

Voting Apathy among the Nigerian Electorates in 2019 General Elections: The Role of INEC, Issues and the Way Forward

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ABSTRACT: *Independent National Electoral Commission is constitutionally empowered to conduct a transparent election in Nigeria, but the seeming declining interest to participate on the electoral system by the electorates' calls for questioning. This study therefore aims at establishing the causes of voting apathy among the Nigerian electorates. The study adopted both Survey Research Design and Secondary Sources of Data Collection as Method of information gathering, while Rational Choice Theory was chosen as the theoretical foundation. Findings revealed that poor political and voters education in congruence with low level of education, illiteracy, especially whereby majority of voters (about 50%) neglect to pick up their permanent voters cards; and could not be accredited to vote; that the nature of Nigerian politics is another factor since Nigeria politics is labelled politics of acrimony, bitterness; that since elected representatives fail to deliver on their campaign promises, that the electorates have lost trust in the government and finds it difficult to participate in the electoral process. The study recommends amongst others; the provision of security; ensuring and sustaining justice; and guaranteeing of liberty etc.*

KEYWORDS: *Voting apathy, Electorates, Elections, Democracy, INEC.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Voting apathy in recent times have become seemingly an innocuous issues in the democratic process in Nigeria. While the purpose of every government is to develop and implement policies for the benefit of its citizens, it is also the right and responsibility of the citizens to elect their leaders through the ballot. A nation's political foundations are built on elections. [1] asserted that voting is a basic process that enables the citizens to choose their own leaders and their representatives in government which entails that voters have the capacity to influence the policies and programmes of a political party and the entire administrative system. In Nigeria, where every adult is given the right to vote, irrespective of sex, class, occupation; statistics in the last two decades have however shown that many people do not participate in elections even when they have been registered by the nations electoral body [2]. His or her vote and those of others, elects the representatives that form the government and govern the country. It has also been observed that despite the increased rate of voters registration owing to the rise in population and political awareness, the rate of voting in Nigeria continue to drop in every election conducted in the country just as the number of unclaimed voter cards keeps increasing.

[3] asserted that voter apathy seems to have emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economics, as well as small and troubled ones, among youth, men/women and other marginalized groups as much as among mainstream dominant interest groups. Voter apathy could be measured by the percentage of registered voters and the turnout during the elections. In other words, the percentage of the registered voters who turn out to vote on election day, and the percentage of voting age population, registered or not registered, that cast their ballots on election day [4].

[5] articulated that every election cycle, the number of Nigerians who vote appears to have repeatedly shrunk in spite of the ever growing number of registered voters and this has been the pattern since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule. In his analysis, between the last election in 2015 and the 2019 election, over sixteen million (16.58) Nigerians according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), became eligible to vote for the first time; yet preliminary figures of the number of people who took part in the 2019 elections showed a shrinking voter base such that collations by INEC in states such as Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Rivers and some others witnessed the lowest turnout, with less than thirty percent (30%) of their registered voters making the ballot. This in stark contrast to the 1999 general election where about seventy percent (70%) of all registered voters turned out to usher in Nigeria's new democracy.

Attempts have been made to link the above to certain inhibiting factors on voter participation in electoral process in Nigeria. In this regard, [6] lamented that many people have lost trust and confidence in the government and their elected representatives since those elected to represent the people have always failed to deliver on the promises made to the electorate during campaigns. In her view, after they are elected and sworn into office, they turn demigods. This makes people lose confidence in them and as such manifests in voting

apathy recorded in almost every elections conducted in Nigeria [7], [8]. This is corroborated by [9] earlier position that politicians make series of promises during election campaigns; hence most of these promises are far from being fulfilled after they are voted into power. As a result of this, most voters lose interest in any political activities. Voter apathy experienced before, during and after the election could be expatiated on the basis of lack of trust/confidence in the government, fear of intimidation by hired thugs/security agents, campaign crises, bad governance, election fraud/violence, poor political education, poverty and dearth of infrastructural development in the state, among others. These factors no doubt seem to have contributed to political manoeuvre during the election and as such made caricature of our nascent democracy.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) being the institution saddled with the electoral responsibilities of the country has been constantly knocked down on the grounds of low level of voter education to quell the menace of voter apathy in Nigeria's electoral process. In this regard, [10] ascribed that poor political and voter's education in congruence with low level of education, illiteracy in Nigeria has been a major bane on voter participation in democratic process in Nigeria. As such, the outcome of elections depicts high degree of voter apathy. He decried a situation whereby nearly fifty percent (50%) of registered voters neglected to pick up their PVC's and therefore, could not be accredited to vote as a result of inadequate mobilization by INEC.

