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Abstract
Nigeria is a heterogeneous country which is known for her ethnic and cultural diversity. The need to involve citizens in the business of governance is one of the reasons that inform the modern democratic thinking. Unfortunately, Nigeria has recorded military intervention since the country gained independence in 1960 not until 1999 till date that the country has been experiencing stable democracy without military intervention. After the country returned to civil rule in 1999 during the fourth republic, the country has recorded uninterrupted democratic governance for over two decades. Though, not without some hindrances and one of these challenges is voter apathy which has been on an increase in every election. In 2003, the number of voter turnout was 69.1\% of registered voters and unfortunately, the last election that was held in 2019 saw a total decline in voter turnout to 34.75\% as reported by the election umpire. The decline in voter turnout has been consistent since 2003 and this continuous drop in the voter turnout informed this research study to examine the factors responsible for low voter turnout in Nigeria for the period of 2003-2019. The theoretical framework adopted for the study was Rational Choice Theory (RCT). To achieve the aim of this study, the study adopted cross sectional survey research design and relied on primary source of data through the help of structured questionnaire. The result obtained from administered questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. The results revealed among other things that one of the major factors responsible for low voter turnout in Nigeria is lack of fulfillment of campaign promises by the political office holders. The study recommended among other things that there should be proper sensitization of electorates by necessary stakeholders and other relevant authorities by encouraging electorates to use their power judiciously by voting out candidates who fail to fulfill campaign promises as this will serve as deterrent for other political aspirants.

Keywords: Voter apathy, election, electorates, democracy, Africa, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental aspect of democratic governance is the right it gives citizens to elect their leaders in order to represent their interest. The political office holders come to power through the mandate given to them by the people (voters). The power of voting given to the people give credence to the very definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people as rightly put by Abraham Lincoln. It is important to note that the beauty of democracy is the right it offers to the citizens to choose their leaders and influence policies. This is to say that democracy will be undesirable and uninteresting if the people fails to exercise this right of choosing their leaders during periodic elections.
In a way, political office holders or political parties who have given the people dividend of democracy will continue to remain in power by enjoying continuous support from the people and vice versa. Unfortunately, political participation in some continent is very low and citizens who are within the voting age lose complete interest in participating during election. In fact, it has become a global problem across the world. It was reported that “voter turnout has been dropping worldwide for the last 30 years and has reached alarmingly low levels in some countries” (Beregovskiy, 2019, P.1). Beregovskiy (2019) noted that despite the fact that the right to vote is one of the most fundamental human rights in a democracy, millions of American voters do not exercise this right and some of them have never show up to vote throughout their entire life. He further stressed that while turnout in European countries is usually above 70 percent, United States presidential elections have not seen a 60 percent turnout in half a century.

Though, the factors that account for low voter turnout differ from continent to continent and from countries to countries. For example, authors such as David Hill claimed that voting legislation and logistical issues lowered voter turnout in the United States; American voting system has traits that are uncommon in other democracies, such as non-automatic voter registration and voting on a weekday (Beregovskiy, 2019). These factors and many more are held responsible for low voter turnout in America.

The violent nature of elections in Africa and lack of transparency in electioneering process are part of the factors many authors have held responsible for continuous increase in voter apathy during an election. For example, some authors held lack of transparency and confidence in electioneering process to be responsible for political apathy in Nigeria (Aloysius, Edeh, Emma, Onwe & Ernest, 2019; Gberevbie, 2014). It is instructive to say that the kinds of interest the electorates show in political participation give the leaders the impression that the citizens are politically conscious. This will no doubt put some kind of iota of responsibility on the part of the leaders to execute people-oriented policies and programmes. There have also been argument in the literature as to whether the outcome of an election can change if all registered voters voted.

