

Actualizing Effectual Citizens' Engagement in the Nigerian Electoral Process: An Opinion Survey (1999-2011)

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Abstract

This study surveys opinion of Nigerians on the factors influencing low voters' participation or otherwise, in the Nigerian electoral process, it made use of data elicited from respondents' of the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State. The stratified random sampling technique was utilized to select a sample of 1,200 Nigerians, from the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State. The structured questionnaire and in-depth interview were the measurement instruments utilized while the Chi-Square and Yule's Q were used to test and determine the degree of association intrinsic in the stated hypotheses. The study revealed that the Nigerian electoral process is inhibited by violence and insecurity and that the INEC, political candidates and parties are failing in their responsibilities to engender active participation of the citizenry in the electoral process. Consequently, some policy advices were made. For instance, it is necessary for the INEC to conduct transparent and credible elections, improve voters' registration process and ensure effective voters' education; the Political Parties and Politicians should ensure internal party democracy, provide responsible representation and fulfill electoral promises made during campaigns; the government should provide adequate protection for voters' and ensure independence of the INEC; while the electorates should resist the temptation to sell votes and to make the

right choices of candidates. Thus, the achievement of credibility, fairness and effectiveness in the electoral process, would require the collaboration of all stakeholders in the Nigerian democratic project.

Keywords: Nigeria, elections, voter behaviour, apathy, insecurity, violence

Introduction

Credible elections form a key factor in democracy, democratization and good governance. Election is a viable instrument for achieving representative government and voting is the major form of political participation in democratic societies. However, there is an indicative evidence globally of the decline in voter electoral participation. There is the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs and a reticent approach towards political activity (IDEA, 1999, 2004). With this scenario voter electoral behaviour, a subset of political behaviour has thus evolved as a foremost challenge in older and emerging democracies. The pertinent question to ask here is, why do people vote or why do they not vote? In the past few years, concerns have been raised that eligible voters are disengaging from the political process, as shown by the continuing decline in voter turnout at all levels of elections globally (IDEA, 1999). This leads to serious questions of legitimacy. In the developed countries the level of citizen participation in the electoral process is diminishing, mainly due to the fact that real choices are limited and the people feel a sense of helplessness instead of satisfaction. In developing countries, especially in Africa, the conducts of elections are plagued with apprehension, conflicts, violence and fraud which make them difficult to be used as a measurement of the peoples' choice. Hence, the exhilaration of the second wave of democratization in Africa is fast losing ground. Yesterday's icons who led civil society in the fight for democratic regeneration have metamorphosed into the images of those against whom they fought. They have assumed dictatorial postures, manipulated elections and tended towards sit-tight regimes (Adejumobi, 2000; Nolte, 2004).

Nigeria is in the league of less successful countries in the area of election management and outcomes. The electoral rules are easily

sabotaged. The electoral body is structurally weak and ineffective while the political actors and agencies are like gladiators in their conduct (Calingaert, 2006). Consequently, the people are often immobilized in an environment of political and electoral misconduct. Voting is therefore reduced to a game of chess 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; Glasgow and Alvarez 2005).

A research initiated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a German non-governmental organization, identified government, INEC, the media and politicians as principally accountable for the decline in voter participation in Nigeria. The study 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. The investigation proved that some of the respondents did not consider election as important. In statistical terms, 49.4 per cent of respondents think 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 study also revealed 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" (Alechenu, 2012).

The electoral system of any given country plays a fundamental role in sustaining and molding the political behaviour of its citizens. The way elections are conducted in a country determines to a great extent the level of political culture, political participation and good governance in the country. The violence that occurs before, during and after elections often brings about instability in the political system of most African countries, with Nigeria inclusive. Electoral violence has thus become one of the foremost challenges of Nigeria's democratic development since 1964 (Okolo, 2002; Ogundiya, and Aba, 2005). Some factors affecting voter electoral behaviour have been highlighted in relevant literature (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Fawole, 2005). These include

broad psychological factors and collective reminiscences of historical and current events. Others are patterns of trust, feelings of efficacy, political engagement and disengagement at individual, group and regional levels. It is essential thus, to comprehend the basis and nature of political abstention by undertaking to study the nature, causes, extent and consequences of declining voter participation in the electoral process, with the goal of obtaining adequate information in designing future plans to deal with its challenges in the Nigerian milieu. The study paper is divided into five sections. Following this section is the conceptual/theoretical analysis; this is followed by the methodology and statistical analysis; the next section deals with policy recommendations while the final section is the concluding segment.