Statement of the Problem

It has become extremely worrisome that over the years, there seems to be significant decline in the rate of voter's turnout during elections in Nigeria. Going through the analysis of official records obtained from INEC website, it revealed that 52.3% of the registered voters voted in the 1999 elections; the figure rose to 69.1% in 2003, then went down to 57.4% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015 and only a handful of 34.74% of the registered voters actually voted in the just concluded 2019 presidential elections (INEC, <https://www.inecnigeria.org/all-about-2019-generalelections>). The News Agency of Nigeria, 2019 in the same vein reported that the 34.75% of voters in the 2019 general elections represents 26,614,190 electorates who cast their votes during elections and that 33.18% representing 27,324,583 of the 82,344,107 registered voters were valid votes that led to the final decision of INEC, hence the declaration of Muhammadu Buhari as President on the Presidential and National Assembly elections held on 23rd February 2019.

The above scenario presents a gloomy picture of voter participation and democracy in Nigeria especially when recourse is made to the fact that Nigeria's population has been approximated to about two hundred million (200m) persons. Supposedly, the affairs of Nigeria state is supposed to be run by elected officials whom greater majority of the electorates elected, but the electorates feels disenchanting and allows of the affairs of the greater population to be decided by few inactive politicians.

Again, when very few people vote, the politicians elected do not represent the beliefs and values of the general population. Voter apathy is therefore been compared with a sort of political depression, where one feels helpless and unable to influence important events.

On the basis of this, this study investigates voter apathy and interrogates the role of INEC in improving voter participation in the national electoral process.

The specific objectives of the study are aimed at:

- i. To determine the factors responsible for voting apathy among the electorate in the 2019 general elections.
- ii. To examine the effects of voting apathy among the electorates on the development of Nigeria's democracy.
- iii. To establish the role of INEC in reducing voting apathy among the electorates for democratic development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

In every research, worthwhile efforts are expended to clarify some core concepts that form the main purpose of discussion of this paper. This will provide a better understanding for the study. In this study, we will explain some of this concepts;

i. Voter Apathy

Voter apathy is perceived as a subset of political apathy. Voter apathy occurs when eligible voters do not vote in public or general elections in a given country. Outside election time, voters may seem disillusioned with the political process or politicians in general. [11], espoused that voter apathy could be measured by the percentage of registered voters and the voters turnout during the elections. In other words, the percentage of voting age population, registered or not registered, that cast their ballots on the Election Day. An individual's voting apathy begins with a lack of interest and understanding of election, politics or government to a certain degree and that makes it more difficult for that individual to see the value in universal suffrage, and to see the benefits and/or cost of new government policies and end up not casting his or her vote in a general election [12]. Voting apathy shows in reservations, restraints, and abandonment of the electoral system, thus not voting.

ii. Election (General Election)

This could refer to as the symbol of democracy. It is the beauty of democracy. It makes the expensive and comprehensive treatment of political matters possible. It plays significant role in the choice of governments. Modern representative government is not feasible without an election. Elections are neatly tied to the growth and development of representative democratic government. It is the single most indicator of the presence or absence of a democratic government. It creates an atmosphere of excitement, battle, contest, victory, defeat, uncertainty, curiosity, speculations, hopes and fears [13].

However, in whatever context the concept of election is used, certain basic elements must be present [14];

i. An election usually entails the selection of a fewer people by a larger number to fill predetermined politics vacancies.

ii. Election implies an element of choice in that electors have options to select either from a number of individuals or a range of programmes.

iii. Election also implies that each elector exercises his/her right to choose independently of any other electors.

Election could also be seen as an institutionalized procedure for choosing office holders by some or all the recognized members of the society [15]. Election have been considered and acknowledged by scholars, statesmen, and a variety of personnel in and out of government circle as a legitimate and most acceptable process by which prospective public office seekers are either elected or rejected by the electorates [16].

Election is the formal process of selecting a person for public or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition. Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary (2006) defines election as; "the act or process of organizing systematic election (permitting mass participation and method of choosing) a person or persons by vote for a public office position in which state authority is exercised. [17] defines election as; a method of the selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by an electorate; those (citizens who are qualified to vote under the rules and procedures of the electoral system)". In this context therefore, elections are organized channels of popular expressions through the instrumentality of the transparency and sanctity of the ballot box.

Election is a democratic process of putting people to positions of control of the nation's resources for the good of the people. Good governance requires people with good intentions who are sincere in what to do, to better the lives of ordinary Nigerians. Election must produce right people to power who understand and importance of working for the poor majority. Election could be seen as institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders by some or all the recognized members of a society. For an electoral system to be democratic, it must provide for equal electorate and the freedom by that electorate to make a real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation [18]. In effect, election would be deemed to be democratic and hence good if it is free and fair and not based on patronage of any kind.

