KASHERE
JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Vol 1, Issue1 . June, 2023 ISSN 2616-1264



A Publication of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria

25. **Impact of Social Media on Political Dissent: A Comparative Analysis of USA and Nigeria**
Michael Chinonso Ogba & Chukwunonso Joseph Akogwu *238*

26. **Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Economic Relations with International Economic Organizations in the Fourth Republic: A General Appraisal**
Bailey Saleh *246*

27. **Effect of Microfinance Institutions Activities on the Satisfaction of Women Entrepreneurs in Adamawa State, Nigeria**
Aliyu Umaru Fudamu *257*

28. **Payroll Administration Reform in Nigerian Civil Service: Assessing the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System**
Olowu Olagunju Folorunso & Uke Iro Iro *268*

29. **Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: An Appraisal of Its Economic Diplomacy**
Muritala Babatunde Hassan & Abdul Hakeem Adejumo *279*

30. **Ethnicity and Religion: The Twin Identity Challenge to Nigerian Integration Drive**
Salisu Inusa Hassan, Adamu Babayo, Dauda Yahaya Kashere & Zephyrinus Ifeanyi Aririguzo *291*

31. **An Assessment of Factors Responsible for Low Voter Turnout in Nigeria: A Literature Review**
Rashida Adamu Oyoru *297*

32. **Maintenance Culture and the Challenges of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria: Implications for the Welfare of the Citizenry in the Fourth Republic**
Yusuf Garba Manjo *304*

33. **Electoral Violence and Voter Apathy in North-East Nigeria**
Franc Ter Abagen & Danjuma Yusuf *318*

34. **The Distinctive Characteristics of Public Administration as the Hub of Every Human Organization: A Conceptual Analysis**
David Kumije *330*

35. **Communal Conflict and the Challenges of Development in Benue State: The Bonta-Okpute-Aino Experience**
John Tor Tsuwa & Janet Nguemo Adorowa *342*

36. **Regional Migration in West Africa: Trends and Challenges along Nigeria-Cameroon Borders**
Abubakar Mohammed Sambo, Abubakar Garba Mshelia, Muhammad Fuad Othman & Rusdi Omar *357*

An Assessment of Factors Responsible for Low Voter Turnout in Nigeria: A Literature Review

Rashida Adamu Oyoru
Department of Politics and Governance,
Kwara State University, Nigeria
Corresponding author: rashida.adamu@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract

Nigeria gained independence in 1960 but became full-fledged democracy in 1999 after several years of military intervention in the political sphere of the country. The first republic was between 1960-1966 followed by the second republic which took place between 1979-1983; the third republic was later established in 1993 following a presidential election that was largely regarded as free and fair but was later nullified by General Ibrahim Babangida which prevented the president-elect, Moshood Abiola, from assuming office. The need to involve citizens in the business of governance is one of the reasons that inform the modern democratic thinking. There have been steady decline in voter turnout since 2003 general election to the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The major objective of this study is to review literature on the factors responsible for voter turnout in Nigeria. To achieve the aim of this study, the study adopted content analysis of secondary data and relied on secondary data as source of data for the study. The study concluded that the main causes of low voter turnout in Nigerian elections include but not limited to the following; the failure of elected officials to fulfill their campaign promises, poor civic education among other things. The study recommended among other things that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be impartial and free of political influence by refusing to associate with any political party before, during and after the election.

Keywords: Civic education, election, political participation, voter turnout, Nigeria.

Introduction

Political participation is one of the fundamental principles of democratic government. Citizens' participation show their enthusiasm in participating in politics and decision-making. The end of the cold war in the 1990s has led to a resurgence of interest in electoral democracy, notably in African countries (Adigun, 2020). The resurgence of interest in electoral democracy has resulted in a significant rise in the number of countries that hold direct national elections. During national elections, decrease in voter turnout has been recorded in a number of countries; Diamond (2015) terms this "democratic recession". Diamond (2015) further state that one of the "signs of democratic ill-health" is the continuous decline in voter turnout. Given the significance of elections for democracy, election stakeholders are making serious efforts to encourage voter participation.