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 behaviour has reached worrying levels worldwide (IDEA, 2006). This experience is not different with the Nigerian democratization process. Through the various generations of elections, declining voter turnout has steadily and increasingly become a major issue of concern affecting emerging and consolidated democracies. Voter turnout represents the percentage of eligible voters who vote during an election. For example, the 1999 general elections recorded a total of 57,938,945 registered voters while actual turnout was 30,280,052; representing 52.3% of registered voters. Also a total number of 60,823,052 voters were registered for the 2003 general elections, with a total turnout of 42,018,735 eligible voters; representing 69.1%. For the 2007 elections, 641,567,036 eligible voters were registered while approximately 58% voter turnout was recorded (INEC did not release the total number of voter turnout for 2007). The 2011 general elections recorded a total number of 73,528,040 registered voters and a turnout of 39,469,484 voters; representing 53.7% (Vanguard, 2011). Though the above figures indicate an appreciable level of voter turnout between 1999 and 2011, yet, a lot of work still needs to be done when

you compare not just the turnout with registered voters but, with eligible voters who did not even register to vote.

Decreasing voter turnout trends in Nigeria are a major cause for concern since it is one of the main indicators to measure the levels of democratic development of a country. Low voter turnout can be connected to several factors closely related to the democratic, economic and social development of a country. The lack of genuine democratic practice in Nigeria and the peoples' perceptions of their inability to influence the political agenda of the ruling elites have influenced the levels of electoral participation considerably. Election management bodies such as the INEC in Nigeria can also contribute to low or high voter turnout by the way it manages the electoral process. Factors responsible for declining voters' participation in Nigeria may include: Low level of 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. Others may include: Lack of confidence in the electoral process and in the electoral institution responsible for managing elections, poor management and poor electoral procedures (Lewis, 2003; Margurn, 2003; Thomas, 2004). These scenarios have been replicated time and again in Nigeria's election since 1964 till date with the promise to subsequently improve, which has proven a difficult dream to realize. Any of the analyzed factors or in combination could significantly affect voter participation. Since to participate, voters must trust the electoral process, in the election administration, in the candidates/parties, in the general outcome of the voting exercise and in the transparency and accountability of the process

Objectives of study

This study set out 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 Nigeria; to examine the role of INEC and political elites as it affects voters' participation; and to suggest appropriate policy recommendation for

improving voter turnout and ensure legitimacy of elections through popular participation.

Formulation of hypotheses

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

H₀: There is no relationship between voter turnout and electoral violence/insecurity.

H_R: There is a relationship between voter turnout and electoral violence/insecurity.

H₀: There is no relationship between electoral participation and the INEC credibility in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

H_R: There is a relationship between electoral participation and the INEC credibility in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

H₀: There is no relationship between voters' turnout and non-fulfillment of electoral promises by political candidates/parties.

H_R: There is a relationship between voters' turnout and non-fulfillment of electoral promises by political candidates/parties.

H₀: There is no relationship between electoral participation and voter education.

H_R: There is a relationship between electoral participation and voter education.

H₀: There is no relationship between voter' turnout and long hours/tedious registration and voting processes.

H_R: There is a relationship between voters' turnout and long hours/tedious registration and voting processes.

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 was 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 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 providing accurate information.

Significance of the study

Voter behaviour is specifically identified and measured in the context of voter turnout, namely the occurrence 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, and among the youth, women and other marginalized groups as much as among mainstream dominant interests (IDEA 1999; 2002).

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 (IDEA, 1999; 2002), elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and help to secure the legitimacy of the political system. In addition, they are vital to political socialization and serve as the foundation for democratic stability (Dulani 2005; Lindberg 2006). Moreover, the findings from this would provide the basis for understanding the factors and dynamics of voter participation in the electoral process in Nigeria. 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 readership piece for scholars, students and others who are interested in the dynamics of voter participatory behaviour and also serve as a basis for further research.

Review of relevant literature /theoretical perspectives

This section reviews relevant materials relating to voter behaviour and examines work done by some writers generally on the topic using evidences and reports from other countries and regions of the world. It also reviews some materials pertinent to the above subject

matter in the Nigerian political landscape and concluded with the theoretical framework of the research. The study adopted the conceptual framework of democracy in the analysis of voter turnout in the Nigerian political milieu.

An overview of voter turnout

In democracies, election performs several functions: it is an instrument through which the voting public compels accountability from elected officials, facilitates political recruitment and enables citizens to make enlightened choices. Universally, election is regarded as the heart of representative democracy. A credible election not only confers legitimacy on political leadership, but also ensures the sustenance of democratic arrangement. Elections provide citizens with the freedom to select their leaders and to decide on public policy. Under democratic systems, the opportunity to choose political alternatives, make decisions and express preferences is wholly that of the electorates (IDEA, 2006).