Election is the act of choosing person or group of persons for the purpose of occupying a particular position or positions through the voting process. Election is used in political and non-political organizations as a process of selecting their leaders. Thus, apart from electing legislators, local government chairmen, governors and president, we now elect leaders of social clubs, church organizations, village committees etc. Election is a modernized democratic way of choosing leaders. Its application is based on the democratic principle that, rulers whom the people are expected to obey should rule in the interests of the people and therefore should be chosen by the people. Elected persons are therefore accountable to the people and should receive peoples mandate to govern [19].

However, a general election is an election in which all or most members of a given political body are chosen [20]. In a presidential system, the term refers to a regularly scheduled election where both the president, and either "a class" of or all members of the national legislature are elected at the same time or period. In Nigeria, it is a time the Chief Executives at the National and State levels as well as the members of the Legislature are elected through a universal adult suffrage. In this context, general elections refer to those involving the President, National Assembly, State Governors and State Assemblies. These elections may be held same day or different days as the case may be [21].

iii. Electorates

This refers to a body or group of qualified adult's citizens that chooses those that represents them in government. In Nigeria, the law or constitution of the country stipulates that for one to qualify to vote, he or she must have attained the age of eighteen (18yrs) years.

II. METHODOLOGY

Survey research (observation method) was adopted for this study. The observation method has to do with an eye witness account of event and their happenings. In addition, this includes media reports and televising of events that happened with relation to the topic of discussion (electoral matters).

Furthermore, survey research was complemented with secondary information. Here relevant literature were reviewed from available sources; namely journals, textbooks, internet materials and quarterly magazines.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts the Rational Choice Theory propounded by George Homans in 1961. The premise of rational choice theory is that the aggregate behaviour in the society reflects the sum of the choices made by individuals. Each individual in turn, makes their choice based on their own preferences and the constraints (or choice set) they face [22]. At the individual level, rational choice theory stipulates that the individual chooses the action (or outcome) they most prefer. In the case where actions (or outcomes) can be evaluated in terms of costs and benefits, a rational individual chooses the action (or outcomes) that provide the maximum net benefit, ie, the maximum benefit minus cost. In general, rational decision making entails choosing among all available alternatives, the alternative that the individual must prefer.

By way of theoretical relevance to this study, rational choice theory is significant in understanding that underlying factors responsible for voting apathy among the electorates in Nigeria's electoral process. An individual has preferences (to vote or not to vote) among the available choice alternatives that allow them to undertake which option they prefer. Here voters are assumed to take account of available information, probabilities of events, and potential costs and benefits in determining preferences of whether to vote or not to vote in a general election, and to act consistently in choosing the self-determined best choice of action.

Therefore, voting is a rational choice made by voters on the basis of their preferences of the costs and benefits given available information about the general electoral process. When voters are provided with adequate knowledge and reasons to vote, there is no doubt that there would be a significant reduction on the level of political apathy in the nation's electoral processes.

Empirical Review

A study by [23] titled, *Factors Militating against Women Political Participation in Nigeria*. The study set to establish the philosophy behind the decline in women participation in political activities and leadership position in Nigeria. The study established that these factors constrains women's participation in political activities in Nigeria; the "purdah system" in Northern Nigeria, which is a house seclusion of women which does not allow them to move about freely as their male counter parts; another is lack of adequate education, as greater percentage of them are illiterate; lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria. A large portion of the Nigerian female population is not financially strong as their male counterparts; since politics in Nigeria are determined by political financiers who are predominantly males. That family responsibilities and childbearing also hinder women from participating effectively in partisan political activities, since a lot of them are involved in childbearing; the fear of crime and electoral violence in Nigeria's politics and lastly are poverty, low self-esteem, ignorance, lack of confidence in other women, cultural stereotypes, religious barriers, high registration fees which most women cannot afford and harmful traditional practices. Recommendation were; to ensure gender equality in relation to political position, should be included in the constitution of political parties as a directive of state policy; that the societal attitudes that encourage male dominance and female-subordination must be eliminated; that there is need for educational and economic empowerment of women as well as the elimination of other forms of socio-economic obstacles to women's political participation; that some obnoxious traditional practices against women like the "purdah system" must be totally removed, etc.

The study by [24] is apt, except that it lacked methodology and implications of the study.