According to Vasquez (2017), voting is a fundamental right of every eligible person to choose the leaders of their choice. According to Mehlape (2016), voting gives us the opportunity to "defend our natural right to make judgments, independent of our identity or social position". Freedom of choice is a defining feature of democracy. Additionally, voting is a good way for people to exercise their democratic right and to learn more about citizenship. A democracy's existence is further confirmed by the fundamental right of voting (Douglas, 2013). Voting is open to all citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are at least eighteen (18) years old. In other words, the constitution provides that every individual from 18years and above has the right to support the political party of their choice. Voting, in the opinion of Lindell (2019), is a mechanism for citizens to express their preference for the political party they believe should govern the country, rather than forcing one group's choice on another.

The foundation of electoral democracy is the premise that all citizens will participate fully in the electoral process because voter participation is one of the most important

measures. Lower turnout is typically linked to voter indifference and skepticism of the electoral political process, even though it is generally acknowledged that increasing voter turnout is an essential indicator of democratic development (Solijonor, 2016). There is enough evidence to suggest that voter turnout is declining globally, as evidenced by political indifference, a lack of psychological interest in public affairs, an emotional distance from civic duties, and a lack of political participation. Nigerians have clearly been less interested in participating in elections after 2003, as evidenced by the glaring fall in voter turnout in national elections (Adigun, 2020). 52.3 percent of the registered voters cast ballots in the 1999 elections, according to information from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Voter Turnout Database (Adigun, 2020). This percentage increased to 69.1 percent in 2003 but has since decreased. It decreased from 57.4% in 2007 to 53.7% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015, and 34.75% in the 2019 presidential election (Adigun, 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the causes of decrease in voter turnout in national elections. Additionally, according to the IDEA Voter Participation Database, Nigeria had the lowest voter turnout in West Africa in the most recent presidential elections, despite having performed better in the database's parliamentary elections. In addition, with 34.75 percent of eligible voters participating, the 2019 presidential election was the lowest voter turnout in Nigerian political history (Adigun, 2020). The evidence for legislative elections does not suggest a substantial fall, despite the fact that turnout in Nigerian presidential elections has been steadily declining. What then could be the causes of the persistent fall in voter turnout compared to prior elections?

Nigeria has seen a number of election years recently with low voter turnout. For instance, only 35.6 million of the 84 million eligible voters cast ballots in the 2019 presidential election, resulting in a turnout of 42.7%. Compared to the 2015 presidential election, which saw a turnout of 65.3% (44 million out of 68 million registered voters), this was a considerable decline. Many people were concerned about the decline in voter turnout in 2019 since it cast doubt on the legitimacy of the political process as well as the efficacy of voter education. Nigeria is not the only African nation that has struggled with voter indifference; several others have as well. Nigeria, however, is particularly concerning because to its size, strategic significance in Africa, and status as the largest democracy on the continent. Finding solutions to the issue and enhancing the electoral process depend on an understanding of the factors that contribute to and are affected by voter apathy in Nigeria. In order to offer suggestions for enhancing citizen participation in democracy, the paper will also draw on the experiences of other nations in addressing voter indifference. Researchers, civil society groups, and policymakers in Nigeria and other African nations who work on democracy, governance, and election processes will be interested in the study's conclusions.

There are various factors affecting turnout, it is important to investigate the main causes of voter apathy because, despite substantial research on voting, there is little evidence linking voter turnout to certain results. Previous research examined some selected factors that account for voter turnout which can only take into account a small number of factors. Therefore, the current study will examine the study within the context of previous studies without any restriction. Hence, the need for the current study to identify causes of voter turnout in Nigeria's previous elections.

Methodology

A document search was employed to collect secondary data from previously published publications, books, journals, and newspapers. The content of information from books, reports, journals, interviews, speeches, newspaper headlines, historical documents, and conversations were examined. The qualitative data could be correctly and methodically assessed with the use of this research approach, enabling the researcher to make generalizations about the categories that were of interest. In addition, the researcher looked at and analyzed a variety of themes in qualitative data using thematic analysis.

