

Between Huge Enthusiastic Campaign Crowds and Tiny Skeptical Voters: The Enablers and Dissuaders in Nigeria's Electioneering

Abstract

Elections in Nigeria have always depicted salient contradictions, nuances and paradoxes. Elections are seen as mere periodic rituals-to meet an unavoidable constitutional requirement- especially for politicians and their *clients*. Prospective voters, seen as electoral customers, are courted and, sometimes worshipped while being sanctimoniously described as king by the politicians even when the former harbor mix-feelings about the integrity of the process. Campaign grounds across the states of the federation are usually peopled by millions of these prospective voters. Yet, in view of the comparative population decline that characterizes voting days, as observed in previous elections, some questions are very germane to this study: Why is it that the large crowds that usually attend campaign rallies do not translate into votes for candidates or political parties at elections in Nigeria? What are the enablers for rallies and dissuaders towards Election Day or what is the proportion of both variables before and during elections? Is election gambling bait for the masses or a strategic liberation exercise towards common good for all? Is election integrity a reality in Nigeria where mandate protection is assured or a ruse where votes do not? Adopting historical, comparative and qualitative descriptive method, using content analysis, this essay emphasizes the significance of elections as the realization of rule by the people to engender sustainable democracy. It also provides an explanatory framework for understanding the voting behavior of the Nigerian electorate within the context of the percentage of registered voters that exercise their franchise on Election Day. It interrogates the interplay of non-partisan passive voters, mobilization drive and rally attendance on the one hand and voter's apathy and turn-out during elections on the other hand. It seeks to unravel those deciding factors that shape the minds of prospective electors between the campaign ground and polling booth.

Key Words: Campaign, Election, Voters, Influencers, Dissuaders

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his [or her] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. ... The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections... **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21**

Introduction and Problem Statement

Democracy, as a theoretical concept, has long been the subject of deliberation, debate and dreams. The way in which democracy is defined speaks not only of the nature of government, elections and power, but also of the nature of society, community and humanity. In the political philosophy of more recent centuries, the concept of democracy has evolved through many incarnations. It has been used as the basis for a utopian society, a means to protect citizens from

government, a tool for the advancement of human development, a form of free-market politics, and a way to ensure stability in a pluralist society (IDEA, 2006:11). Much of the recent research on African elections fails to provide a consistent definition of which elections should be considered democratic. In fact, the elections that are treated as democratic often vary from author to author. Clearly, this is problematic if one wants to develop testable and generalizable conclusions regarding African democratic elections (Golder and Wantchekon, 2004).

As a system of government, democracy embodies a variety of institutions and mechanism with the highest ideal being the power and right of the people to elect their preferred leaders. It is against this background that a democratic government should be a government elected by the people for the people and serving the interest of the people (Jonyo, 2013:25). In a liberal democracy, elections are not only the basis of a democracy but they are also one of the major acceptable ways the governed communicate with those who govern (Omilusi, 2014:160). It has been argued that holding regular, free and fair elections is the hallmark of building a democratic society. This is because the election process determines who should stay in office, who should be thrown out of office and who should replace those thrown out (Harrop and Miller, 1987 cited in Adetoye and Omilusi, 2013:2).

Modern elections are an effort to ensure decency, legitimacy and representation; and can thus be a transformative strategy towards full democracy (Nwiabu, 2011:1). For a country to be a democracy, it must have more than regular, multiparty elections under a civilian constitutional order. Even significant opposition in presidential elections and opposition party members in the legislature are not enough to move beyond electoral authoritarianism. Elections are only democratic if they are truly free and fair. This requires the freedom to advocate, associate, contest, and campaign. It also requires a fair and neutral electoral administration, a widely credible system of dispute resolution, balanced access to mass media, and independent vote monitoring (Diamond, 2008). Election can also be described as a formal process by which voters are free to make their political choices on candidates to occupy public offices. It is a formal expression of preferences by electorates, and this is aggregated and transformed into a decision concerning who is chosen and who is not. However, elections alone do not guarantee the establishment of a true democracy but are essential to it, since no regime would qualify as democratic in our modern era if it does not hold regular elections.

Since in a democracy the ideal is seeking the consent and mandate of the citizens; therefore, for any leader to be accepted as legitimate, citizen participation in the choice of their leaders is important (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011:19). In fact, the quality of elections is part of the criteria for assessing the level of consolidation of new democracies (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010). Participation in elections makes citizens to feel a sense of belonging, and reinforces self-esteem. They no longer feel isolated but see themselves as part of the government, and part-taking in decision making. Legitimacy of a political society is also reinforced by elections. The government has the right to govern, and the governed recognizes the rights of the government to govern (Harrop and William 1987).

Thus, at the heart of all democracies is an essential trust that the individual places in others to fairly pursue the common affairs of all people (IIDEA, 2001: vii). In democratic system, each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means of expressing his approval or disapproval of government decisions, policies and programs, the policies and programs of various political parties and qualities of candidate who are engaged in struggle to get the status of being the representatives of people. Put differently, voting and election are virtuous features of the modern democratic society (Ajiboye, 2015). Despite its importance to democracy, the right to participate is not exercised by all who possess it. The number of nonparticipants varies with time, place, and circumstance, and also with the type of participation (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). The right to vote, which is inseparable from the right to participate in government and public affairs, embodies the concept that sovereignty of a country belongs to its people and that the legitimacy of government therefore derives from the will of the people. The free expression of that will is impossible without freedom from fear of violence, intimidation, bribery and other forms of undue influence or retribution for the expression of political choice.