In another study by [25] titled, *Democracy, Human Rights and Electoral Violence: The Nigerian Experience in the Fourth Republic*; The study sort to establish how democracy has fared since 1999 in Nigeria; what gave rise to human rights abuses and electoral violence and the role of the electorates in the electoral system. The study adopted frustration aggression as the theoretical framework of analysis. The study established that; ill elections conducted in Nigeria, 2003-2019 continues to hold sway with attendant electoral violence and human rights violations and abuses; that the post-election crisis in Northern Nigeria lends credence that electoral voting in Nigeria is still sectarian and ethnic driven, that the inability of the present democracy under the fourth republic to address the problems of human rights abuses in the present security challenges leading to multiple deaths, arson, refuge problems, displacement; causes of electoral violence such as; poverty, unemployment, weak penalties, weak governance, corruption, proliferation of illegal and small arms is an indictment on the leadership. This study therefore opined that the above factors contributes in scaring people away from participating in the democratic process.

The findings by [26] are apt, but the study lacked methodology, implications of findings and recommendations. On the basis of the above defects, it was criticized.

Another study by [27] titled, "Electoral Systems and Problems Relating to Voting and Representations". The study sort to establish the factors that inhibits electorate participation in voting, as well as making choice for effective representation. He sees franchise as a person's right to vote. He maintained that if franchise is the electorate's right to vote, why has franchise generated a form of controversy? According to him, he claimed that laws and policies of government concerns all people and what affect all, should be decided by all. So, to grant suffrage to some means the exclusion of others from representations.

He equally acclaimed that the most widely accepted kind of franchise in practice world over and in present times is that the right to vote should be given to all adult citizens without discriminations on the basis of religion, race, caste, creed, wealth, language, domicility, colour, sex, culture, ideology except those excluded on the basis of being minors, aliens, non-resident citizens, convicts, lunatics, etc. Some countries like Nigeria, Britain, USA, use the minimum age of 18 years. Switzerland, and France use 20 years and 21 years respectively. In this respect, every citizen on acquiring the status of adulthood, is given the right to vote, unless he/she belongs to one of the excluded classes. It is these exclusions that demoralize willing Nigerians electorates or foreigners to cast their votes during elections.

The study by [28] established that female franchise has been a matter of controversy on whether women should be given the right to vote or not. The controversy posits that female suffrage are:

- i. The women's world is confined to hearts and homes.
- ii. The women are generally conservative and most of them are illiterates, in which case, they will misuse the right to vote and cast their votes in favour of incompetent persons.
- iii. If the women cast their votes against the will of their husbands, there will be tension and clashes in their homes and families.
- iv. The women would lose their feminine qualities and virtues, if they are given political right.
- v. Those against female franchise argue also that women cannot perform public duties as men because they are physically weaker than the men.

These controversies and limitations have greatly constrained women participation in the electoral process.

However, despite how commendable the study by [29] may seem, a lot of controversies were equally generated thus; the study lacked methodology, theoretical framework, implications of the study and recommendations.

So far, having exhaustively reviewed this paper, the researchers expend effort in discussing;

- i. The trajectory of voting apathy in Nigeria's General Elections (1959-2019).
- ii. The Rationale behind Voting Apathy among the Electorates in 2019 General Elections in Nigeria.
- iii. Implications of Voting Apathy among the Electorates on the Development of Nigeria's Democracy.
- iv. Curbing voting Apathy for the Development of Nigeria's Democracy: Role of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC.

A. The Trajectory of Voting Apathy in Nigeria's General Elections

A historical perspective on voting trends in Nigeria shows that there are variant trends in the level of voter turnout during the country's general elections. To start with, the 1959 general elections symbolises an important landmark in Nigeria's electoral history. This is because that was the year, the first general elections were held on 12th December, 1959 in prepatory to the attainment of political independence in October 1960. A total of 9,043,404 voters were registered, of whom 7,189,797 (75%) voted [30]. This turnout, which was regarded as impressive, has been explained as a result of social and political pressures, as well as administrative actions by the regional governments and local authorities who exhorted the voters to go to the polls. In their view, [31], revealed that although the regions took administrative actions to promote voter turnout, their efforts yielded different levels of success. For instance, while Lagos, the then Federal Capital Territory, recorded a total of 76.2% respectively.

However, since the 1959 general elections, voter turnout has been less impressive. For example, all stages of the 1979 elections were characterized by low voter's turnout, with 34% of voters voting in the presidential election, 28.8% in the Senate and 30.7% in the House of Representatives elections. Although, there was a marginal increase in the 1983 elections, the turnout was still very low such that in the presidential elections, for example, only 25,430,096 out of the 65,304,818 registered voters cast their votes, which amounts to 38% [32]. The turnout for the senate elections of 1992 was 39% and presidential election of 1993, it was 37%. The low turnout can be explained by the high level of inconsistency and apparently endless transition programme under the General Ibrahim Babangida's administration [7], which tended to reduce the level of public trust in the transition.

