or otherwise in relation to the identified factors impacting on the credibility of the electoral process in Nigeria.

The stratified random sampling technique was utilized to select the respondents' or sample of 1,200 Nigerians, from Edo South, Edo North, and Edo Central Senatorial Districts of Edo State. The structured questionnaire and in-depth interview designed to elicit appropriate and adequate responses on voters' participatory behaviour in the electoral process, were the measurement instruments utilized. The data gathered were analyzed with the aid of simple percentage, and the Chi-Square and Yule's Q to test and

determine the degree of association intrinsic in the stated hypotheses. Evidence from the study's results reveal that: the married respondents' were more likely than their counterparts who are single to have the opinion that voter participation in the electoral process is inhibited by electoral violence and insecurity; the respondents' who fall within the age bracket of 40 years and above were less likely than their counterparts who fall within the age bracket of below 40 years to have the opinion that the electoral process as conducted by the INEC is credible; the respondents' who are public servants were more likely than their counterparts who fall within the business and other category to have the opinion that political candidates and parties are failing in their duty to fulfill electoral promises to the electorates in Nigeria; the respondents' with tertiary education were less likely than their counterparts with secondary education/less to have the opinion that the INEC/Political Parties are sufficiently educating the electorates on the electoral process in Nigeria; and the male respondents' were less likely than their female counterparts to have the opinion that long hours/tedious registration and voting processes hinder voters' participation in the electoral process in Nigeria. At the end of the study, some policy advice or recommendations were made, these include:

Ø The need for the INEC to conduct transparent and credible elections, improve voters' registration process, educate voters' sufficiently, etc.

Ø The need for the Political Parties and Politicians to ensure internal party democracy, organize political rallies well, provide responsible representation, fulfill electoral promise made during the campaign, etc.

Ø The need for the government to provide support to the INEC, provide adequate protection for voters', ensure the independence of the INEC, etc.

Ø The need for the electorates to make the right choice, resist the temptation to sell votes, make necessary sacrifices for political development and nation building, etc.

Thus, the achievement of credibility, fairness and effective voters' participation in the electoral process, would require the collaboration of all relevant stakeholders in the Nigeria polity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In liberal democratic theory, an election is a viable mechanism for consummating representative government and voting is the main form of political participation in democratic societies; the study of voting behavior is a highly specialized sub-field in political and social science. There is no gainsaying that credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance globally. Elections in

democracies help to promote representation of popular will and to secure legitimacy of the political system. However, there is an indicative evidence of the decline in voter electoral participation- the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and a somewhat reserved attitude towards political activity even at the global level. It is imperative therefore, to understand the sources and character of political abstention. Voter electoral behaviour, a subset of political behaviour, has thus emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economies, as well as small and large ones.

Why do people vote? Why do they not vote? This is a pertinent question; there has been much concern in the past few years that the citizens are disengaging from the political process, as shown by the continuing decline in voter turnout at all levels of elections. This leads to serious questions of legitimacy. If fewer than half of all eligible citizens vote and a winning candidate receive a little bit above 50% of the vote, what can we say about mandates and about the power to govern? Are non-voters completely disengaged, or simply engaged in other kinds of political activities that they find more satisfying and more likely to affect their lives?

Voter participatory behaviour impacts upon the electoral process and its outcome. Any serious effort at electoral reforms to bring about free, fair and credible elections must take into account the challenges, especially of voter declining participation in the electoral process. Thus, it became imperative to do a study on the nature, causes, dimensions and consequences of declining voter participatory behaviour, with a view to being adequately informed in designing future strategies to tackle its challenges in the Nigerian context. In a country trying to consolidate democracy after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilizing people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well conceptualized and carefully designed. In doing this, peoples' perceptions and attitudes have to be studied, analyzed, understood and taken into consideration. In any case, liberal democracy is in crisis in many countries, developed and developing (Adejumobi 2002).

In the developed countries the level of citizen participation in the electoral process is dwindling, largely because real choice is limited and the people feel a sense of powerlessness rather than satisfaction. In developing countries, especially in Africa, elections are riddled with tension, conflicts, crises and fraud such that it is difficult to use them as a barometer of the peoples' choice. Hence, the euphoria of the second wave of democratization in Africa is fast receding. Yesterday's icons who led civil society in the struggles for democratic renewal have been transformed into the images of those against whom they fought. They have assumed dictatorial postures; they manipulate elections and tend towards sit-tight regimes (Adejumobi

2000).

Nigeria is in the league of less successful countries in the area of election management and outcomes: the electoral rules are either unclear, ever changing, or easily subverted; the electoral body is structurally weak and perennially ineffective; the political actors and agencies are like gladiators in their conduct; while the people are often powerless in an environment of political and electoral misdemeanor. Voting does not amount to choosing in the Nigerian environment, as electoral choices are made by political barons outside the environment of electoral norm, rules and procedure. In such circumstances, 'winners and losers have often been determined before the contest, and voters merely go through the charade of confirming choices already made' Fawole (2005:15).