The inability to conduct credible elections in Nigeria has been attributed to the long period of military rule, coupled with weak democratic institutions and processes and hosts of other historical factors, which have led to the emergence of a political culture characterized by electoral violence, monetized politics, low political accountability, abuse and personalization of power, general apathy towards elections and low participation of critical segments of the society (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2010). The periodic electoral accountability that should come with free and fair elections remains gravely lacking in Nigeria, because of the subversion of the rules of electoral governance and its processes by the country's political parties and other stakeholders

(Akubo and Yakubu, 2014:102). This naturally brings about political cynicism, which is defined by Capella and Jamieson (1997; 166) as a “mistrust generalized from particular leaders or political groups to the political process as a whole – a process perceived to corrupt the persons who participate in it and that draws corrupt persons as participants”.

Instead of providing opportunity for public deliberation, election campaigns are mainly moments for politicians to engage in mass mobilization and manipulation of electoral rules. All too often, campaign strategies feature material inducement and political intimidation (Bratton, 2008:1). Election has always been fiercely contested under party politics that is intemperate and violent in nature. Politicians explore all strategies- both conventional and unconventional means to outwit one another in electoral contests. Yet, as observed by Olurode (2014:13), what seems to be prompting this desperate desire to participate in the electoral process is not preoccupation with the wellbeing of the public but the motivation tends to be self-centeredness the perception that power should be grabbed for personal material fulfilment.

The rest of this essay focuses on the nature and character of electoral democracy in Nigeria. It addresses the interface of party politics, political behavior and voters’ choice of candidate or party in an electoral contest. Also, it examines the intervening variables between campaign period and Election Day with a view to ascertaining the propelling factors behind voters’ enthusiasm or apathy as the case may be. It seeks to establish how representative of the population are the registered or actual voters and if legitimacy could be derived from low turnout. The main thrust of the essay, however, is anchored on the observable trend that while more people discuss politics and attend campaign rallies than vote; the implication remains that political office holders are always elected by a small fraction of the populace. Yet, this does not necessarily erode the legitimizing effect such an exercise ought to have on the government put in place.

Party System and Electoral Democracy in Nigeria: A synopsis

Nigeria, like many African nations that emerged from European colonialism, has faced a rocky road in its democratic development. After achieving independence from the British in 1960, the country's fragile government rapidly descended into civil war. For the next three decades, the nation was then ruled by an almost uninterrupted series of military dictatorships (Levine, 2015). Nigeria’s experience with democratic elections since independence has been rather mixed.

Although the country has managed to transit from one administration to another, hardly any election conducted in the country has been completely free of charges of irregularities, electoral malpractices, violence and various degrees of disruptions (Jega, 2010:3). This leads to distortion in the election outcomes and further engenders public discontent about the quality and credibility of elections in Nigeria. The reason for this phenomenon has been political parties' lack of commitment to democracy and accountability, both within their own structures and in the manner they engage with the electoral process (UNDP, 2012:10).

The country has a presidential system of government with an executive President, a judiciary and a bicameral National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives). All national and statewide elected officials serve four-year terms, unless courts overturn election results; such decisions are common for Nigerian state and legislative elections, although unprecedented in presidential contests. Each state has three senators and between 5 and 24 representatives. Senators and representatives are not term-limited, but the president and state governors may serve only two terms (Thurston, 2015:5). The entire federation is treated as a single constituency for the presidential election and the successful candidate must win "not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the states in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja" (See Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Section 134, Subsection 1(b)).

Nigeria's institutional system ensures that the ruling party controls all aspects of politics. The only institution in which minority parties have a say is the National Assembly. Furthermore, the first-past-the post system ensures that not all of the 250 ethnicities are represented. Nigeria has employed the first-past-the post electoral system since independence. While this has produced clear winners, it does not reflect the diverse nature of the country. By failing to relate a party's share of the votes to the legislature, Nigeria's electoral system does not provide full representation to a diverse population (IDEA, 2003).

The period between political independence and final transition to civil rule in the country in 1999 witnessed an unprecedented military rule accompanied by constitutional suspension and disrespect for the fundamental human rights of citizens and the rule of law. Put differently, apart from two brief phases of civilian government (1960-1966 and 1979-1983), the current dispensation is the third serious attempt (from 1999 onwards) to establish a lasting democratic political system. As observed by Peter Lewis (cited in Omilusi, 2015:3) there appears to be an

elite consensus on the utility of democratic institutions. He, however, adds that “a succession of flawed elections, the dominance of the ruling party, and scant evidence of political accountability have all undermined the legitimacy and stability of democratic rule. Weak institutions-including the legislature, courts, police and civil service- foster continuing problems of governance”.

The long period of military rule, coupled with weaknesses of democratic institutions and processes and a host of other historical factors, have led to the emergence of a weak political culture characterized by electoral violence, monetized politics, poor and low political accountability, abuse and personalization of power, zero-sum approach to politics, general apathy towards elections and low participation of critical segments of the society such as women, the disabled and internally displaced persons (Electoral Reform Committee, 2008:4). The centralization of power, security, and financial resources in the presidency constitutes a major obstacle to the realization of Nigerian democracy. In turn, this has undermined popular democracy, the rule of law, federalism, devolution of powers, and good governance (USAID, 2006:5).

