

POLITICAL ALIENATION IN NIGERIA: A SURVEY OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Democracy is about popular representation; thus, the attainment of adequate electoral participation in a democratic setting is essential to maintain legitimacy, credibility, and stability. Available data from Nigeria and other parts of the world show that electoral participation is gradually but steadily on the decline. The study thus surveyed the perceptions of Nigerians on the factors influencing declining participation of eligible voters in the Nigerian electoral process. The aim was to find out the reason for declining voters' turnout, the nature of voters' abstention and the implication for Nigeria's democratization process. The research is a qualitative study of primary data. Data were obtained from a sample of 1,200 respondents' in the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted, while the descriptive-analytical technique was used to analyze the qualitative data. The findings show that low voter turnout in Nigeria is the result of alienation factored

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by bad governance, corruption and violence. It is, therefore, advised that good governance based on citizens' needs should be ensured; fraudulent electoral practices should be strictly penalized, while election violence incidences should be mitigated.

Keywords: Alienation; Powerlessness; Voter's behaviour; Low voters' turnout; Elections

INTRODUCTION

The factors that engender democratization and good governance in an enduring democracy are a robust electoral process and credible elections. An Election is a viable instrument for achieving adequate representation in government, as well as the main instrument of political participation in democratic societies. There is however global evidence indicating low voters' participation, signifying an emotional withdrawal, a detachment from public affairs and a reticent approach towards political activity (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1999, 2004). With this scenario, voter behaviour, a subset of political behaviour, has become a foremost challenge in advanced and developing democracies. In the past years, concerns have been raised that the continuous low turnout witnessed globally at all levels of elections is an indication of the disengagement of eligible voters from the political process (IDEA, 1999). This scenario may endanger the legitimacy of the political process; however, the degree, form, and intensity of the citizens' involvement in electoral activities have been subjected to heated academic debates (Raciborski, 2011). Scholars, however, concede to the fact that attainment of a functioning democracy would, at least, require some level of involvement by the citizens to ensure the legitimacy of the political system (Dalton, 2007; Raciborski 2011). The consequently low levels turnout by voters experienced worldwide and its implications for democratic sustenance have stimulated observations, comments, and investigations by com-

mentators, political officials, as well as scholars who try to find out the factors responsible (Franklin, 2004; Ellis, 2004).

It has been stated that the “low rates of voter participation are additional signs of democratic ill-health”. Given the importance of elections to democracy, the issue of voter participation should be taken more seriously by election stakeholders. The fact that this downward trend in voter turnout worldwide is not showing any sign of recovery demands not just an inquiry into the causes of the decline, but also immediate action to improve voter participation” (Diamond, 2015: 152).

Since the Fourth Republic began (1999- 2019), the number of the non-voting public has continued to rise. The Centre for Democracy and Development and Professor Atahiru Jega, former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), corroborated the above assertion. In June 2011, Professor Jega stated that out of the more than seventy (70) million voters who registered for the 2011 general elections, only about 35% of them voted, noting that the low participation of Nigerians in the polls was a clear indication of political apathy, a scenario that has obvious implications for popular participation and governance (Ike, 2011; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2014). Some factors highlighted as responsible for voter electoral behaviour include psychological factors, feelings of efficacy, patterns of trust, political engagement and disengagement at the level of individual, group and regions (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Fawole, 2005). Electoral violence has also become a phenomenal experience in Nigerian elections, posing as a challenge to Nigeria’s democratic development since independence (Okolo, 2002; Ogundiya & Aba, 2005). It is thus essential to comprehend the basis and nature of political abstention by undertaking to study the nature, causes and extent of declining voter participation in the electoral process.