The past several decades have witnessed a general decline in voter turnout throughout the world. While there is little agreement as to what specifically constitutes a reasonable level of turnout, recent declines in many countries have raised concern among governments, electoral management bodies (EMBs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens. It is widely acknowledged that global voter turnout has dropped slowly but consistently in recent years. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in 2006 undertook a study which utilizes data from elections in the 214 countries and territories in the IDEA database from 1945 to 30 June 2006 which included both parliamentary and presidential elections. The study shows that elections in the years prior to the late 1980s show an average turnout which generally fluctuates in the mid-to-higher 70 per cent range. From 1945 to 1960, the average turnout was 76.4 per cent. This slightly went up in the period 1961-75, to 77.1 per cent, but then declined to 74.8 per cent, in the period 1976-90. From 1990 to 2006, the average turnout declined substantially, to 69.7 per cent. In the decade to 2006, it was less than 69 per cent. Also, the standard deviation in these numbers also declined from over 3 per cent previously to about 2.5 per cent. These numbers show not only that the overall world turnout rate

has declined, but that country turnout rates are now more uniform, with less variation between the highs and the lows. All electoral events involve many factors operating at different levels, which have varying effects on voter turnout. Some factors are not easy to change, as they would require alterations to a country's institutional framework or electoral laws or are even the result of massive social transformation (IDEA, 2006).

Table 1: Voter turnout worldwide from 1945 to June 2006

%	%	%	%	%
1945-74.4	1958-80.7	1971-78.0	1984-78.0	1997-69.0
1946-78.5	1959-75.6	1972-80.1	1985-79.2	1998-70.9
1947-71.2	1960-73.7	1973-77.5	1986-72.8	1999-72.7
1948-75.6	1961-76.8	1974-74.1	1987-79.6	2000-66.7
1949-82.8	1962-79.2	1975-75.7	1988-73.4	2001-73.2
1950-74.6	1963-86.5	1976-76.0	1989-74.8	2002-67.9
1951-79.1	1964-74.9	1977-79.8	1990-70.3	2003-67.5
1952-74.4	1965-79.0	1978-74.7	1991-68.9	2004-68.4
1953-81.2	1966-76.3	1979-71.3	1992-72.0	2005-66.3
1954-74.6	1967-74.2	1980-80.4	1993-72.2	2006-66.5
1955-74.1	1968-75.5	1981-79.7	1994-73.6	
1956-76.3	1969-73.8	1982-74.2	1995-67.3	
1957-74.9	1970-74.3	1983-74.7	1996-71.4	

Source: Culled from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

Table 1 displays world voter turnout data from 1945 to 2006 (in percentages), it reveals a gradual but steady decline of voters' participatory behaviour in the electoral process from 74.4% in 1945 to 66.5% in 2006. This is an indication that the declining turnout trend throughout the world subsist as a major problem to new and old democracies.

Table 2: Voter turnout statistics of selected countries from 1997- 2012

Country	Year	Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
United Kingdom	1997	71.5	74.8	77.0
	2001	59.4	74.7	77.1
	2005	61.4	73.4	77.2
	2010	65.8	73.1	78.8
United States	2004	68.7	60.5	73.4
	2008	64.4	62.7	70.2
	2012	N/A	N/A	70
France	1997	68.0	66.9	76.0
	2002	60.3	61.8	78.8
	2007	60.0	55.3	76.4
	2012	55.4	65.9	79.2
Canada	2004	60.9	69.8	76.9
	2006	64.9	69.5	77.3
	2008	59.5	70.5	78.3
	2011	61.4	70.4	80.4
Greece	2004	76.6	92.7	81.0
	2007	74.1	92.7	86.3
	2009	70.9	92.5	82.8
	2012	62.5	92.4	83.2
South Africa	1999	89.3	94.5	63.9
	2004	76.7	84.6	56.8
	2009	77.3	83.4	56.6
Ghana	2004	85.1	90.1	80.0
	2008	72.9	84.2	69.9
	2012	80.1	87.1	82.2