The history of Nigeria’s party politics since the coming into force of the 1979 Constitution, and even before it, shows strong deficits in the practice of competitive party and electoral politics. The persistent and seemingly intractable deficits include: (i) the personalization of politics, and the prevalence of the God-father syndrome; (ii) the negative influence of money; (iii) lack of internal democracy, especially the imposition of candidates; and (iv) election-related violent political conflict within and between political parties (Ibrahim, 2007; Ibrahim and Aturu, 2009 cited in Jinadu, 2013:5). Elections in Nigeria have always lacked credibility in the eyes of the general public and therefore, fell short of meeting the essential ingredients of a democratic electoral process.

Rather than building enduring infrastructure, Nigerian politicians believe their electability or popularity will be enhanced by the amount of patronage they can dispense. In doing this, they create a cult-like figure in the eyes of the critical mass of the working poor. In a country where poverty stalks the citizens like a shadow, this has proved very effective (Olupohunda, 2014:26). This can be further explained with Richard Joseph’s concept of prebendalism. Prebendalism is the disbursing of public offices and state rents to one’s ethnic-based clients, and is inherently rooted in state corruption. The concept was applied specifically to the context of Nigerian

politics. It is an extreme form of clientelism where state resources are corruptly allocated in order to mobilize cultural and political identities.

It is a truism also, that politics in Nigeria is still largely an elite game. This closed system is propagated by what Nigerians refer to as the “sit tight” or incumbency syndrome, in which elected officers refuse to relinquish their seats in government despite their poor performance, and utilize any means to stay in office. Not only does this result in an inadequate circulation of elites, but it also perpetuates systematic discrimination against the vulnerable groups (USAID, 2006:17). Contending groups struggle on grimly, polarizing their differences and convinced that their ability to protect their interests and to obtain justice is co-extensive with their power. That creates the politics of anxiety. In this type of politics, there is deep alienation and distrust among political competitors. This is the type of politics that has prevailed in Nigeria since independence (Ake, 1985:10). While explaining the crisis of electoral governance in Nigeria, Jinadu (2011:151) submits that:

The first feature is the character of the Nigerian state as the site for zero-sum electoral competition for the acquisition of political power the vast patrimonial economic power it confers. This partly explains why Nigerian electoral politics has over the years increasingly assumed violent, war-like forms, accentuated by the winner-takes-all tendency inherent in the first-past-the-post electoral system practiced in the country since independence. It is also why no effort has historically been spared by partisans across party lines to subvert the electoral process, knowing full well that they can get away with electoral impunity. It has turned politics into a huge business enterprise, where rules designed to ensure the indeterminacy of elections are openly and crassly violated, and where regulators become active or inactive collaborators in the grand larceny of the people’s electoral mandate

Similarly, corruption is still the stock-in-trade of Nigerian democracy, rooted in the centralized, clientelistic nature of politics described above. Political elites misappropriate considerable public funds for their personal gain, while most of their constituents lack access to potable water (USAID, 2006:19). Many political elites, past and present, have accumulated personal fortunes through resilient, deeply rooted systems of political patronage that are wired into the booming oil industry in the south (Hoffmann, 2014 cited in Omilusi, 2015:4). Although citizens regularly carry out their voting obligations, their concerns are often not reflected or their rights protected by elected officials in policy-making and governance decisions. The states’ failure to respond to citizens’ needs despite economic growth has created disillusionment with democracy. Yet, as emphasized by the Electoral Reform Committee (2008:77), the significance of elections must always be situated within the context of their contributions to the overall political, economic, and social development of the polity.

Political Behavior and the Rationale for Choice of Candidates or Parties

The rudiments of a true democracy are good governance, fair and legitimate elections, justice, equity, accountability, transparency, responsible leadership, political education of the masses, efficient political institutions and respect for the rule of law (Jakande, 2008:85). As Kerr (2013) argues, the consolidation and the progress of democracies hinge on popular confidence in the process of and in the conduct of elections. The credibility of Nigerian elections over the years has been conspicuously low. Elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and, subsequently, help to secure the legitimacy of the political system (INEC and FES, 2011:7).

From the voters' perspective, there are two ways to establish a view on the likely policies of each of the available choice options, one retrospective and the other prospective. Retrospectively, voters establish a sense of the course of future policies on the basis of their experience of the course of past policies (Key 1966, Fiorina 1977 cited in Schmitt and Wessels, 2005:9). On the other hand, prospective evaluations of policy differences between the choice options – parties or candidates – are much harder for the voter because they call for a considerable amount of knowledge and information (ibid).