A research initiated by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Friedrich–Ebert-Stiftung, a German non-governmental organization, has identified government, INEC, the media and politicians as largely responsible for the decline in voter participation in Nigeria. This was made public by the Lead Researcher and Professor of Political Science, Adigun Agbaje, during the public presentation of the report entitled, "Voter Apathy and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria," in Abuja, the report was based on a nationally representative sample of 1,200 respondents randomly selected across 12 states in the six geo-political zones within 27 local government areas and 103 wards. According to him, the research showed that some of the respondents did not consider election as an important assignment. In statistical terms, 49.4 per cent of respondents believe that votes do not count in Nigeria, 28.7 per cent were discouraged by unfulfilled promises by politicians while 14 per cent believed that there is corruption in the system. About 7.9 per cent see violence during elections as an obstacle. The report also showed that 57 per cent of the respondents rated the activities of elected officials as "not satisfactory", 32 per cent rated them as "fairly satisfactory" while 11 per cent rated them "satisfactory." As a way out of the problem, Agbaje recommended that, "Government should provide support to INEC, fulfill electoral promises, engage in public enlightenment campaign, ensure adequate security for voters, stop corruption, and enforce law and order in the society and non-interference in the electoral process". "Politicians should fulfill the electoral promise made during campaign, stop violence and door die politics, educate their supporters and organise peaceful political rally, accepting election results without manipulation, avoiding bribery and corruption". "The Press should assist in voter education; provide timely, accurate and factual information, unbiased report, equal coverage and avoiding bribery and corruption." (Alechenu, 2012).

The electoral system of any given country plays a fundamental role in sustaining and molding the political

behavior of its citizens (Okolo, 2002). The way election is conducted in a country determines to a great extent the level of political culture, political participation and good governance in the country. This obviously depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of a country's electoral system. Since democracy means rule by the people, people are supposedly able to choose politicians they want to represent their interest in the government through election; although history has it that it is usually difficult to hold elections that are completely free and fair. In 2004, the election that gave victory to former President George W. Bush of the United States was alleged to have been marred by irregularities in the state of Florida (Falana, 2009). But that is not to say that a country cannot experience free, fair and credible election, at least the election that brought President Obama of United States and late Prof. John Atta Mills of Ghana to power bear testimonies to this. However, we must admit that conducting elections has been the major bane confronting African countries. Studies on elections show that transiting from one regime to another is often the problem in most African state (Falana, 2009). The violence that occurs before, during and after elections often brings about instability in the political system of most African countries, with Nigeria inclusive. No doubt, election violence has been one of the major banes of Nigeria's democratic sustainability since 1964 general elections.

Several factors that affect voter electoral behaviour have been highlighted in relevant literature. Some of these include broad psychological factors and collective memory of historical and contemporary events. Others are patterns of trust, feelings of efficacy, political engagement and disengagement at individual, group and regional levels (Fawole, 2005). In spite of the empirical evidence that the global trend has been toward a decline in voter turnout, there is lack of grounded and sustained scholarly attention to voter apathy in the context of voter turnout in Nigeria despite the challenges plaguing the country's electoral system. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap by undertaking to study and find out the reason(s) for the decline of voters participation in the electoral process.

1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public. Democracy requires an active citizenry because it is through discussion, popular interest, and involvement in politics that societal goals should be defined and carried out. Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force (Russell, 2002). In recent years voter participatory behavior has reached worrying levels worldwide. Through the various generations of elections, declining voter participation, especially among the youth, has steadily and increasingly become a major issue of concern that has been equally affecting emerging democracy and consolidated ones.

Decreasing voter participation trends are a cause of concern because voter turnout is one of the main indicators to measure the levels of democratic development and robustness of a country. Low voter turnout can be related to and originated by many different factors closely related to the democratic, economic and social development of a country. The lack of genuine democracy in a country, peoples' perceptions of not being able to influence the political agenda and the lack of interest in political life are all factors that can influence the levels of electoral participation considerably. Other factors may include:

- low confidence in the political candidates/parties due to unfulfilled promises;
- insufficient levels of accountability of elected candidates to their constituents;
- the lack of political maturity of parties;
- violence during the electoral process; and
- the low levels of "democratic culture" and awareness of the electorate and
- other stake-holders

Low voter turnout could also be occasioned by flaws in the electoral process in two different ways:

- 1) Lack of trust, confidence and credibility in the electoral process and in the electoral institution responsible for managing elections.
- 2) Administrative hindrance to access and participate in the voting process due to poor management and poor electoral procedures.

Lack of confidence in Electoral Management Bodies and electoral processes can depend on a wide variety of factors, such as:

- the inadequacy of an electoral system;
- a biased election administration;
- lack of transparency in decision making and electoral procedures; and
- the way in which electoral disputes are being dealt with by the relevant body(ies).