Though, this argument has not recorded empirical backings but Fowler (2013) raised similar concern in his studies when he posed a question as to whether election results and public policies be different if everyone voted. Unfortunately, the number of registered voters in Nigeria for the 2019 presidential election was 34.75% of registered voters as reported by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2019). The implication is that 65.25% of the registered voters did not vote. Though, the focus of this study is not to provide answers to the question of whether or not the outcome of the election would have changed if this 65.25% electorates had added their voice through the ballot rather to find out major factors that lead to the refusal of the 65.25% electorates to exercise their civic rights as given to them by virtue of practicing democracy. It is against this backdrop that this study is carried out to find out the major factors that result to high voter apathy in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

African countries are known for their political instability and military intervention. Nigeria witnessed different military interventions before the country returned to full fledged democracy in 1999. The 2003 general election in Nigeria recorded the highest voter turnout in the history of election in Nigeria since the beginning of fourth republic.
in 1999. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the 1999 election. The official figures reported by INEC shows that the number of people that participated in the 1999 general election was 52.3% of registered voters. Though, this may not be unconnected to the alien nature of election in Nigeria and poor awareness because the 1999 served as litmus paper.

However, in 2003, the number of registered voters increased to 69.1%. Though, official figure for voter turnout was not released in 2007 but it was estimated for 57.5% of registered voters. However, in the 2011 presidential election the percentage of voter turnout further dropped to 53.68% of registered voters. The 2015 presidential election as revealed by INEC shows that the percentage further dropped to 43.65% of registered voter and lastly, the 2019 presidential election recorded just 34.75% of registered voters in Nigeria (INEC, https://www.inecnigeria.org/all-about2019-generalelections).

Nigerian population is estimated to be over 200 million citizens. Though, in the 2019 presidential election, 84 million people were registered as eligible voters but unfortunately, only 34.75% of the registered voters actually came out to exercise their franchise. By implication, only 29 million people decided who lead the country for the next four (4) years in a country of 200 million citizens. In addition to this reality, when the numbers of people that elect the leaders are too meager, it therefore means that those who are elected may not represent the choice of the masses.

In addition, previous empirical research tried to establish the relationship between age, education and internet access on voter turnout (Resnick & Casale, 2011; Tolbert & Meneal, 2016; Chevalier & Doyle, 2012; Alelaimat, 2019; Snyder, 2011; Fowler, 2013) but failed to incorporate many factors responsible for voter apathy. Therefore, the current study focused on finding out from empirical evidence the most leading factors that lead to voter apathy in the Nigerian 2019 presidential election. Despite extensive research on voting, there is little evidence connecting turnout to tangible outcomes as there are many factors responsible for the turnout and as such, the need to investigate the leading factors responsible for voter apathy. Previous research tend to use correlational analysis that can only accommodate certain number of independent variables and the need to use different statistical methods that will give room for the factors to be exhausted without any statistical restrictions. However, the research is carried out in order to find out the leading factors responsible for voter apathy in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

2. EMPIRICAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Empirical Review

Aloysius et al. (2019) investigated voting apathy among the Nigerian electorates in 2019 general elections. The study relied on secondary sources of data. The findings from the study revealed that poor political and voters education, education, illiteracy, neglect to pick up their permanent voters cards, the nature of Nigerian politics is another factor since Nigeria politics, failure of the elected representatives to deliver on promises are the factors that make electorates to find it difficult to participate in the electoral process. The study therefore recommended the provision of security to ensure safety of electorates during and after election.
Babeiya (2013) in his study assessed voter registers and the question of inclusion and exclusion in Tanzania’s multiparty elections. The study aimed at investigating whether or not the introduction of permanent voter registers in Tanzania has resolved registration controversies. The research relied on secondary source of data. The study concluded that despite some improvements such as the establishment of a permanent voters’ database, voter registration in the country is still marred by numerous anomalies such as a denial of some eligible voters of their registration rights. Likewise, others who register find themselves being disqualified from voting on different grounds, as election observers’ reports have revealed.