As could be deduced from the previous sections, elections are a simple, effective and convenient way by which citizens can participate in the proceedings of a democratic society. Even one vote can play a crucial role in the collective decision-making process and tip the balance towards one side or the other. Thus, the electoral process must be managed in a way as to guarantee citizens an effective participation in the choice of leaders. A quality participation of citizens implies that appropriate measures must be taken to enable them play their part in the best way as possible (Hounkpe and Gueye, 2010:13). During elections therefore, voters are given an opportunity to make their own assessment of both the achievements of the outgoing government and of the policy manifestos of the opposition. Elections give citizens a political voice. They form the basis upon which political accountability is to be built, and provide orderly procedures for the succession and alternation of power (Bargiacchi et al, 2011:2). It should, however, be stated that elections by themselves may not lead to a democracy unless underpinned by the capacity of the people to know the reason and meaning of their votes. Ball and Peters (2000) identified three broad approaches to voting behavior:

Party identification model-party identification determines the choice of candidate to vote for even though personality of candidates and presentation of issues and organization of campaigns could

help change the choice...Rational choice approach- the choice is based on expectations of the voter and but some traits of the voter may intervene in making the choices between candidates. The sociological factor- focuses on the voter's class, religion, age gender and group tend to stand the time even though still has further issues within

The main alternative approach in electoral behavior has focused on understanding how social norms, political attitudes, cognitive opinions, and cultural values shape patterns of voting choice and party support. Studies have employed increasingly sophisticated research designs, including cross-sectional post-election surveys representative of electors and parliamentary elites, multi-wave campaign panel surveys, experimental methods, and content analysis of the mass media and party platforms (Norris, 2004:13). In most cases, as will be discussed in the next section, parties and candidates use all means to stimulate turnout and motivate supporters to go to the polls. Of significant mention is the socio-economic status of the electorate which, in most cases, makes them susceptible to the machinations of these political gladiators and thus, influences their choice of candidate or political party during election. Obafemi (2014) drives home this point more poignantly:

Various factors affect the choice of platform the common vote for; such include religion, gender, psychological factors and social-economic status (poverty). But in the Nigerian context, poverty is the most overriding factor. This is made evident during the election periods, when parties go head to head in the electoral arena... The party with the most assurance of such benefits in the now, later and future wins the race of loyalty from the poor. Such assurance include evidence of them being incorporated into the future spoil sharing system, hence loyalty is symbiotic in the Nigerian system

According to Onapajo, et al (2015:7), political elites characteristically use oil money to fund elections and buy votes from the electorate. It seems reasonable to assume that, in seeking to control voter behavior, politicians would focus their efforts on the most vulnerable elements in society. One would therefore expect a disproportionate concentration of bribery and violence on poor and uneducated people. The poor are likely to be victimized by vote buying because their limited means makes them susceptible to material inducements, including offers of basic commodities or modest amounts of money (Bratton, 2008:5). Although, Morris (1999) advises that message is more important than money, and suggests that "the key to winning any race is to come up with an affirmative message that outdistances the opponent's message" but because poverty has become a household phenomenon, Nigerians usually see electioneering period as payback time by the seemingly elusive political office holders who, in the estimation of the former, have abysmally failed on their initial campaign promises coded in nice messages. Thus, 'getting my own share of the national cake', 'my dividend of democracy can only be gotten

now', '*we go show them this time*' or 'they think we are fools' become common phrases on the lips of the electorate. As noted by Adetula, (2008), these usages adequately describe the rent-seeking behavior of politicians and voters.

Today, being in government is the most lucrative business in Nigeria and therefore it is also the greatest investment and profit yielding venture in town (Momoh, 2010:3). Nigeria is arguably one of the most expensive democracies in the world. The resources required to maintain the leaders are outrageously ridiculous. Scales of reckless spending and uncontrolled use of materialism is rife in Nigerian politics (Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011:12). Although, money is central to the organization of political activity, Egwu (2008:23) argues that its uncontrolled and unregulated use can undermine the central value of liberal democracy underpinned by the logic that the political market place should decide who holds public power on behalf of the people. Perhaps, this partly explains why governance deliverables are better seen as tangible dividends by the political class and the electorate alike. In its editorial, Vanguard (May 26, 2015), calls it a unique democracy:

Nigerians and their democracy are unique. If elsewhere people delight in the capacities of their government to deepen their liberties, broaden opportunities, our democracy is delivered as structures, visible and tangible. We call them dividends of democracy... The lure of dividends – a throwback to the days when the economy supported companies making returns to shareholders – has created an array of expectations. People expect democracy to translate to instant wellbeing... Equating physical developments with gains of democracy could result in dissipating the more important aspects of democracy and by extension accepting any form of rule, as long as it builds better roads and bridges.

Also, sociological approach has much influence on electorate's voting behavior. Voters prefer to vote for a candidate of the same religious background irrespective of his or her manifestoes (Ayantayo 2008 cited in Iseghohime, 2009: 22). Religious leaders in Nigeria study parties' manifestos and advise their members to vote for a particular party. Ethnicity is another factor that influences voters' behavior in Nigeria. As observed by Orji and Uzodi (2012:34), "politicians invoke and use ethnicity in political mobilization, especially in countries like Nigeria where electoral constituencies coincide with ethnic boundaries". Ethnic politics has often been a negative force in Nigeria aimed at gaining power through the manipulation of sectarian sentiments (IDEA, 2001:104). Some voters vote for candidates not because of the content of the manifestos but because of the ethnic group or region the candidate belongs. Political party could be described to belong to a particular region judging from the ethnic background of the founders and leaders of such a party (Lancia, 2007 cited in Iseghohime, 2009: 22).