Source: Culled from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

Table 2 above contains voter turnout statistics for selected countries around the world showing voters' turnout trends up to 2012. Transversely, the table shows that turnout trends in elections globally has not made much significant progress from the observations analyzed in table 1 above. For example, aside the United Kingdom and Greece which recorded a 71.5% and 74.1% turnout and South Africa and Ghana with slightly higher figures (i.e. 89.3% and 85.1%), other election years for the respective countries were a little above average. Several factors

account for the global trend in voter turnout, which have been highlighted in relevant literature (Margurn, 2003; Claassen, 2007; Dyck and Gimpel, 2005; Thomas, 2004; Bowler and Donovan, 2011; Hall, Monson and Patterson, 2009). These include those of psychological involvement and shared memory of historical and current events, issues, patterns of trust, feelings of efficacy and political engagement and disengagement of persons. Others are, geographic regions, campaigns communications, media, the role of space, distance and convenience of voting and competitiveness of elections on account of the extent to which elections are considered strategic and its outcomes projected to be close. There are also factors such as, problems in the legal framework of the elections, inadequacy of an electoral system, poor or biased election administration and management by electoral management bodies (EMBs'), inadequate electoral procedures and voting arrangements, manner of electoral dispute resolutions, insufficient levels of accountability of elected candidates to their constituents. Also evident are the lack of political maturity of parties, complex inter and intra-party politics, low levels of "democratic culture" and awareness of the electorate and other stakeholders. Moreover, there is the impact of technology and of human, including poll worker, dimensions of elections, the electoral policy and wider issues connected to economic concerns and voting (Koch, 2007; Gray and Caul, 2000; Blais and Franklin, 2004).

The Nigerian chapter

One of the first published works on indications of voter turnout statistical analysis in Nigeria is in the seminal work by Post (1963) which, in its Appendix D offers a 24 page table of registration and voter turnout statistics for all constituencies in the Northern Western and Eastern Regions as well as for the Lagos Federal Territory. The average percentage of voter turnout for the Northern Region in that election is put at 89.2%, with 74.4% recorded for the East and 76.2% for the Lagos Federal Territory. These figures according to Post (1963) conform to the viewpoint that foundational elections in a transitional period tend to record relatively large voter turnout. In addressing the general issue of voting behaviour in the Presidential, Senatorial and House of Representative elections of 1979, Oyediran (1981) and Oyediran and Arowolo (1981) provide important insights into voting behaviour and

electoral statistics in the elections in comparison with Post's (1963) findings on the 1959 election and also deal with issues arising from the pattern of voting and suggestions of possible bloated statistics of voters for the 1979 elections resulting from multiple registrations, registrations of fabricated persons and other forms of misconduct which suggested that 1979 voter turnout may have in fact be even higher than was officially reported (Oyediran and Arowolo 1981). Some of the factors outlined by Oyediran (1981:97) to explain this development include the absence of partisan politics for over 13 years, the tumultuous politics of the pre-military era which discouraged the older generation of voters especially, and the failure of party leaders to access large sections of the population during the campaigns.

Voters' turnout in the 1999 general election was not quite impressive since 57,938,945 of the voting age population were registered and only 30,280,052 of these cast their votes properly. In 2003, the number of registered voters increased to 60,823,033 and the number of voters' turnout also increased to 42,018,735; a slight improvement from 1999 statistics. However, in 2007, despite the increase in the number of registered voters which totaled 61,567,036, the total votes cast dropped significantly to 35,397,517 representing just half the number that registered (IDEA, 2002). In 2011, the number of registered voters increased to 73,528,040 but, only a slightly significant 39,469,484 eligible voters exercised their franchise.

Table 3: Voter data turnout for Nigeria elections (presidential-1999 to 2011)

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting age Population	Total Population
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,033	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359

Source: Culled from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

Table 4: Voter data turnout for Nigeria elections (parliamentary-1959 to 2011)

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting age Population	Total Population
2011	28,66%	21,074,621	73,528,040	25.80%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2007	No data	No data	61,567,036		71,004,507	131,859,731
2003	49.32%	29,995,171	60,823,022	46.63%	64,319,246	129,934,911
1999	84.81%	49,136,212	57,938,945	93.07%	52,792,781	108,258,359
1983	38.90%	25,400,000	65,300,000	58,23%	43,620,780	89,022,000
1979	32.34%	15,686,514	48,499,091	41.13%	38,142,090	77,841,000
1959	79.52%	7,185,555	9,036,083	43.46%	16,532,640	34,443,000

Source: Culled from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2006)

Tables 2 and 3 above indicate that in 1999, the Nigerian population was 108,258,359. The voting age population (VAP i.e. those qualified to vote- 18 years and above) was 52,792,781 while the registered voters' was 57,938,945. This period however produced the highest turnout of 84.81% in the table displayed. In 2003, the Nigerian population was 129,934,911. The VAP was 64,319,246 while the number of people that registered was 60,823,022. Nigeria's population was 131,859,731 in 2007, the VAP was 71, 004,507, out of this, only 61,567,036 registered as the table shows. By 2011, figures in table 4 indicate that Nigeria's population was 155,215,573. The VAP was 81,691,751. However, only 73,528,040 registered. Registration is a precursor to voting. As indicated in the tables, from 1999 to 2011 many people did not registered while some of those who registered did not vote in the respective elections. Therefore, the determination of voter turnout is not only the comparison of registered voters with turnout but a comparison of voter turnout, voter registration and voting age population.