Literature Review

Institutional, psychological, and election-

specific factors have received the most attention from academics who have studied elections and voter turnout (Stockemer, 2017; Solijonor, 2016; Burden & Neiheisel, 2013; Harder & Krosnick, 2008; Roberts, 2009; Grönlund & Setälä, 2004; Ansolabehere & Konisky, 2006). Due to this concentration, less empirical research have been done on more important factors influencing voter turnout in sub-African elections, such as voter intimidation, vote buying, ballot fraud, and candidate popularity. Voter turnout is contrasted to measures of political trust and satisfaction with the performance of the present administration and is considered a key indicator of political legitimacy. Measures of political legitimacy, according to Grönlund and Setälä (2004), are thought to have an impact on voter participation, although voter choice may not directly be influenced by a voter's trust in political figures or contentment with the administration. There is agreement in the research that countries with compulsory voting, where elections are seen as significant and where populations and sizes are small, may have higher voter turnouts (Stockemer, 2017).

Opinions on the effects of socioeconomic, institutional, and election-specific factors on voter turnout, however, vary. Academics have over the years considered a variety of factors that influence the level of voter participation in elections. In both collective and individual study, factors such as institutional context, political atmosphere, voter characteristics, and attitudes have all been linked to observed differences in turnout (Conway, 1999 cited in Adigun 2020). According to Cancela and Geys (2016), Solijonor (2016), and Hogan (2013), there is a direct correlation between campaign spending and voter turnout. This approach, however, sparks a debate regarding the role that money plays in elections, particularly in Africa. Cancela and Geys (2016) further argued that in addition to campaign spending, closeness of the election and registration requirements have more explanatory power in national elections, whereas population size and composition, concurrent elections, and the electoral system have a greater impact on explaining turnout in subnational elections. During the 2008 presidential election in Zimbabwe, voter intimidation and coercion were examined by Robinson and Torvik (2009). They concentrated on the part that inadequate institutional and legal frameworks play in allowing politicians to incite violence as a tactic to gain advantage over their rivals, particularly among swing voters. Their argument heavily relies on the presumption that voters want to make informed decisions, but that low voter turnout may result from voters' expectations of politicians unleashing violence. In contrast to Downs' (1957) claim that voters are rationally uninformed, this position suffers from the evident weakness that voters are rational individuals who cannot be externally affected.

Researchers like Tracey (2016), Burden and Wichowsky (2014), and Stockemer, LaMontagne, and Scruggs (2013) found that prospective voters may choose not to cast a ballot if .socioeconomic reasons including unemployment, poor infrastructure, and electoral corruption have made them unhappy. According to Stockemer, LaMontagne, and Scruggs (2013), voters may lose interest in or become disengaged from the electoral process if they don't feel they can choose candidates who will stand up for their interests if they are elected. Burden and Wichowsky (2014) argue that despite what the "withdrawal theory" might suggest, high unemployment rates may actually increase voter turnout because people are "more likely to select politicians based on economic performance" than on their current circumstances. According to some researchers, despite the fact that unemployment may play a significant role in voter turnout, the political establishment has failed to effectively engage unemployed potential voters to participate in the electoral process by putting issues attempting to address unemployment on the political agenda (Tracey, 2016). The election system, demographics, social mobility, campaign funding or social capital, and weak political parties have all been studied by academics (Roberts, 2009 and Harder & Krosnick, 2008).