Usukuma (2014:47), in his piece on political marketing, contends that most Nigerian politicians need to assimilate today's reality in Nigeria that politics is more about emotions than intellect. The savviest marketer on this turf, according to him, must understand that if he wants his brand to succeed, it must appeal to the heart, more than the mind. For Gbadegesin (2014 cited in Omilusi, 2015:20), elections are the only means of choosing leaders in a democracy, and elections are about people's preferences. Preferences on their part, according to him, could be rational or irrational, self-regarding or other-regarding. It does not really matter because in a democracy, the voters are the kingmakers. Yet, Thomas (2014:24) argues that a voter's power should be exercised with some degree of sanity and logical discretion and should not, under any normal circumstances be used to encourage the enthronement of tyranny and to celebrate mediocrity.

From Campaign Rallies to Polling Booths: The Intervening Variables

In many established democracies, concern about eroding participation at the ballot box has been widely expressed, with commentators suggesting that we are seeing the 'vanishing voter' (Norris, 2004:25). Substantial academic research has examined the barriers to voting and the reasons why many people are not voting (Gludovatz, 2014:3). Indeed, several factors that affect voter apathy have been highlighted in relevant literature. Some of these include broad psychological factors and collective memory of historical and contemporary events. Others are patterns of trust, feelings of efficacy, political engagement and disengagement at individual, group and regional levels (INEC and FES, 2011:7).

Also, some relate to the individual micro-level factors (age, income, education, and interest in politics) and others to macro-level political factors (the party system, the electoral system and election procedures) (Ballington, 2001:12). The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, in its report on the 2011 general elections (cited in Onyekachi, 2014), identified the lack of transparent elections, election violence and politicians' refusal to honor their campaign promises as major reasons for voter apathy in the country. Other reasons, according to research, are the imposition of candidates by political parties, missing of voters' names from the INEC register as well as late arrival of election materials on Election Day.

The past several decades have witnessed a general decline in voter turnout throughout the world, and, while there is little agreement as to what specifically constitutes a good 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 (IDEA, 2006:10). It is noted that exaggerating the size of rally crowds is mostly a ritual in electoral contests at different levels, particularly elections into executive offices, when crowds often do grow in size and intensity (Mann, 2015:34). However, in as far as people's participation is concerned, evidence show that the most vibrant democracies have vibrant economies, educated citizens and a well-structured and developed social system and peaceful coexistence between citizens (Jonyo, 2013:25).

It is observed that people are more likely to vote when contacted by friends, family or members of a political party who encourage them to vote. Also, people are more likely to vote when political parties offer policy distinct policy alternatives that are relevant to the voter. Regardless of the specific mechanism thought to influence electoral participation, nearly every study of voter turnout assumes that the individual vote calculus is motivated in part by the election, the campaign, or the candidates. That is, most assume that people participate in elections because they have some interest in the outcome of the elections (Miles, 2015:3). Indeed, what happens between one election and another is arguably more important than what happens on the polling day. The idea of elections, therefore, is one that is located within the larger dynamics and functioning of a society and as such, it is reflective of these dynamics (Biegon, 2009:4). The concern here therefore, is to interrogate the specific mechanisms that motivate Nigerian voters towards exercising their franchise while others also choose to stay away from the polling booths after having attended different campaign rallies. Is this electoral behavior universal or peculiar to Nigeria?

Nigeria's elections since independence have been highly contested. A number of factors underlie these elections, and determine the perceptions, actions and strategies of the political class as elements within it competitively jostle to win power – for those who have been out of power and desperate to win it – and/or sustain it – for incumbents who want to remain in power. Between these actors all sorts of sentiments and divisive tendencies – ethnicity, religion, generation, geography etc. – are politically unleashed on poor and powerless communities of the voting public. Effectively, these communities are cajoled to vote on the basis of deceitful reasons.

It has been affirmed that voter apathy goes beyond just lack of interest or passivity of voters towards voting; it is the insensitivity of voters to electoral processes, particularly voting caused by disenchantment arising from dissatisfaction with the political system and sometimes ignorance and lack of proper education. Voter apathy thus, results in low voter turnouts (Agaigbe, 2015:8). Put simply, some people participate in elections when they are satisfied and

refuse to participate when they are displeased with government performance, particularly when the probability of changing the composition of government through a single vote is small (Miles, 2015:3). Miller (1974:952) explains that cynicism “refers to the degree of negative affect toward the government and is a statement of the belief that the government is not functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations”. Political cynicism reveals a feeling of distrust in politics, politicians, and governmental institutions by the public (Strama, 1998). For Larry Diamond (2007:12) therefore, trust between citizens and their government officials and elected representatives is a vital element of a well governed society. In the absence of trust, citizens become cynical about their political system and disaffected with the existing order.

Clemence (2011:5) observes that Nigeria has predictable voting patterns, as all democratic countries do. In a study carried out by INEC and FES (2011:47), out of the four possible reasons adduced by respondents for voter apathy in Nigeria, violence and electoral fraud were considered the most significant. Their persistence, interacting with equally intractable legacies of military rule, problems of corruption, triumph of culture of impurity, erosion of culture of restraint, low-quality political leadership, institutional weaknesses and structural inadequacies have served as constraints to voter turnout and catalyst to voter apathy (INEC and FES, 2011:24).