Observations on the integrity of the electoral process amidst malpractices during the 1999 and 2003 general elections reveals that the electoral process as practiced currently in Nigeria is expressively estranged for the majority of the people who are only periodically inserted in the process when they cast votes. Moreover, when these voters' have completed the ritual of voting, the result bears little resemblance to the options made through their ballots. As long as these scenarios exist, votes in Nigeria will remain devalued (Ibeanu, (2007;

Suberu, 2010; Bratton, 2010). The electoral process which includes voter registration, political campaigns, voting, declarations of results, and post-election petitions and complaints, have been very controversial in Nigeria. It has been observed by commentators that, voter registration is a crucial phase in the electoral process which political parties in countries like Nigeria view as a first step in positioning themselves to winning elections. As a result, they go all out to mobilize their groups for the exercise and perpetrate acts such as the manipulation of voter registration process through multiple registrations, registration of underage persons, and denial of registration to opposition supporters or inflating the voters' register. According to LeVan, Pitso and Adebo (2004:33), "voter registration suffered several setbacks that affected overall enfranchisement and therefore confidence in the electoral process. Problems included logistical delays, insufficient staff training, and the lack of security at registration centers, poor voter education campaigns and other flaws". Malpractices were rampant, including cases of hoarding of registration forms and cards with the aim of selling them to politicians, and creating artificial scarcity of registration materials. After the registration exercise the voters' list was not made available as required by the Electoral Law, thus denying many Nigerians the opportunity to verify their names. It was therefore strange, that "The commission finally claimed to have registered 61 million voters, thereby crowning a glaringly troubled and tangled process with a success rate of 100 percent - improbable, to say the least". It became apparent later that the voter registration exercise was a prelude to the grand electoral fraud that characterized the 2003 general elections (Lewis, 2003:141).

A study on voter preferences and attitudes, published in 2007 regarding voter enthusiasm and persisting optimism in the countdown to the disastrous 2007 elections indicates that 74.6% of the respondents showed very keen interest in voting at the elections, not necessarily because of confidence in INEC but because of their determination to use their vote to make a difference. While there was public enthusiasm and optimism toward the elections, the conduct and outcome of these elections confounded such hope. With the generally acknowledged exception of the 2011 elections, whose conduct appear generally to have rekindled hope in the electoral process, the consensus, to an extent, has

been that Since the advent of civil governance in 1999, increasingly costly and astronomically prohibitive elections have produced increasingly cruel travesties leading to democratic regressions rather than the consolidation of the democratic process (Adejumobi, 2010; Williams, 2011). However, the April 2011 polls for the National Assembly, president and governors in the fourth nationwide elections was a marked improvement from the ones held since 1999. According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), "Nigeria's 2011 general elections, the fourth since the return to civilian rule in 1999, were significantly more transparent and credible than the three preceding polls in 1999, 2003 and 2007. Conducted in April and May, these polls represented a key milestone in the country's democratic development" (2011, 7). The elections have been deemed to be the most organized, free and fair in the country's history, but they were far from flawless. International Observers described the votes as a 'significant improvement' over previous ones. The report indicated that, pre-election violence, including bomb attacks (which killed dozens of people) and the cumbersome new voting system used - in which registered voters had to be certified at designated polling booths in the morning and then vote in the afternoon - ensured that there was a low turnout. Of the close to 74 million registered voters (of an overall population of more than 150 million), only 39 469 484 people voted in the crucial presidential elections. There were reports of voting by underage voters in baggy pants (mainly in the northern parts of the country), and there were attempts to steal ballot boxes. A total of 1,259 978 votes were disqualified by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Vanguard, 2011).

Factors affecting voter turnout

Various factors have emerged which scholars and theorists have shown to affect levels of voter turnout throughout the world. Some of these include individual and social factors, attitudinal factors and political worth.

Individual and social factors

In terms of individual characteristics, age is seen as the most important factor, substantially related to turnout. Recent studies have

consistently shown that the younger members of a voting population are less likely to vote. Age is often used as a measure of social connectedness based on the idea that as a person advances in years, he/she acquires more experience, becomes more aware and knowledgeable of what is at stake in his/her community and country. Marital status, residential mobility, and religious involvement are other variables regularly employed to measure social connectedness whereby those who are married, are less apt to move frequently and those who observe a religious lifestyle are also more likely to vote. The other consistently significant social- demographic variable in predicting turnout is education. While the extent of its impact seems to differ from country to country, a positive relationship generally exists in much of the world. Those with higher levels of education tend to be more likely to vote (Franklin, 2006; Franklin et al, 2004; Andrew et al, 2005).