Prior to the 1999 general elections, there were 57,938,945 registered voters by INEC, but it was only 30,280,052 cast their votes, which represents 52.3% [9].

However, the voter turnout rose to 69.1% in 2003 elections. That year, INEC had 60,823,022 registered voters, out of which 42,018,735 turned out and cast their votes with 39,480,489 valid votes and 2,538,246

invalid votes. He further unravelled that the turnout in 2003 represented an increase of 16.8%. In 2007, available records showed that there were 61,566,648 registered voters by INEC, out of which 35,419,262 voters representing 57.4% were said to have been voted. This represented a drop in the voter turnout of 11.04%. The voter turnout again dropped further to 53.7% in the 2011 presidential election when INEC had 73,528,040 registered voters, but only 39,469,484 of them turnout for the poll, with 38,209,978 valid votes and 1,259,506 invalid votes. This represented a drop of 4.36%. The situation was same in 2015, when only 29,432,083 voters, which was 43.6% out of the 67,422,005 registered voters turned out and cast their votes. That year, there were 28,587,564 valid votes and 844,519 invalid votes, thereby dropping by 10.1%.

Finally, in the 2019 general elections, only 34.75% of voters voted, representing 28,614,190 electorates who cast their votes during the elections, out of the 82,344,107 registered voters (the News Agency of Nigeria, 2019).

The statistics above are summarized below;

Table 1: Summary of voter Turnout in Nigeria’s General Elections, 1959 – 2019

Elections	Registered voters	Turnout	Percent
1959 General Election	9,043,404	7,189,797	75.50%
1979 Presidential Election	48,633,782	16,846,633	34.00%
1979 Senate Election	48,633,782	12,532,195	25.80%
1979 Reps Election	48,633,782	14,941,782	30.70%
1983 Presidential Election	65,304,818	25,430,096	38.00%
1983 Senate Election	65,304,818	Na	Na
1983 Reps Election	65,304,818	Na	Na
1992 Senate Election	36,923,571	14,716,074	37.00%
1992 Reps Election	36,923,571	15,329,670	41.00%
1993 Presidential Election	37,826,460	14,321,963	37.00%
1999 Presidential Election	57,838,945	30,280,052	52.30%
1999 Senate Election	57,838,945	24,386,427	42.11%
199 Reps Election	57,838,945	23,573,407	40.70%
2003 Presidential Election	60,823,022	42,018,738	69.10%
2003 Senate Election	60,823,022	29,995,171	49.30%
2003 Reps Election	60,823,022	30,386,270	50.00%
2007 General Election	61,566,648	35,419,262	57.4%
2011 General Election	75,528,040	39,469,484	53.7%
2015 General Election	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.6%
2019 General Election	82,344,107	28,614,190	34.75%

Source: Omotola and Aiyedogbon (2012), Idike, (2014) Orjime (2019), INEC (2019), The News Agency of Nigeria (2019).

b. The Rationale or Factors that Predicates Voting Apathy among the Electorates in Nigeria’s General Elections

Scholars have attempted several justifications for the persistence of voting apathy among electorates in Nigeria’s general elections. [23] write that the outcome of the election depicts a high degree of voter apathy and attributed it to poor political and voter’s education in congruence with low level of education/illiteracy. He lamented on a situation whereby nearly 50% of registered voters neglected to pick up their permanent voters card and therefore could not be accredited to vote as a result of inadequate mobilization by INEC, Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations (CSO’s) as well as the media. No doubt, the level of voter education in Nigeria is still very low. Majority of the citizens are illiterates and as such, they may feel there is no need for them to get involved in electoral process, since they do not understand the intricacies of politics. [9], observed that illiteracy is shown in the Nigeria’s participation during the 2019 General Elections.

[29], submitted that the nature of Nigeria’s politics is another militating factor to electoral participation by electorates. The politics in Nigeria no doubt is tagged politics of acrimony, bitterness, where winner’s take-all syndrome has assumed a centre stage in politics. As a result, many active citizens shy away from politics and political activities because of how it is practiced in Nigeria. Politics is seen as a do or die affairs by political big-wigs. Hence, politics in Nigeria is callously referred to as a dirty game, since it is practiced with bitterness, hatred, rancour and other associated evils showing that Nigeria is still in vicious cycle of political crisis and instability.