It is observed that corruption has a negative influence on voter turnout. Kostadinova (2009) argues that corruption diminishes voter participation in elections because it erodes popular belief that citizens can influence political outcomes—a necessary component of civic engagement. The periodic electoral accountability that should come with free and fair elections remains gravely lacking in Nigeria, because of the subversion of the rules of electoral governance and its processes by the country’s political parties (Jinadu, 2013: 5). Many Nigerians of voting age strongly feel disgusted about the electoral process and politicians that drive the process. Because they do not feel/see any improvement in their living standard over the years, or any humane policies that could engender such, they do not see their electoral participation as essential for the expected change.

Similarly, some people have low internal political efficacy, believing that their single vote will not make a difference while other people have low external political efficacy, believing that the results of the election will not reflect their choices, so there is no reason to bother voting (Gludovatz, 2014:4). In Nigeria, many people in this category, due to incentive by party loyalists/politicians, do regularly attend campaign rallies in their localities. Customized

shirts/caps, transport and feeding stipends are made available by the local campaign committee- all coded in logistics. In fact, in some communities, the assurance of seeing the incumbent again *after the last election* brings many of these people to the venue. This may not be construed as a demonstration of love or support as may have been erroneously assumed by the candidates or political party but a seeming valedictory get-together for a non-performing incumbent! This may have informed Mann's (2015) submission that:

Clearly, using campaign rallies as vehicles to motivate supporters and generate new coverage isn't going anywhere. Besides, what else would candidates do when not governing or fundraising? Nonetheless, the size of a rally is not necessarily an indicator of momentum or popular support. Larger crowds don't always translate into Election Day victories

Specifically, for the incumbent governor or president, state resources are easily deployed to mobilize people to campaign grounds. At the state level, it is not uncommon for a governor to direct all local government chairpersons and other political appointees to compulsorily bring certain number of people to such rallies. With the appropriate logistics mentioned earlier, instances abound where civil servants, artisans, market women, religious faithful and traditional leaders are compelled to honor the incumbent with their presence in large numbers. In a society where political office holders wield enormous power, it becomes difficult to resist such an invitation. Many of these people are non-partisan passive voters without any serious commitment to supporting a particular political party or candidate¹.

Also, elections have always been high stakes affairs in Nigeria. For instance, the buildup to the 2015 elections was accompanied by unprecedented levels of tension and anxiety (Cooke and Downie, 2015: v). The 2015 elections were perhaps the most contentious in recent political history (Fabiya and Otunuga, 2015). The political climate was aggravated by competing claims, by politicians and ethnic leaders from different regions, to the presidency and other offices (ICG, 2014:3). Many Nigerians of voting age who, had earlier, ferociously engaged in the pre-election emotional campaign which the exercise generated for a few months, could not demonstrate such interest on the Election Day. In a polling survey conducted by Fabiya and Otunuga (See Sahara Reporters, May 27, 2015), they adduced some factors to this observable low turnout:

One must either believe that despite the high emotional intensity generated by the electioneering campaign, there was still significant ambivalence towards both candidates, or that there was a pervasive fear of violence that kept people away from the polls. Another explanation might be that

¹ A deep interaction with some of them will also reveal that they have not voted in previous elections and do not intend to have a change of mind thereafter. Thus, on Election Day, they distant themselves from the voting centres.

the turnout in this electoral cycle is actually more reflective of the real level of voter participation in Nigerian elections, and that previous elections were characterized by fraud in a way that was not possible in the 2015 polls due to the use of the personal voter card (PVC) readers – which set an upper bound on voter counts, limiting the ability for wholesale voter fraud by restricting rigging to an upper bound constrained by the number of people who were actually accredited to vote on election day, and not on the entire population of registered voters.

It is also a fact that violence or anticipated acts of violence on Election Day discourage Nigerian electorate from voting. In fact, a gender perspective is articulated in this regard because uncertain security situation is seen as a major threat to women's political participation. As established by the CLEEN Foundation (2015:3), "some of the violence is also gender specific and difficult to contain in some deeply patriarchal societies". A majority of those who attend political rallies are women and youths in Nigeria and one becomes curious to discover that some of these women prefer to stay in-door on Election Day having witnessed the pre-election violence in their communities. This is not disputing the fact that more of women are seen voting on Election Day than men but their proportion to rally attendance is obviously insignificant. This observation has also been alluded to by the International IDEA (2001:121) in its study:

There are those who provide support but do not determine the real direction of the party's politics. It is yet to be determined whether they have been confined to this position by choice, circumstances or obstacles within political parties. However, we have been told that where political victories are decided through violence, manipulation, widespread electoral abuses and money, women are less likely to compete... Investigations reveal that low female voter participation can be linked to inadequate/inappropriate information about the voting process, voter apathy, the belief that votes will not impact on the outcomes and the failure of politicians to develop their campaigns around issues that have an appeal to women.

The new concept of *See and Buy* also discourages prospective voters from coming out on Election Day. Having been deceived in the past, the political parties-through their special agents have devised a new method of financially compensating voters at the polling booths after authentication of *correct vote*, in some instances, with active connivance of election officials. Many political parties no longer give financial inducement before Election Day. Instances abound where a prospective voter may have received handouts from different political parties and eventually thumb print for the highest bidder or for his/her real choice or for the fear of molestation, stay at home. Because many of these people are no longer remunerated beforehand, they become reticent and thus, their usual enthusiasm wanes considerably. More so, that they are

not sure if such remuneration will be guaranteed, or better still, released in full by the equally treacherous special party agents².