Attitudinal factors

This may have psychological and sociological foundations, which influences the individual to participate or not. These include political interest, political knowledge, and commitment to politics, which can be clearly linked. Succinctly put, the more interested a person is in politic activities, the more likely that he or she will participate, whether in gathering knowledge, in voting or in engaging in other political activities (Franklin, 2004).

Political worth

This is another key determinant in voter participation. A sense of usefulness is attained when people feel informed about politics to believe that they can influence their preferences through the ballot. However, if an election appears to be meaningless or irrelevant, or citizens feels immobilized in their interactions with the political system, the sense of political efficacy reduces and abstention from voting is more likely to occur. In its intense forms, this can result in political apathy and alienation (Roberts, 2000).

Abstract Configuration

Democracy, as a theoretical concept, has been subjected to a series of deliberations. This is so because democracy denotes the fundamental nature of civilization, freedom of choice and government. The notion of democracy has developed through many manifestations and has been used as the foundation for a utopian society. It is visualized as a means to defend people from government, an instrument for the expansion of human development, a form of free-market politics, and a way to ensure stability in a pluralist society (Russell, 2002). As a mechanism, representative democracy is strictly seen as a system of government which allows people to exercise their franchise to choose people who will represent their interest in government. The exercises of voting provide an opportunity for everyone to have interest and actively participate in the actions of their government. The outcome of the election confers legitimacy on those elected to and the power to make political decisions on behalf of their constituencies. Voting then becomes the main contact linkage between the representatives and the citizenry and provides the foundation for discussions, deliberations and citizens involvement in the operation of the political system.

Consequently, if turnout declines, the primary linkage between the citizen and the political system may become weakened, this may threaten the legitimacy of the democratic system. Also, government policies and programmes may less likely reflect the aspirations of the people. Some theorists have however, asserted that the concept of democracy as practiced since the late-20th century is contradictory. This is because the societal system in operation which acknowledges the political equality of citizens through the franchise also maintains actual inequality of class, prospect and wealth. The argument is that this form of democracy is the main reason behind the prevalent voter alienation and declining turnout. Scholars have opined that politics should not only be viewed as a tool of control but also as a way of societal living and decision making. Political participation therefore needs to be expressive, giving room for citizens to feel a part of the democratic process. In this wise, citizens' participation in the democratic process is envisioned as a medium for citizen and societal development. Citizen participation in the process of governance is necessary to accomplish an

equitable and civilized society (Franklin, 2004). Regardless of their differences, all democratic concepts acknowledge voting as an essential element and elections continue to serve as the primary basis of public influence within representative democracy because it provides some measure of public control over elected representatives. As a type of political participation, voting remains the easiest and most common form of political engagement for majority of the citizens.

Methods

This study was conducted between October, 2012 and August, 2013. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The National Population Census of Nigeria in 2006 puts the population of Nigeria at one hundred and forty million, four hundred and thirty one thousand, seven hundred and ninety, at which Edo state figures stood at three million, two hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and sixty-six (3,233,366). The population of Edo State was used in the investigation of this study which comprises of the three senatorial districts of Edo State. The sample size of 1,200 respondents which comprises of male and female adults of voting age (18 years and above) was drawn from the population for administration of questionnaire through the use of stratified random sampling. Primary data formed the nuclei of data collection for analysis while secondary data were utilized for review of relevant literature. The data collected were analyzed using standardized methods. To this end, the Chi-Square (χ^2) and simple percentage were used to analyze the questionnaire.

Background characteristics of the respondents

For this study, a total of one thousand, two hundred (1200) questionnaires were administered, nine hundred and twenty seven were completed and returned by the respondents. Out of the 927 respondents, majority of them were males numbering up to 625 which represented 67.4% while 302 of them were females representing 29.3%. Also, the age category of 40 years and above constituted the highest frequency of 712 representing 76.8% of the respondents while those below the 40 years category make up the frequency of 215 representing 23.2%. This indicates that majority of the respondents with sufficient experience are within the age bracket which enable them to give

informed opinion. Furthermore, the study revealed that 330 of the 927 respondents representing 35.6% were single while 597 representing 64.4% were married. This indicates that majority of the respondents are people considered to be responsible and experienced, who can therefore give reliable responses useful to this study. Finally, the study indicates that 192 respondents representing 20.7% had secondary education/less while 735 of the respondents representing 79.3% had tertiary education. This distribution implies that majority of the respondents are enlightened and therefore in a position to make informed decisions.