Snyder (2011) examined factors that impact levels of voting activity among in American. The study used data from the American National Election Survey (ANES) from the years 1972 – 2004. The study revealed that education and political knowledge remain the most important predictors of voter turnout. In addition, the study further revealed that education on voter turnout remains elusive but it is certain that education is still among the most important factors to consider in studying voter turnout and further stated that its vary across space and time.

Seanego and Mogoboya (2019) examined the factors contributing to the decline of votes in South Africa using Mankweng community as a case study. The study adopted survey research design which adopted random sampling of fifteen (15) eligible voters from a total population of twenty-eight (28) from Mankweng community. Open-ended interview was used as instrument of data collection. The study revealed that the youth and elderly believed that the government does not adequately add value to their lives and as such do not see the need to vote.

Mataka and Nkandu (2020) examined the effect of voter apathy on the growth of electoral democracy in Zambia with a focus on Kabwe central constituency. The study relied on a mixed approach as it combined both qualitative and quantitative research. The study reveals that there is a positive co-relationship between voting and the growth of electoral democracy since voting promotes citizen participation which is one of the cardinal elements for the growth of electoral democracy. The study also revealed that factors account for voter apathy include failure to change leadership, failure to honour campaign promises, electoral violence, and religious beliefs, age eligibility, limited voting hours and lack or inadequate voter education.

Nwankwo (2019) examined determinants of voter turnout in Nsukka council of Enugu State, South Eastern Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design for the study. The study adopted stepwise logistic regression in order to remove variables that are not important, leaving the variables that best explain the distribution. The study revealed that age, education, marital status, political trust and partisanship are core predictors of voter turnout in the study area. All these five factors are statistically significant, but among the five elements, only partisanship has a negative effect on voting.

Amanyie, Bariledum and Lucky (2015) examined the effect of electoral violence on political participation in Nigeria with specific reference to Osun State gubernatorial election. The study adopted qualitative approach as data was gathered from secondary sources and analyzed using content analysis. The study hypothesized that there is a correlation between electoral violence and voter apathy. The study revealed that voters’
apathy declines with reduced electoral violence and rises with increased transparency, credibility and security.

Micheal (2018) examined politics and governance a critique of the 2019 Nigeria presidential election. The study adopted survey research design. Questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection for the study. The result of the analysis shows that political apathy has significant effect on governance in Nigeria and further indicated that good governance has significant effect on the economic growth of Nigeria. Political apathy is a product of electoral violence and it negatively affects upon the electoral process and its outcome.

Falade (2014) examined the extent to which the citizens are involved in political activities. The study adopted mixed method of data collection by using questionnaire as the quantitative instrument and interview schedule was used to obtain qualitative data. The findings of the study revealed that 57% of the participants were not actively involved in political activities. In addition, it was discovered in the study that majority (53%) of the respondents had no confidence in their political leaders.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Rational Choice Theory (RCT) for the current study. The theory was propounded by George Homans in 1961. The theory stated that human being will always make a decision that maximizes their satisfaction and reduces loss. The thrust of the theory is centered on the reality that the aggregate behaviour in the society is a reflection of individual choice made to reflect their preferences. Individual makes their choice based on their own preferences and the constraints (or choice set) they face (Omotola, 2007). They prefer the best satisfaction based on the information they have at their disposal. It is important to state that individual while making this choice will evaluate the options available in terms of costs and benefit and chooses an action that provides the maximum benefit and minimum cost.