In a similar study conducted in the United State, one of the main reasons for low voter turnout in US elections, according to Burden and Neiheisel (2013), Roberts (2009), and Ansolabehere and Konisky (2006), is the "additional costs" that prospective voters must pay during the voter registration process

because of increased bureaucracy, restrictions imposed by the law, and other hindrances (Roberts, 2009). Davenport (2010) asserted that in contrast to more traditional techniques, face-to-face canvassing, voter mobilizations, and get-out-the-vote campaigns can significantly boost voter turnout. In order for voters to understand the urgency and necessity of casting their ballots on issues they deem crucial to resolving their immediate economic or social challenges, candidates may frequently need to make significant investments in voter education and raise the stakes for elections during pre-election campaigns (Solijonor, 2016). Despite the fact that many academics, including Collier and Vicente (2014), have argued that electoral violence, intimidation, voter fraud, and the prevalence of socioeconomic factors tend to influence voter turnouts, others question the extent to which country specific instances of pre-election violence can be generalized in other countries (Bekoe & Burchrad, 2017). In light of this, this study examined the factors that cause low voter turnout in Africa with focus on Nigeria.

Factors Contributing to the Decline of Votes in Elections

There are various studies that have been conducted in respect to voter turnout in Africa which has similar problem with Nigeria, Tracey (2016) in a study conducted in South Africa has stressed some of these factors; in a similar study conducted by Mataka and Nkandu (2020) in Zambia also examined some of these factors and some authors make reference to Nigeria. The factors can be examined below to understand how they are related within the Nigeria context where the current study is being conducted.

Poor Voter Education: Education is the accumulation of knowledge and abilities that are used in the real world to advance a nation, especially when it is carried out well. Because they believe there is a disconnect between their requirements and the curriculum in that it does not empower them, the majority of Nigerians are unsatisfied with the caliber of their education. In other words, the country's economic demands are not addressed in the curriculum, which is why the pandemic of youth unemployment has emerged. As a result, a large number of recent graduates wander the streets without jobs because the educational system did not give them the necessary training for the nation's socioeconomic progress. Tracy (2016) is of the view that education should liberate people from all of the issues and limitations they experience on a daily basis. They need to be given the courage they need to face tomorrow as a result. But this is false, which explains why fewer people showed up to vote given the situation in Nigeria at the time.

High Incidence of Corruption: The issue of corruption is also another critical determinant of voter turnout in Nigeria and some African countries. Not just a stain on the Nigeria government, corruption and poor management are a shame in many governments throughout the world. The electorate seeks out candidates with strong moral principles, impeccable credentials, and unwavering integrity (Adejumobi, 2000). By not casting a ballot, young people can voice their anger and discontent. Despite the effort they put forth in their academic endeavors, corruption makes it hard for them to prosper in their careers. Nigerians have lost faith in the current administration because of the high incidence of corruption that has made a lot of people impoverished. Beaton (2016) emphasizes how politicians' self-interest makes it difficult for young people to support them.

Weak Political Parties

In a study conducted in America by Roberts (2009), he stressed that the possible reason for low voter turnout in the United States can be linked back to the strength of the two major political parties. The study stressed that from 1828 until about 1900, voter turnout was at its highest historical levels in U.S. history. While there may be a variety of reasons for such high turnout during that time period, most scholars gave most of the credit to political parties. During this time period, political parties were a great deal more competitive than they are today. Nigerians have clearly been less interested in participating in elections after 2003, as evidenced by the glaring fall in voter turnout in national elections. 52.3 percent of the registered voters cast ballots in the 1999 elections. This

percentage increased to 69.1 percent in 2003 but has since decreased. It decreased from 57.4% in 2007 to 53.7% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015, and 34.75% in the 2019 presidential election (Adigun, 2020). During the period that recorded high voter turnout, they frequently invested a lot of time in local organizing to provide every person a chance to participate. These powerful political parties, nevertheless, quickly grew to be excessively dominant and were frequently charged with unethical activities including purchasing votes and intimidating voters. Nigerian voters became somewhat less tolerant of excessively powerful political groups as their abuse became more obvious. As a result, party participation started to decrease. Political party strength and increased voter turnout are strongly correlated, regardless of whether individuals view political parties as a force for good or evil.