It has been argued that many people have lost trust in the government and their elected representatives. [5] wrote that since those elected to represent the people have failed to deliver on the promises made to the electorates during elections, the electorate have learnt to shy away and shun political activities. These elected representative on assumption of office, turn demigods who could not be reached; thereby making the electorates lose confidence in them [8]. Politicians make series of promises during election campaigns hence most of these promises are far from being fulfilled after they are voted into power. As a result of this, some voters lose interest, not only in the country’s political system but all political activities.

Most worrisome is that the 2019 Nigeria's general elections was riddled with fear because of intimidation, harassment, violence, arson, maiming, etc, especially in some states like Rivers, Benue, Akwa-Ibom, Kano, Kaduna among others. Acrimonious politics has been part of the Nigeria's political culture with the use of political thugs and security personnel to harass and intimidate voters thereby creating fear in the hearts of the eligible voters. As a result, many lose interest in politics. Some people believe that since politics is violence prone, the involvement in the process may lead to loss of their lives or properties [12].

[11] opined that bad governance has manifested in all areas and spheres of life in Nigeria. Many Nigerian leaders are not accountable to the people, they are not truly representative of and responsive to the people's interests. What borders them most is the welfare of their immediate ethnic or sectional origin, region, family or relatives and that of their few friends. Nigeria citizens and electorates are suffering; many people are being killed unjustly on a daily basis, properties are being destroyed, while billions of naira are siphoned from public treasury to private realms or stashed abroad. This situation which makes people less concerned about the political affairs. These have been demonstrated in the declining interests of Nigerians to register and vote from 1999 to date (2019).

[17], espoused that electoral fraud, such as rigging has been a permanent features of Nigerian politics in contemporary time. The electoral process in this democratic dispensation has often been associated with fraud, rigging and other forms of manipulation. Some people even believe that since the election is hardly free and fair, as it is always rigged by the incumbent government, the powerful or affluent politicians there is no need of participating in such a process. The fact that elections are usually rigged in favour of certain candidates or ruling party, encourages political apathy because people sees it as a mere waste of time even if they get involved in such activities.

The issues highlighted above, among others, such as bad leadership, imposition of candidates, intra and inter party crisis, insecurity, racial or tribal segregation, religious fanaticism, lack of infrastructural development, political instability, and arbitrariness of the ruling government constrains political participation thereby contributing to voting apathy among the Nigerian electorates as demonstrated in the 2019 general elections.

c. The Implications of Voting Apathy among the Electorates on the Development of Nigeria's Democracy

In countries where the rights of voting are still limited to certain level, it is hard to set themselves on the path of progress. Such countries may have to face widespread discontent among the people as a result of total lack of transparency and public faith in the policies and activities of the government. In Nigeria where adults are given the right to vote, irrespective of sex, class, occupation, etc, statistics in the last two decades (1999-2019) have shown that most electorates do not participate in election, even when they have been registered by the country's electoral body.

[30] opined that the consequences of this, is the inability of the masses to have a link between the state of underdevelopment and their non-participation in the electoral process. It is unfounded that after successive democratic regimes, an average Nigerian still lives on less than one dollar per day, while elected few enjoy a life of affluence. These elected representatives have attained a level of influence and affluence whereby they can manipulate the political and judicial system to remain in power. The questions, the electorates and mass of Nigerians ask is, why should I vote, when I know my vote would not count? The rate of underdevelopment viz-a-viz the volumes of looting by politicians remain a mystery to the electorates who commuted power to such individual. None participation therefore becomes the end result of frustration in the system. It is in this regard that [15] concluded that the Nigeria political culture has not given room for the entrenchment and sustenance of true democracy.

Women marginalization in the political system has been a major effect of voting apathy in Nigeria. Over time, political and political decisions have been restricted to the men even when the impact of such wrong decisions are most likely to be felt by women and children. This is disturbing and alarming especially in the developing and underdeveloped societies. [20] expressed that the low level of political participation of the Nigerian women is becoming alarming and disturbing. Since the emergence of political independence in 1960, the Nigerian women have remained invisible in the political process. This perhaps has been the reason why few women aspire for political position and a huge percentage does not see the reliance of participating in the electoral process. Although, the 1985 Beijing declaration to which Nigeria is a signatory provides that thirty percent (30%) of all positions in government should be given to women [3]. [13] maintained that the policy is yet to be implemented in Nigeria because there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other public positions. When political participation is high, apathy will be low and vice versa. In general, while political participation strengthens the democratic process and system, political apathy weakens the system and makes the central government susceptible to anarchy. The existence of voting apathy in Nigeria thrives on the low participation of the electorates in the electoral system. A democratic government ensures participation and

inclusiveness and is also responsive and accountable to its people. Rather than benefit the democratic system, apathy crumbles the system and makes room for external and military aggression [2].