This study focused on voting behaviour, an aspect of political participation in relation to alienation. The central thesis of the study is that political alienation is mainly responsible for abstention and low voter turnout recorded every election year in the electoral process of Nigeria. Although the survey is based on the 2019 general elections, the study made use of data from the Fourth Republic for its analysis. The paper is a contribution

to existing literature on voter abstention and, to the best of our knowledge, a novel contribution to an empirical study of political alienation as it affects voting behaviour. Previous studies had concentrated on apathy and voting behaviour. The study became imperative because of the continuous low voter turnout in Nigerian elections which has adverse implications capable of undermining the development of the political system. This trend can affect the legitimacy of government and prevent a sizeable number of citizens from participating in the decision-making process of their country. Voter behaviour is specifically identified and measured in the context of voter turnout, and voter abstention describes the aspect of voter behaviour captured by non-voting in an election, which may be the effect of alienation.

The study is necessitated by the global recognition as noted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 1999, 2002) that popular participation performs a fundamental function in entrenching democratic development and good governance. It is also essential for effective political socialization and for ensuring enduring democratic stability. Thus, findings from the study would provide the basis for understanding the continuous and declining status of voter turnout in the Nigerian political system.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The Concept of Political Alienation

The term political alienation can be construed as the relative continuing sense of estrangement from or rejection of the prevailing political system by the individual citizen. The politically alienated desire to vote, but their feeling of insignificance to the system restricts them. They feel that their interests are not regarded and represented by political leaders (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010). The alienated are of the view that political leaders who hold offices are incompetent, self-seeking and corrupt; thus, they are suspicious, hostile, distrustful and skeptical of these leaders. They believe

that the political process as a whole is fraudulent, a betrayal of public trust and a charade (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller 1954).

Alienation has been given several connotations, but the overriding notion which best describes the term is that of 'powerlessness,' that is, the erosion of the individual's freedom and limitation of the sphere of control (Seeman 1959; Roberts 1987). Thus, "alienation can be conceived as the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks" (Seeman 1959: 784). Roberts (1987) described 'powerlessness' as a result of a sense of the loss of self-worth. Powerlessness and self-estrangement have been identified as the fundamental features of alienation (Seeman 1959; Korzeniowski, 1994; Dalton, 2007). Further discourse by scholars described political alienation as a blend of a feeling of inefficacy and a lack of confidence in political institutions (Bowler & Donovan 2002; Kim 2005; Catterberg & Moreno 2006).

Political alienation has been categorized into two broad groups by Olsen (1968): political incapability (powerlessness) and political discontentment (disapproval or disappointment). He posits that the first case is compelled by the environment upon the individual, while, in the second, it is a voluntary choice by them. Finifter (1970) outlines five variants of political alienation. These are:

1. **Political powerlessness:** A feeling of incapability to affect political/electoral outcomes and governmental actions by the alienated.
2. **Political meaninglessness:** The perception by the individual that political/governmental outcomes/decisions are unpredictably unclear.
3. **Political normlessness:** The perception that there is a clear and rampant deviation from norms and regulations intended to govern political and governmental outcomes.
4. **Political isolation:** A rejection of widely held/shared societal norms and rules of behaviour by the individual.
5. **Political disappointment:** A person's displayed lack of interest in political/electoral decision and activity because of the misdemeanour by the ruling political elites

An Analysis of Voter Turnout and Voting in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019

The statistics of voter turnout in the 1999 general elections in Nigeria were not quite impressive; a total of 57,938,945 eligible voters were registered, but only 30,280,052 of these figures cast their votes, which represent 52.26% of voters registered by the INEC. In 2003, a total number of 60,823,033 voters were registered, while 42,018,735 voted to represent 69.08%. These figures show a slight increase in the number that registered as well as those who voted as compared to the 1999 election figures. Thus, the voter turnout of 2003 increased by 16.8% compared to that of 1999.