Electoral Management

A lack of trust in election official to hold free, fair, and credible elections is another factor that contributes to voter apathy in Africa generally and Nigeria particularly. It is important to remember that some voters may lose interest in election-related issues if they believe their society is unable to have a free, fair, and violent-free election or if they are dissatisfied with how prior election disputes were handled. The lowest voting turnout ever was in Nigeria's 2019 presidential election, with 34 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots. In Nigeria, this may have been fuelled by the 2011 post-election crisis that claimed so many lives and properties especially in the Northern part of Nigeria because a certain candidate failed to win election. The 2019 election saw a sharp decline in voter turnout, with some locations reporting as few as 20% of registered voters in specific constituencies. Nigeria's voter turnout has been declining over time, according to data gathered by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This egregiously shows how little trust the country has in our political process and democratic institutions.

Failure to honour campaign promises

Another factor that lowers voter turnout is the fact that most individuals do not feel the need to vote since they do not believe their elected representatives to follow their word. Another justification for this is that some people abstain from voting due to their convictions. The insincerity that Nigerians have experienced in the hands of their leaders has made many of them to lost confidence in election. This is not unconnected to the fact that those who are elected once they get into office became reluctant in fulfilling campaign promises. The motivations of Nigerians to vote in subsequent election begin to decline. This position has been stressed by Madu and Abdulmalik in their study on voter turnout in Nigeria and also in a similar study by Mataka and Nkandu (2020) in Zambia.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has offered a thorough examination of voter apathy in Nigeria, including its roots, impacts, and potential remedies. According to the literature, voter apathy is a complicated problem that calls for a broad-based and ongoing effort to remedy. Nigeria can improve its democratic institutions, increase citizen engagement, and create a society that is more inclusive and equitable by putting the study's recommendations into practice.

The study concluded that the main causes of low voter turnout in Africa and Nigeria, particularly in the previous elections, include the failure of elected officials to keep their campaign promises, poor civic education, high incidence of corruption, and lack of trust in the integrity of the election process. The 2019 Nigerian presidential election's low voter turnout was mostly caused by violence during the election. The study made the following recommendations in light of its findings:

i. Improve voter education: By creating initiatives and programs that advance voter awareness, comprehension of the electoral process, and the significance of voting, politicians must prioritize voter education. In order to execute voter education programs that are accessible to all eligible voters in the nation, the government should work in partnership with civil society organizations. Public awareness campaigns, the usage of social media, and community-based groups could all be used

to accomplish this.

ii. Enhance Electoral security: In Nigeria, the problem of electoral violence plays a key role in the country's low voter turnout. The training of security personnel to offer safety for voters and polling places during elections is one of the things that policymakers should consider in order to strengthen electoral security. In order to hold those responsible for election violence accountable, there is also a need to look into and prosecute them.

iii. Increase access to polling stations: Policymakers should prioritize efforts to increase access to polling stations for voters. This could be achieved through the construction of new polling stations in underserved areas, the provision of transportation services to remote areas, and the deployment of mobile voting units to reach hard-to-reach communities. Additionally, policymakers should invest in infrastructure such as good roads and transportation networks that would make it easier for voters to access polling stations.

References

Adejumobi, S. (2000). Elections in Africa. *International Political Science Review, 21*(1), 59-73.

Adigun, O.W. (2020). The factors determining voter turnouts in presidential elections in Nigeria: Multivariate correlation analysis of the 2019 presidential election. Open Political Science, 3, 11–33 https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2020-0002

Ansolabehere, S. & Konisky, D. M. (2006). The introduction of voter registration and its effect on turnout. *Political Analysis, 14*(1): 83-100 DOI: 10.1093/pan/mpi03

Beaton, C. (2016). The Science Behind Why Millennials Don't Vote. Forbes. 4 Nov 2016. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinebeaton/2016/11/04/whymillenilaisarentvot ing/#365751 a3959c2. Assessed 24 March 2019.

Bekoe, D.A. & Burchrad, S.M. (2017). The contradictions of pre-election violence: the effects of violence on voter turnout in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Studies Review*, 1-20 DOI: 10.1017/asr.2017.50

Burden, B. C & Wichowsky, A. (2014) Economic discontent as a mobilizer: unemployment and voter turnout. *The Journal of Politics, 76*(4), 887-898

Burden, B. C. & Neiheisel, J. R. (2013). Election administration and the pure effect of voter registration on turnout Political Research Quarterly, 66(1), 77-90 DOI: 10.1177/106591 2911430671

Cancela, J. & Geys, B. (2016). Explaining voter turnout: A meta-analysis of national and subnational elections. Electoral Studies DOI: 10.1016/j. electstud.2016.03.005.