[7] adduced that democratic politics is built on certain minimum principles. These principles include; participation and inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability, transparency and good governance, regular free and fair elections, freedom and respect for human rights and the observance of rule of law. Participation and inclusion pertains to the individual freedom to vote and be voted for as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Also, the responsiveness of the system in the democratic system relates to how the people, electorates, orient or participate in the political system. People oriented leadership is central to good governance and such is the goal of any democracy. Regular, free and fair election cannot be compromised, so political participation is expected to increase. More so, respect and value for human right will determine the value placed on the system. In Nigeria, all of these variables seems negative; hence the people are excluded from the electoral process and the electoral system marred with a lot of inconsistencies; while good governance remain a mirage, human rights abuse is worse, the law manipulated to suit selfish individual interest, all these engender voters apathy.

D. Curbing Voting Apathy for the Development of Nigeria's Democracy: Role of Independent National Electoral Commission

Attempts at providing possible strategies for eradicating or stemming the tide of voting apathy in Nigeria have been explored by scholars.

Therefore, any attempt by INEC in curbing voting apathy for the democratic development of Nigeria should focus on key issues like conducting transparent/credible elections, adequate education and orientation of voters, being truly independent, providing adequate voting materials, recruiting competent staff and training them, improve voter registration process, conduct public enlightenment campaign, provide adequate security, enforce law an order, and without interfering with the electoral process [11]. Emphasis is therefore drawn on the issues itemized above;

i. Provision of Security

Adequate security before, during and after the elections by INEC is one of the most essential strategies in curbing voting apathy. Most electorate do not vote on election days on the grounds of possible insecurity. [1] maintained that one of the basis for the existence of government and forms a central part of a democratic government is the provision of security for the people especially during electioneering period. Security is the freedom from danger or relative freedom from aggression and unwarranted violation. The questions on the lips of many Nigerians is, how far the Nigeria state and INEC has gone in providing security for her citizens during elections and general life philosophies. In terms of political security, it is expected that the government will provide a conducive political atmosphere which is devoid of any threat to individuals' participation in the states' political activities. This however seems missing in the Nigerian state as so called godfathers and leaders impose their will on the people. Policy decisions are not reflective of the peoples need and the people are left helpless in the system.

During elections, the agents of the state including the law enforcement agencies are used to rig elections, manipulate results and cancel the election when it does not favour the interest of the ruling political class [9], [10].

Lastly, though military security is vital and also a core demand of the voters, especially as it has to do with the protection of lives and properties of individuals by the state during and after elections. Rather than securing the citizens, the military forces in Nigeria have been involved in protecting the political class at the expense of the Nigerian people. More so, the inability of the military to protect Nigerians during the pre-election and post-election crisis that have rocked the country leaves the citizens disappointed in the system and by implications engender voting apathy.

ii. Sustenance of Justice

As observed by [14], unless the state is a community existing for ethical purposes and holding together by moral ties, it is more than a highway robbery on a larger scale. It is upon these foundations that many societies imbibe the tenets of the rule of law which is the acceptable standard in any nation. It should be noted that Nigeria is made up of multiple ethnic national with different standard practice and code of conduct as enshrined in their culture. The existence of these ethnic nationals as a country therefore makes the need for justice and equity. The rule of law as common to every democratic institution including Nigeria can be seen as just if and only if there is supremacy of the law, equality before the law where all men are equal and fundamental human rights strictly observed. The supremacy of the law implies that the rich, political office holders and political godfathers are not superior to the law. In addition, it ensures that the fundamental human rights of the people are defended. Human right determines the dignity and value of individuals within the country. The fundamental human rights entails; the right to life; right to dignity of human persons; right to

personal liberty; right to fair hearing; right to private and family life; right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and right to freedom of expression. The existence of the state is not only expected to guarantee these rights but to promote and protect these rights at all time.