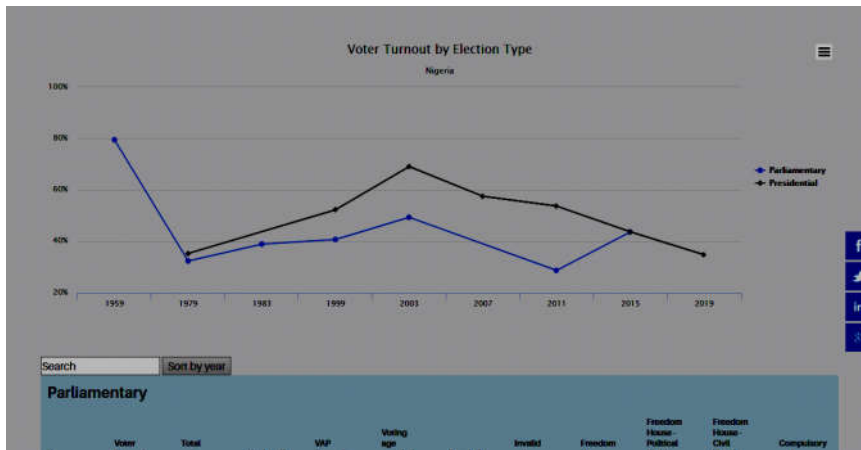
The general elections of 2007 recorded an increase in the number of registered voters which was 61,567,036; disappointingly, the total vote cast was 35,397,517, which represents 57.49%, about half the number of registered voters. The voter turnout of 2007, however, reduced by 11.6% compared to that of 2003 (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019).

In 2011, the number of registered voters increased to 73,528,040, but only a slightly significant 39,469,484 eligible voters exercised their franchise, representing 53.68%. The voter turnout of 2011 witnessed a further drop of 3.81% in the number of voter turnout as compared to the 2007 elections. The 2015 general election was not different from that of 2011; the number of registered voters was 67,422,005; the total votes cast dropped significantly to 29,432,083 representing 43.65%; that is less than half of the number of voters that registered. This figure represents a further decrease of 10.3% as compared to the 2011 elections. The 2019 general elections recorded a total of 82,344,107 registered voters, with a voter turnout of 28,614,190 representing 34.75%. This figure represents a further decrease of 8.90% as compared to the 2015 elections (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019; Pulse.ng, 2019).

The voter turnout analyses above show a significant reduction in the rate of voter turnout since 1999. The overall voter turnout figures were in the 50 and 60 percentiles between 1999 and 2011 but reduced to 43.65% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019. Given that the credibility of these elections

and the authenticity of the figures may be contestable, nonetheless, these figures are far from being impressive. Even though the voting-age population has been rising since 1999 (from 52.7 million in 1999 to 106 million in 2019), the voting age turnout has been on the decline (International IDEA Data Base, 2015, 2019; Ojetunde, 2019; Pulse.ng, 2019). These scenarios are depicted in figure 1 and table 1 below.

Figure 1 Voter Turnout in Nigeria’s Presidential and Parliamentary Elections From 1959- 2019



Source: International IDEA Data Base, 2019

The figure above shows the voting turnout trend for both presidential and parliamentary elections from 1959 to 2019 in Nigeria. The figure shows a disappointing less than 40% voter turnout in 2019 from an appreciable 79% in 1959.

“Table 1 Voter Data Turnout for Nigerian Elections (Presidential- 1999 to 2019)”

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	Voting Age Population Turnout	Voting age Population	Total Population
2019	34.75%	28,614,190	82,344,107	26.87%	106,490,312	208,679,144
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,033	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359

Source: International IDEA Data Base, 2015; 2019"

Theoretical Analysis

Explanation of Alienation as the Cause of Voter Abstention

The notion of alienation as popularized by Seeman (1959), Roberts (1987), and *Finifter (1970)* is fundamentally based on the erosion of the individual's liberty and power to make decisions. From this perspective, "alienation can be conceived as the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks" (Seeman 1959: 784). Seeman (1959) and *Finifter (1970)* identified five alternative meanings of political alienation which include the following: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Other literature refers to political alienation as a combination of the erosion of confidence in political institutions and a feeling of political inefficacy (Bowler & Donovan 2002; Kim 2005; Catterberg & Moreno 2006).