Nigeria's electoral success can be attributed in part to several reforms adopted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which conferred new legitimacy on the country's electoral process. Among other things, INEC introduced machine readable voter cards for voter accreditation and encouraged political parties to deploy their agents at all polling units across the country (Orji, 2015:1). However, concerns were raised about the voting process as designed by the election management body. As observed by Olubodun (2015), the idea of electorates getting accredited and returning hours later to vote made the whole process unnecessarily bureaucratic. In the 2015, for instance, presidential elections, figures from INEC show that 31,746,490 voters were accredited but only 29,432,083 votes were cast. It is safe to conclude that 2,314,407 accredited voters did not return to cast their votes and hence were disenfranchised by the cumbersome process. Also, in spite of early preparations, extensive planning and concerted efforts by stakeholders, Orji and Iwuamadi, (2015:13) observe that logistical and technical lapses, irregularities and violence were not entirely avoided during the 2015 elections. The key lesson, according to them, is that obstacles to smooth conduct of elections may not be eliminated as quickly as we expect.

How Representative of the Population are Voters?

Political participation is a sine qua non of any kind of democracy. Rule by the people requires participation, which has several aspects in elections. First, in a representative system, popular political participation is primarily exercised through voting. Equality of political participation in elections implies there is universal suffrage guaranteed by law. Suffrage may be limited by citizenship, age, and mental sanity. To be included in the analysis, an election must take place under regulated circumstances that in principle, guarantee universal and equal suffrage. The percentage of electorates who actually participate in electoral processes is used as an indicator of the realization of equal popular participation. Second, participatory elections also imply individuals and political parties have equal rights to exist and field candidates to contest elections (Lindberg, 2004:53).

² I refer to them as special party agents because the officially accredited party agents are always conspicuously tagged for identification. However, this set of party men and women often disguise as prospective voters (some of them may have registered at the polling units though) but their clandestine activities could only be known to discerning observers or those who had foreknowledge of it.

As indicated earlier, robust voter turnout is fundamental to a healthy democracy and that voting is one of the most fundamental aspects of civic engagement. Many political scientists link voting with the health of the democratic process and argue that declining voting rates may be symptomatic of a "democratic deficit" (Pammett and LeDuc 2003; Nakhaie 2006 cited in Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté, 2015). Thus, the right to participate is an essential element of democratic government, inseparable from such other attributes of democracy as consent, accountability, majority rule, equality, and popular sovereignty. But apathy has always characterized political participation in Nigeria, particularly during electioneering as aptly demonstrated in the 2015 general elections. In fact, as pointed out by Fabiyi and Otunuga, (2015), "it must be noted that at 43.65%, the turnout for the 2015 Presidential elections was the lowest since 1979. The average turnout in the previous four (4) Presidential elections since 1999 has been about 58%." Soyemi (2015) puts it in a more graphic form:

On the 28th of March 2015, 28,587,564 Nigerians voted, largely peacefully and meticulously. Muhammadu Buhari, the now president-elect won the 2015 vote by 2, 571,759 votes with 15,424,921 votes cast in his favor, while outgoing president Goodluck Johnathan received a mere 12,853,162 votes. Now, of the 67,422,005 registered voters only 29,432,083 actually voted; this is a paltry 43.6% of registered voters. And it is an even lesser fraction of the total of the country's 177,155,754 strong population that are over the legal voting age of 18. In other words, Buhari has swept to power on the say so of 8.7% of Nigeria's total population (counting infants and children under 18).

The graphic analysis of both Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Nigeria since 1959 as documented by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2015) clearly shows the gap between registered voters and actual voters; between voting age population and registered voters; and between the total population and actual voters that usually elect representatives. There is usually considerable fluctuation from one election to another among those who participate actively, as candidates, issues, economic and political conditions change as explained in the previous sections.

Voter turnout data for Nigeria

PRESIDENTIAL

Year	Voter Turn-out	Total vote	Registration	VAP Turn-out	Voting age population	Population	Invalid votes	Compulsory voting
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056	2.87%	No
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573	3.19%	No
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731		No
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911	6%	No
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359	1.40%	No
1993		14,039,486		27.79%	50,526,720	105,264,000		No
1979	35.25%	17,098,267	48,499,091	44.83%	38,142,090	77,841,000	2%	No

PARLIAMENTARY

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International

Year	Voter Turn-out	Total vote	Registration	VAP Turn-out	Voting age population	Population	Invalid votes	Compulsory voting
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056		No
2011	28.66%	21,074,621	73,528,040	25.80%	81,691,751	155,215,573		No
2007			61,567,036		71,004,507	131,859,731		No
2003	49.32%	29,995,171	60,823,022	46.63%	64,319,246	129,934,911	3.20%	No
1999	40.69%	23,573,407	57,938,945	44.65%	52,792,781	108,258,359	2.40%	No
1983	38.90%	25,400,000	65,300,000	58.23%	43,620,780	89,022,000		No
1979	32.34%	15,686,514	48,499,091	41.13%	38,142,090	77,841,000	4%	No
1959	79.52%	7,185,555	9,036,083	43.46%	16,532,640	34,443,000		No

IDEA).