Unfortunately, justice remains a big challenge in Nigeria from independence to date and until it is addressed, voting apathy will continue to thrive. The arm of government responsible for upholding the judicial system is inefficient [9]. Most judicial workers, judges and lawyers are highly corrupt, accepting bribes from some individuals and perverting the course of justice [18]. It is said that justice delayed is justice denied, but Nigeria's judiciary is a clear characteristics of judicial system were cases linger in court for centuries. Many are put in prison unjustly, spending years before they are proven innocent. This aberration is devastating and leaves the common man wondering if the law actually works. In addition, many political office holders that are charged with corruption offences and misconducts while in office cannot be apprehended and punished because of the position they occupy. The rule of law therefore seems to apply to specific set of persons rather than everybody. To this end, there are sacred cows that must be sacrificed. Under this biased situation, the people tend towards voting apathy. They cannot demand justice, especially where justice is served when demanded. So political apathy in the political system is mostly perpetuated by the failure of the state to provide justice. It therefore behoves on INEC to ensure electoral justice to curb voter apathy in Nigeria.

iii. Guaranteeing Liberty

Liberty must be ensured and guaranteed for all the individuals in the country to ensure voter participation. Just like the issues of security and justice, whether Nigeria is providing and protecting the rights and liberties of all individuals is something else. This is because; rule of law is not strictly adhered to. Therefore, as pointed out earlier, instead of having the law as supreme, you have some individuals above the law; and instead of having fundamental human rights and other rights for all individuals, you have the fundamental human rights and other rights of the privileged few by virtue of their wealth, power or influence being observed by Nigerians. Situations like this endanger voter participation.

iv. Provision of Economic Welfare

Apart from making provision for security, justice and liberty, the state has a central role in the provision for the economic welfare of the people. Welfare here pertains to the wellbeing and standard of living for the people. To ensure good life, Nigeria must encourage its unity, strength and self-reliance. Being a country that is referred to as the richest black nation in the world with crude oil, favourable climate for agriculture and a growing market, the existence of the state is expected to maintain the welfare of the people. One way of ensuring this is through income redistribution that is meant to bridge the gap between the have and the have's not. Nigerian government is required to open up economic opportunities for the citizens no matter where they reside, rural or urban centres.

The presence of even development has a lot to do with the welfare of the citizens of Nigeria. A country with over two hundred million people (200m) and over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups scattered all over to feel the dividends of democracy. In the provision of social amenities or provision of the basic necessities of life, the state must not be found wanting or being biased towards any of the ethnic group. The state (government) provision of economic welfare in Nigeria is and should be hinged on unity, strength and self-reliance which are the building blocks of the nation. If the country is built on a sound national unity, Nigerians anywhere will have the ability and freedom to live in other parts of the country. The Ibo man from Eastern Nigeria can live freely and do business in the North, and the Northern can live safely in the South. These are not only the basic for national existence but a critical factor in the access to economic welfare. In addition, Nigerians are expected to be self-reliant owing to the investment of the government in her people. When the state develops human capital, then productivity of the country increases and each individual in broad sense does not depend on the government for daily meal.

As common to other expectations from the state, provision of welfare in Nigeria has been a mirage. [30] adduced that on the first note, there is a wide disparity between the rural and urban areas, such that this has crippled the agricultural sector of the country, due to high urban drift. In addition, political office holders are fond of concentrating development in their own locality at the expense of other parts of the country. The result effects of these are the fierce battle for power bent (politicians) milking down the national cake. This seems not to be a thing of surprise as politics is no longer viewed as service to the nation but service to individual pocket and ethnic group. It is thus common to see groups clashed in other to get represented at the centre of power.

Furthermore, disunity is the order of the day and the nation is paying dearly for it in economic terms. In Northern Nigeria for instance, religious and ethnic motivated violence targets other Nigerians, destroying businesses, properties and incapacitating human life. This is evident in the growing decline of the economic prowess of the Northern Nigeria over time. Unfortunately, the government is not concerned with this trend, as it keeps milking the people for its selfish gains. The consequence is that Nigerian government is viewed as not having anything to offer to her citizens [15].

Most Nigerians would jump at the offer of travelling abroad because of the harsh economy and the unbearable situation of the country.

The political apathy in the Nigerian democratic system is only a revelation of the injury, hurt, disappointment and displeasure of Nigerians with the entire democratic system and governance. Political apathy is a manifestation that can only be corrected by the political class who are the key to the political problems that engulfed the country.

In summary, conducting a transparent and credible election would be the most important requirement of INEC. Others are; ensuring adequate voter education, guaranteeing independence of INEC, provision of adequate election materials, recruitment, training, retraining of competent staff as well as improvement of the voter registration process. The Government, should equally provide support to INEC, fulfil electoral promises, engage in public enlightenment campaign, ensure adequate security for voters, stop corruption, and enforce the law and order in the society as well as non-interference in the electoral process.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper examined voting apathy in Nigeria's electoral system, with regards to promoting and encouraging voter's participation in the electoral system. The study pointed out some factors that discourage the people from taking active part in the electoral system.

This study therefore concluded by outlining some positive steps that will be taken by the state (government) and INEC so as to increase the peoples (electorates) willingness to participate in the electoral process in Nigeria.

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