Collier, P. & Vicente, P. (2012). Violence, bribery, and fraud: the political economy of elections in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Public Choice, 153*(2), 117-147.

Davenport, T. C. (2010) Public accountability and political participation: effects of a face-to-face feedback intervention on voter turnout of public housing residents. *Political Behavior 32*(3), 337-368 DOI: 10.1007/S11109-010-9109-X

Diamond, L. (2015). Facing up to the democratic recession. *Journal of Democracy, 26*(1), 141–55.

Douglas, J.A. (2013). The foundational importance of participation: a response to professor Flanders. *OKLA. L. Rev.* 66(81).

Downs, A. (1957). An economic theory of democracy. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Grönlund, K. & Setälä, M. (2004). Low electoral turnout: an indication of a legitimacy deficit? Paper prepared for presentation at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Uppsala, 13–18 April 2004, Workshop 9 "Low Turnout – Does It Matter?" Available online: https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/d83ddd59-0a00-4535-a117-55a859e6a630.pdf [Accessed on 29 March 2019]

Harder, J. & Krosnick, J. A. (2008). Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout. *Journal of Social Issues 64*(3), 525-549.

Hogan, R. E. (2013). Campaign spending and voter participation in state legislative elections. *Social Science Quarterly, 94*(3), 840-864

Lindell, H. (2019). The importance of voting. The University of Texas.

Madu, A.Y & Abdulmalik, T.A. (2020). An Assessment of Factors Responsible for Voter Apathy in Africa: Empirical Evidence from 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election. Being a paper presented at *International Seminar on Regional Politics, Administration and Development* (INSORPAD) Organized by University Utara Malaysia and Stisipol Raja Haji. Tanjungpinang. Riau. Indonesia dated 14th to 15th October. 2020

Mataka, B. & Nkandu, M.O. (2020). The effects of voter apathy on the growth of electoral democracy in Zambia with special focus on Kabwe central constituency. *Global Journal of Advanced Research, 7*(3), 81-87.

\Mehlape, M.M. (2016). Voter Participation factors in the South African Local Government Elections: Influences and propositions for voter education. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives, 1*(2), 15-27.

Roberts, D. S. (2009). Why we don't vote: low voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections University of Tennessee. Honors Thesis Projects Available onli https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonopr oj/1365

Robinson, J. A., & Torvik, R. (2009). The real swing voters' curse. *American economic review: papers & proceedings, 99*(2), 310-315.

Seanego, M.J & Mogoboya, M.J. (2019). Factors Contributing to the Decline of Votes in South Africa: A Case Study of Mankweng Community. The 4th Annual International Conference on Public Administration and Development Alternatives 03 - 05 July 2019, Southern Sun Hotel, OR Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Solijonor, A. (2016). Voter turnout trends around the world Stockholm. *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1*(2),1-12

Stockemer, D. (2017). What affects voter turnout? A review article/meta-analysis of aggregate research Government and Opposition, 52(4), 698-722 Available online: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition/article/what-affects-voter-turnouta-review-articlemetaanalysis-of-aggregate-research/2CCC1F9A8B742953B2D10C87C13D9F12 (Accessed on 11 April 2019)

Stockemer, D. LaMontagne, B. & Scruggs, L. (2013) Bribes and ballots: The impact of corruption on voter turnout in democracies. *International Political Science Review 34*(1), 74-90.

Tracey, L. (2016). Do you want my vote? Understanding the factors that influence voting among young South Africans Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

Vasquez, E. (2017). Importance of voting: Why should every citizen vote'. poling place photo project. 16 November 2016. Available at: pollingplacephotoproject.org/content/how-to-participate. Accessed 24 March 2019.