In relation to this study, rational choice theory views the action of individual on the basis of cost-benefits analysis. Individuals will tend to vote if the benefits they are expected to gain from voting outweighs the benefits of not voting. It is important to know that the two choices for the voters are either to vote or not to vote. In Nigeria, many electorates have lost confidence in the election process and they become adamant about voting because they feel their action or inaction will not influence the outcome of the election. Voters are expected to take into consideration the available information as well as the potential costs and benefits in determining preferences of individual as to whether to participate in election or not to participate. Aloysius et al (2019) noted that when voters are provided with enough knowledge and conviction on the reasons to vote, there would be a significant reduction on the level of political apathy in the nation’s electoral processes. In terms of participating in election, rational choice theory explains that voters do calculate the costs and benefits of voting or participating in election and this will help them decide whether to vote or not to vote. More often than not, election in Nigeria is usually marred with violence and also citizens do not see the dividend of democracy through policies and programmes of government. In fact, the voters lack interest to vote because government does not fulfill campaign promises which usually lead to loss of interest in voting during election.
Though, this theory is usually criticized on the ground that individuals may not have all the information needed to make a rational decision and as such decision of individual will be based on the available information at their disposal which may not be enough to make a rational decision. Though, this does not invalidate the relevance of this theory in the current study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted cross sectional survey research design. This design is used to obtain information concerning the factors responsible for low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria for the variables under study. The design was deemed suitable for this study due to its ability to elicit a wide range of baseline information about the factors.

3.2 Target Population

The target population of the study comprises of all the 84,004,084 electorates who registered for the 2019 presidential election as eligible voters from 18years and above as declared by INEC.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques:

The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane (1967: 886) formula as follows:

\[ n = N + N(e)^2 \]

Note: \( n \) is sample size, \( N \) is the population of the study area (i.e. 84,004,084), \( e \) is precision level (0.05).

\[ n = 84,004,084 + 84,004,084(0.05)^2 \]

\[ n = 399.99 \]

\[ n = 400 \]

According Israel (2013), he suggested that researcher should add 10% of the main sample size to make up for likely unreturned questionnaire or error that may occur in filling the questionnaire. The main sample size of the study is 400 but with the addition of the 10%, the questionnaire administered increased from 400 to 440. Though, 440 respondents supposed to take part in the survey but 411 representing 93% of the total questionnaire were duly filled and returned, while 29 of the questionnaire distributed representing 6.59% were not returned. Therefore, 411 questionnaires formed the basis for analysis and interpretation.

However, the study adopted simple random sampling technique because the population of the study is known as there is existing sample frame. This gives room for all the population to have equal chance of being selected to participate in the survey.
3.4 Research Instrument

The instrument used for this study is structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was designed using Google form and adopted five (5) point Likert scale. The questionnaire was designed using Google form which was sent to the respondents through a link online to be filled and submitted electronically without having direct contact with the respondents.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Instrument

Twenty (20) respondents were used for pilot study to enable researcher to determine whether there is any ambiguity in any of the items and ensured that the instruments elicited the type of data anticipated to answer research questions. The instrument was further reviewed by experts with specialized knowledge in the area of study and those that failed to measure the variables intended were either modified or discarded.

The questionnaire from the pilot study was subjected to reliability test using Cronbach’s Alpha. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 70.2% was obtained as shown in Table 1. Hence, the responses generated for all of the variables used in this research were reliable enough for the data analysis. Though, this does not form the main analysis of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Reliability Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>N of Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.702</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Data was edited to identify incomplete questions and internal consistency of the recorded data. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to enable the researcher to be able to determine the factors that contribute significantly to voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The data was analyzed using Mean and Standard deviation statistical tools using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 20.0.

Note: Strongly agree (5)

Agree (4)

Undecided (3)

Disagree (2)

Strongly disagree (1)

Cut off point = 1+2+3+4+5/5

Cut off point = 3 + 0.5 (margin error)

Cut off point = 3.50

Decision Rule: Any variable that has a mean score of less than 3.5 is not considered as a significant factor and any variable that has a mean score of 3.5 and above is considered as a significant factor that influence voter turnout.
4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 2  Did you register to vote in the 2019 general election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Yes 410</th>
<th>No 1</th>
<th>Total 411</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Percent</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Percent</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researchers’ survey 2020

The Table 2 shows clearly that 410 respondents representing 99.8% registered to participate in the 2019 presidential elections as eligible voters who are 18 years above while only one respondent fails to register as eligible voter. This is an indication that since almost all the respondents registered as eligible voters, they are the right people to fill the questionnaire since the study focused on registered voters.