Table 5: Edo state: population and sample size by senatorial districts and local government areas

Senatorial Districts	L. G. A.	Sample Size	
Edo North (955,791)	Akoko Edo	261,567	300
	Etsako Central	94,228	
	Etsako East	147,335	
	Etsako West	198,975	
	OwanEast	154,650	
	OwanWest	99,056	
Edo Central (591,534)	Esan Central	105,242	300
	Esan North East	121,989	
	Esan Soth East	166,309	
	Esan West	127,718	
	Igueben	70,276	
Edo South (1,686,041)	Egor	340,287	600
	Ikpoba- Okha	372,080	
	Oredo	374,515	
	Orhionmwon	183,994	
	Ovia North East	155,344	
	Ovia South West	138,072	
	Uhunmwode	121,749	
Total		3,233,366	1,200

Source: Culled from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2006)

Statistical analysis and findings

Hypothesis 1:

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

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

Table 6: Many Nigerians of voting age do not vote because of fear of violence on election day

Fear of Electoral violence	Marital Status		Total
	Married	Single	
Yes	426	202	628
No	171	128	299
Total	597	330	927

Source: field work

The **Hypothesis 1** result shows that using the degree of freedom 1 and the level of significance $\alpha = .01$. The calculated $X^2(10.01)$ is greater than the critical $X^2(6.64)$. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of 1%. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The Yule's Qof +0.22 implies that there is a medium positive relationship between respondents' marital status and their opinion about electoral violence and insecurity in Nigeria. Therefore, the respondents who are married are 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.

Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between respondents' age and their opinion about INEC credibility in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a relationship between respondents' age and their opinion about INEC credibility in the electoral (registration and voting) process.

Table 7: Credibility of INEC in the electoral process (registration and voting)

Credible Electoral Process by INEC	Age Group		Total
	40 years and above	Below 40 years	
Yes	242	93	335
No	470	122	592
Total	712	215	927

Source: field work

The **Hypothesis 2** result shows that using the degree of freedom 1 and the level of significance $\alpha = .02$. The calculated $\chi^2(6.13)$ is greater than the critical $\chi^2(5.14)$. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of 2%. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The Yule's Qof -0.19 implies that there is a medium negative relationship between respondents' age and their opinion about the ability of INEC to conduct credible free and fair elections in Nigeria. Therefore, the respondents who fall within the age bracket of 40 years and above are 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.

Hypothesis 3

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

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

Table 8: Non-fulfillment of electoral promises by candidates/political parties discourages voting behavior

Non-fulfillment of Electoral Promises	Occupation		Total
	Public Servants	Business and Others	
Yes	358	258	616
No	144	167	311
Total	502	425	927

Source: field work

The **Hypothesis 3** result shows that using the degree of freedom 1 and the level of significance $\alpha = .001$. The calculated $X^2(11.62)$ is greater than the critical $X^2(10.83)$. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of 1%. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The Yule's Q of +0.23 implies that there is a medium positive relationship between respondents' occupation and their opinion about the non-fulfillment of electoral promises by candidates and political parties. Therefore, the respondents who are public servants are 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.

Hypothesis 4

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

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

Table 9: Lack of effective voter education affects participation in the electoral process

INEC/Parties Educating sufficiently	Voters	Educational Level		Total
		Tertiary	Secondary/Less	
Yes		75	30	105
No		660	162	822
Total		735	192	927

Source: field work

The **Hypothesis 4** result shows that using the degree of freedom 1 and the level of significance $\alpha = .05$. The calculated $X^2(4.45)$ is greater than the critical $X^2(3.84)$. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of 5%. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The Yule's Q of -0.24 implies that there is a medium negative relationship between respondents' educational level and their opinion about voter education. Therefore, the respondents with tertiary education are less likely than their counterparts with secondary/less to have the opinion that the INEC/Political Parties are sufficiently educating the electorates (voters) on the electoral process in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 5

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

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a relationship between respondents' sex and their opinion about long/tedious registration and voting processes.

Table 10: Long/tedious registration and voting processes hinders electoral participation

Long, tedious registration/voting processes hinders voting	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	215	227	442
No	410	75	485
Total	625	302	927

Source: field work

The **Hypothesis 5** result shows that using the degree of freedom 1 and the level of significance $\alpha = .001$. The calculated $X^2(51.44)$ is greater than the critical $X^2(10.83)$. Data are statistically significant with a sample error of 1%. Therefore we reject H_0 and accept H_R . The Yule's Q of -0.50 implies that there is a large negative relationship between respondents' sex and their opinion about long hours/tedious registration and voting processes in Nigeria. Therefore, the respondents' who are males are less likely than their counterparts who are females to have the opinion that long hours/tedious registration and voting processes hinders voters' participation in the electoral process.