Drawing from the above table, it is obvious that many people of voting age have not always been registering to vote and a significant proportion of registered voters do not exercise their franchise on Election Day. This has, no doubt, validated one of the issues raised in this essay. In the 2015 presidential election for instance, out of the 91,669,312 voting age population, only 67,422,005 were registered voters. Yet only 43.65% of the total number of registered voters did vote on March 28. But considering an aggregate population of 181,562,056, how representative are 29,432,083 voters in choosing a President? And this is the conundrum that modern representative democracy throws up such that in a First-Past-The Post electoral arrangement for instance, a candidate with fifty plus one (regardless of the insignificant number of voters) wins an election. As Navrat (2003: 6) points out, “the winning party bases its support on the biggest minority among the voters”

The percent of registered voters that took part in the 2015 presidential poll, according to Downie (2015), compares unfavorably with turnouts of 80 percent in Ghana's 2012 election and 86 percent in Kenya's 2013 election. He opines that the low voter turnout perhaps reflects the lack of serious policy debate during the Nigerian campaign, fears about insecurity, and the complex and lengthy voting process. Onyekachi (2014) observes that even the June 12, 1993 presidential election that was generally believed to be free and fair but was later cancelled by the military, recorded only 35.6 percent of the voter population of 40 million at that time. Analysts have not failed to ask whether candidates elected in election where less than 50 per cent of registered voters took part can claim to be popularly elected.

Conclusion

It has been established that apathy is a symptom as well as a cause of weakness in the system. It signifies a failure to involve all members of the society in their own governance, a failure to inspire interest and loyalty. Such failures may be dangerous to democracy, for whenever a large number of people exist outside the normal channels of politics and are unable to share in the decisions that shape their lives, the political atmosphere becomes potentially explosive (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). By neglecting to avail themselves of the reinforcement's contingent upon participation, the apathetic are further discouraged from bothering to formulate political opinions and demands. Ignorance thus accumulates, and the general level of political vitality and vigilance declines (ibid).

Turnout is, therefore, the most obvious example of political participation and electoral engagement, but it is simply a democratic health-check. Poor turnout is likely to be the consequence of poor electoral engagement rather than the reason behind it. Focusing solely on the issue of turnout runs the danger of attempting to cure the symptom rather than the cause of the democratic malaise (The Electoral Commission, 2002:15). As a panacea, issue-based voter education is seen as an effective way to combat voter apathy by making citizens aware of the issues at stake during an election and how these issues may be relevant to their lives. According to the National Democratic Institute (2006:6), proving to voters that they have a vested interest in the outcome of the election will not only mobilize them for voter registration and on Election Day, but could increase their engagement in the broader political process beyond elections.

Election studies have claimed that certain indicators of economic development, notably: industrially-based urbanization; the spread of private wealth in the hands of capitalists and a high income-earning middle class; high rates of literacy, and increased capacity for organization of campaign and voter mobilization “facilitated political action and increased citizen capacities for sustained political action” (Ginsberg, 1993:262). Generally, for democracy truly to take root, Nigeria must promote more effective systems of checks and balances among its government institutions, safe-guard human rights and liberties at all levels of society, and guarantee public accountability. According to Diamond (2002), Nigeria is much more likely to survive as one nation if it survives as a democracy- and learns to make the institutions of democracy work.

However, as pointed out by Oromareghake (2013 cited in Bolaji, 2015:75), for institutional reform to work well: ‘it must be pursued along with attitudinal and behavioral reform. From historical insight, the institutional foundations of elections in Nigeria fail not because they are inherently corruptible or incapable of doing the right thing, but because the main political actors design them to fail so that they can advance their self-interests.’ Thus, a critical component of democratic institutionalization is voter education. To get the electorates informed about issues around elections and governance so they can make relevant choices and contribute to democratic process meaningfully. Once this is not the case, the electorates are left in limbo and disempowered (Human Development Initiatives, 2014:63). The importance of citizenship education as it relates to credible elections can be seen in the fact that democracies require active, informed and responsible citizens, that is, citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process.

For Adetula (2008), there is rising consciousness about the dangers of political corruption in the country and also the need to control the influence of money in politics as a part of electoral reform process. He however, argues that this consciousness needs to be consolidated into concrete policy frameworks and programs, drawing upon global best practices. As Richards Joseph observed, Nigeria’s present and future depend upon a prior understanding of the nature, extent and persistence of a certain mode of political behavior, and of its social and economic ramifications (cited in IPCR and UNDP, 2003).

Mike Omilusi holds a Ph.D in Political Science and teaches the same at Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. He has wider exposure as a researcher, scholar, essayist, election observer and consultant with government, civil society groups and international organizations on democracy and development-related affairs at local and international levels. He received the

Best Democracy Monitor in Nigeria award from the Justice, Development and Peace Commission, JDPC, in 2001. He was one of the winners of the 2012 International Essay Competition organized by Irmgard Coninx Stiftung, Germany. He has several publications to his credit and has presented academic papers at conferences within and outside Nigeria. He is the author of many books, including: 1. Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Key Issues and Challenges; 2. Nigerian Democracy and Echoes of Civic Consciousness; 3. Internal Insurgency and Terrorism in Nigeria: Perspectives, Phases and Consequences; 4. Politics, Power and Political Parties in Nigeria, among others.

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