Table 3  Did you vote in the 2019 general election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Yes 127</th>
<th>No 284</th>
<th>Total 411</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Percent</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Percent</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researchers’ survey 2020

The Table 3 shows clearly that 127 respondents representing 30.9% actually voted in the 2019 presidential elections as eligible voters who are 18 years above while 284 respondents fail to cast their vote. This is indications that since most of the respondents fail to vote in the 2019 presidential election, they will be able to tell the factors that made them not to vote in the election and their opinion will be valid.

Table 4  Factors Responsible for voter turnout in the 2019 Presidential election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Politicians do not fulfill campaign promises</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.008</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Long queue before voting</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.343</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I do not trust election umpire because my vote will not be counted</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.334</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do not like the method of voting</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.364</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Violence during election</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.394</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My polling unit is too far from my residence</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.226</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lack of voter education</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.148</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Limited voting hour</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 shows that the responses of the respondents to items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 with mean scores of 4.40, 3.89, 3.79, 3.67 and 3.60 and standard deviation scores of 1.008, 1.343, 1.334, 1.364 and 1.394 respectively were accepted base on 3.50 cut off point as the factors that led to low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election held across all the states of the federation in Nigeria. However, items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 revealed means scores of 2.64, 2.60, 2.50, 2.37 and 1.84 and standard deviation scores of 1.226, 1.148, 1.107, 1.041 and 0.384 respectively were rejected base on the 3.50 cut off point as factors that made the voters not to turn out to vote in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The findings of this study indicate that some of the voters refused to vote in the 2019 presidential election because the previous government have failed in keeping up with their campaign promises. This findings conform with previous studies’ findings such as Aloysius et al (2019); Nwankwo (2019); Seanego and Mogoboya (2019); Mataka and Nkandu (2020); Yakubu (n.d); Idike (2014); Falade (2014) who also found out that failure to fulfill campaign promises is a major factor that influence turnout.

In addition, the study also revealed that the need to stay on the queue for a long time period of time before getting accredited and also to vote which is usually considered to be very hectic especially during the election because of large number that the election umpire will have to deal with in the course of getting them accredited and voting as well. The finding is in line with similar studies by Stephen (2012).

It was also revealed from the analysis that voters felt there is practically no point in coming out to vote because more often than not, the winner of an election is usually decided even before the commencement of the polls and as such they have lost confidence and trust in the election umpire and this has made many of the voters to refuse to come out to exercise their franchise in the 2019 general election. This findings is in line with Haime (2017); Babeyia (2013).

Also, some of the voters who fail to vote in the 2019 presidential election held that they do not like the method of voting. Though, the method of voting in the election was ballot paper as the INEC has not finalized on the introduction of Electronic Voting (EV) in Nigeria. Lastly, many of the respondents revealed that their refusal to come out to vote is not unconnected to the safety of their lives as election in Nigeria are usually marred by violence which is usually orchestrated by political thugs who are hired by politicians to bring them to power though violent means. This finding is in line with that of Mataka and Nkandu (2020); Amanyie et al (2015); Stephen (2012); Micheal (2018).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the major factors responsible for low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election include failure of political office holders to fulfill campaign promises they made prior to election, long queue before voting, lack of confidence in election body
to conduct free. Fair and credible election and violence during election are the major factors responsible for low voter turnout in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommended the following:

i. Community leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders and other relevant authorities should enlighten the voters on the danger of voter turnout by admonishing voters to vote out non-performing political office holders rather than refusing to vote.

ii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should ensure that they deploy enough ad hoc staff to polling unit to save time during election. This will ensure that people do not stay for too long before they can cast their votes during election.

iii. INEC officials should ensure that they remain independent and autonomous from political influence by not associating with any politician during and after election and where an official is found wanting, he/she be made to face the law.

iv. Lastly, government should provide armed security personnel to man polling units across the federation in order to ensure that political thugs do not disturb polls that could scare voters not to be able to come out en masse to exercise their franchise during elections.

REFERENCES