Administrative hindrance due to poor management and procedures can for example depend on factors such as:

- inadequate electoral procedures and voting arrangements/facilities;
- poor voter education and information;

Any of these factors alone, or in combination, could significantly affect voter participation. After all, to participate, voters must have full trust in the electoral process, in the way in which elections are administered, in the candidates/parties they are going to vote for, in the overall outcome of the voting

exercise, in the way in which those elected can be accountable to deliver the commitments they took before being elected, and in the way in which those who don't deliver can be voted out.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

This study is set to achieve the following goals:

- To examine the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process.
- To examine the cause or causes of low voter turnout during elections in Edo State.
- To examine the role of INEC and political elites as it affects voters' electoral participation.
- To suggest appropriate policy recommendation to improve voter political behaviour in the electoral process to ensure legitimacy of elections through popular participation.

1.4 FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES

Deriving from the above, the hypothesis listed below in their null and alternate forms are hereby proposed:-

H_O: There is no relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence/ insecurity.

H_R: There is a relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence/ insecurity.

H_O: There is no relationship between respondents' age and their opinion about INEC credibility/plan of action in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

H_R: There is a relationship between respondents' age and their opinion about INEC credibility/plan of action in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

H_O: There is no relationship between respondents' occupation and their opinion about non-fulfillment of electoral promises by political candidates/parties.

H_R: There is a relationship between respondents' occupation and their opinion about non-fulfillment of electoral promises by political candidates/parties.

H_O: There is no relationship between respondents' educational level and their opinion about voter education.

H_R: There is a relationship between respondents' educational level and their opinion about voter education.

H_O: There is no relationship between respondents' sex and their opinion about long hours/tedious registration and voting processes.

H_R: There is a relationship between respondents' sex and their opinion about long hours/tedious

registration and voting processes.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The scope of this study was limited to the examination and analysis of the nature of voter participatory behaviour in the electoral system covering the period of 1959 till date but with particular focus on 1999 to 2011.

A major limitation to this study was the vastness of the Nigerian landscape, which will be problematic in terms of coverage. Therefore the three senatorial districts of Edo State served as the sampling frame from which data was elicited from respondents.

Moreover, the objective of the study was misconstrued by some of the respondents (especially the illiterates) who saw it as a government initiative to identify persons who do not participate in the electoral process for possible sanctions. They were therefore, unwilling to fully cooperate with the researcher in terms of supply of accurate information.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Voter behaviour as a subset of political behaviour is specifically addressed, identified and measured in the context of voter turnout, namely the incidence and quantum of the exercise of the franchise. Low voter participation describes that aspect of voter behaviour captured by non-voting in an election. It has emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economies, as well as small and troubled ones, and among youth, women and other marginalized groups as much as among mainstream dominant interests (International IDEA 1999; 2002).

This study provides a more scientific, empirically grounded and updated picture of voter perception of voter participatory behaviour as it relates to declining turnout in Nigeria, against a backdrop of global and historical experiences.

The need for this study is based on the global realization of the vital role of credible elections as the bedrock of democracy, democratization and good governance. As noted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1999; 2002), elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will. They help to secure the legitimacy of the political system.

In addition, they are vital to political socialization, the exercise of political influence, and serve as the foundation for democratic stability and renewal (Dulani 2005; Lindberg 2006).

Moreover, the findings from this study will help beam the search on the factors and dynamics of voter participatory behaviour in the electoral process in Nigeria. The findings will provide the basis for

understanding the intricacies involved in voter behaviour in the Nigeria polity.

Furthermore, this study would suggest possible solutions to the problems of voters' low turnout during general elections

Finally, it is the researcher's expectations that the study will make good reading for scholars, students and others who are interested in voter participatory behaviour in the election process of Nigeria and will serve as a basis for further research.

1.7 DEFINITION OF BASIC TERMS

For purpose of clarity, some of the concepts that are used in this research study are hereunder defined.

Voter

A voter is a person who has a right to participate in an election as an elector. In Nigeria, a voter is a citizen who is 18 years old and above, and is duly registered to elect political office holders. In effect anyone who can exercise the right to vote is a voter.

Voting Behaviour

Voting is the main form of political participation in liberal democratic societies and voting or voter behaviour in the context of this work, is the attitude, perception, action, of an eligible voter in voting/not voting and how and why such decision was made.

Apathy

Political apathy is the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity. Political apathy is evidenced in mass, collective behaviour but has its origin at the level of the individual psyche. In the aggregate, political apathy is revealed by attitudes and an absence of expected activity. When people cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society, and perform entirely nominal or rote acts- or none at all- in political institutions or organizations, apathy is indicated (Mason, Nelson and Szklarski (1991).

Voting Age Population

This is the total number or percentage of eligible voters who are qualified to vote in an election

Voter turnout

This is the total number or percentage of eligible voters who cast ballots in an election.

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