Interview analysis

The interview schedule was centered on three parts which borders on questions relating to the importance of elections, voter education and the challenges of the INEC and Political Parties in conducting free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. A total of eight carefully selected respondents were interviewed. They included five politicians and three members of staff of the INEC. The following represents responses obtained from the respondents:

Three of the politicians and all three of the INEC officials agreed that elections are important and stated that it provides opportunities for the electorates to elect credible leaders, which could lead to better development of the country and stability of democracy. However, two of the politicians opined otherwise, citing corruption in the electoral process/violence, elections not being free, fair/vote 'note counting' and unfulfilled promises by politicians as their reasons.

Two of the politicians and all two of the INEC staff submitted that electoral participation has been on the increase stating that with the new democratic dispensation and the electoral reform, some amount of credibility is coming into the process of engendering confidence in the process. Three of the politicians however, opined to the contrary, stating that most people are not yet convinced of the sincerity of government and the politicians to allow credibility in the electoral process and ensure the independence of the INEC. The five politicians and the three INEC officials submitted that the reasons people do not vote at elections are thus: Violence, fraud/manipulation by politicians and electoral officials, non-fulfillment of electoral promises and tedious registration and voting processes. They suggested the following as probable solutions to the problem: provision of adequate security, improvement in the registration and voting hours, independence of the INEC as well as fulfillment of electoral promises by politicians.

The three INEC officials submitted that the INEC is doing its best to educate the electorates but admitted that the effort of the agency in this regard is not enough. They cited inadequate manpower and logistics as hindrances. On their part, the five politicians submitted that the parties have not 'sold' their manifestoes to the electorates

sufficiently and cited insufficient funds and internal party squabbles as hindrances. All the respondents however, advised the government to give adequate attention to voter education and support the INEC and political parties to carry out their operations effectively. The three INEC officials outlined the challenges facing their agency thus: lack of effective training for staff using electronically based gadgets, keeping of adequate/up-to-date voter register, deployment of credible/honest electoral officials to conduct elections and collate results. They advocated for staff training, the keeping of adequate voters' register and improvement on the voting process. On the other hand, the five politicians enumerated the challenges facing their various political parties thus: problem of internal party democracy, the issue of Godfathers and hand-picking rather than electing candidates in party primaries, insufficient funds, violence and assassination of politicians. They therefore advocated for sufficient funding by government, internal party democracy/reducing the influence of godfathers in politics, and eradication of violence including expelling violent prone politicians from participating in political party activities.

Policy recommendations

The following recommendations to improve the electoral process and encourage voters' participation are offered for consideration and possible action by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and any other relevant stakeholder.

The INEC is advised among other things to conduct transparent /credible elections, engage in voter Education, recruit proficient staff and ensure sufficient training. INEC should also provide adequate voting materials as well as improve voter registration process. The political parties are advised to organize better political rallies, educate voters, provide responsible representation, obey rules and regulations of INEC and ensure internal party democracy. They should also be responsible and honest representatives of the people, accept election results without manipulation or respond to election results according to apposite procedures and avoid bribery and corruption. The politicians on the other hand, are advised to ensure the education of their members/supporters, organize peaceful and regular political rallies,

avoid violence/do or die politics and ensure the fulfillment of electoral promises made during campaigns.

The government on its part is advised to provide adequate security for voters, enforce law and order in society, prosecute electoral offenders, ensure non-interference with the electoral process and fulfill electoral promises. Finally, the electorates are advised to make the right choice and resist the temptation to sell votes, defend their votes, avoid criminal acts and political violence and protest within the law when necessary. They should make necessary sacrifices for political development and nation building.

Conclusion

From one election to the other, scholars, political observers/commentators as shown in the literature, have highlighted the challenge of voter declining participation/apathy in the electoral process and have suggested possible solutions to the problem. Their comments have of course, not been based on sustained study of the problem as has been done here. Nonetheless, the suggestions have been insightful. These include how to handle violence, ensure consistency in voter turnout from national to sub-national elections at all levels of the federal arrangement, training for public officials, strengthening of the institutions for electoral management, security, and effective voter education, among others. It is hoped that comments, anecdotes, other viewpoints and the findings obtained from this study in a systematic, comprehensive, and scientific manner (although not exclusively exhaustive), would offer a more grounded basis for beginning to actively address in theory, method and practice, this vital challenge to the consolidation of voter turnout in future elections in Nigeria.

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