Political powerlessness, normlessness, and self-estrangement are critical factors that may impact negatively on the participation of eligible voters in the electoral process. Closely linked to these variables is political disappointment indicated by *Finifter (1970)* (an individual's disinterest in a political decision or participation because of bad governance and corruption by political leaders). These variables speak of the individual's perceived incapacity to affect electoral and political outcomes that may result in helplessness, discontentment and discouragement of the electorates.

Stating the Problematic of Voter Abstention

The issue of voter abstention is already a global phenomenon. It has become a major problem both in the developed and developing democracies; it is common among youths, women, and the marginalized groups and even among mainstream dominant interests. The abstention or low turnout of eligible voters' in Nigeria has been a recurring phenomenon. The various elections in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic, have witnessed a gradual but steady decline in turnout that has negatively impacted on the development of the democratization process. For example, the 1999 general elections had only 52.3 per cent of registered voters casting their votes; 69.08 in 2003; 58 per cent in 2007; 53.7 per cent in 2011; 43.65 per cent in 2015, and 34.75 per cent in the 2019 general elections.

The above figures show a gradual declining level of voter turnout between 1999 and 2019. Low voter turnout trends in Nigeria calls for concern because it indicates a country's levels of democratization. Low turnout can be associated with several factors closely linked to the socio-economic and political development of a country. These factors may include the peoples' perceived incapability to influence the electoral and political agenda of the ruling elites; loss of confidence in the candidates and parties as a result of failure to keep electoral promises; lack of accountability of elected political officials to their constituencies; bad governance; electoral violence; poor management of election by the INEC; electoral fraud and poor electoral procedures.

Any of the above mentioned factors or their combination could affect voter participation significantly, resulting in alienation, that is, withdrawal of support by the electorates for the political process. The problems already analyzed can reduce voters' confidence and trust in the electoral process/electoral administrative agency leading to alienation and possibly apathy of voters in the electoral process.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. Why is voter turnout declining during elections in Nigeria?
2. What is the nature of voter abstention in Nigerian elections?
3. What is the implication of low voter turnout for Nigeria's democratization process?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To find out the reason(s) for the low turnout of voters in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria;
- 2) To ascertain the nature of abstention concerning voting activities;
- 3) To examine the implication of low voter turnout for Nigeria's democratization process.

Research Propositions/Hypotheses

From the above information, the following propositions are put forward.

1. Political alienation is a function of unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance in Nigeria.

2. Political alienation is a function of electoral corruption/fraud during elections in Nigeria.
3. Political alienation is a function of electoral violence in Nigerian elections.

Methods and Materials

Demographics of the Study

The study adopted the *ex-post facto* and the descriptive analytical approach in the presentation and analysis of data. The population of the study is the Nigerian State covering the six Geopolitical Zones. The National Population Census of Nigeria in 2006 puts the figures of the Nigerian population at one hundred and forty million, four hundred and thirty-one thousand, seven hundred and ninety (140,431,790) (Nigerian Data Portal, 2006). A sample size of 1,200 respondents was taken from the selected Six (6) Local Government Areas of the respective zones in Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select three zones from the six geopolitical zones; two states each from the three selected zones, and one local government each from the selected states, making a total of six Local Government Areas. The systematic sampling technique was then adopted to select households from the selected Local Government Areas. Consequently, the questionnaire was administered to the voting age population in each of the selected households.

The sample size of 1,200 respondents was arrived at by adopting the formula of Taro Yamane, the statistician, which he developed in 1967 to calculate sample sizes from a given population (Yamane, 1967). The adoption of a **5 per cent** error margin and a **95 per cent** level of confidence in calculating the population of one million, four hundred and ninety-seven thousand, one hundred and fifty-seven (1,497,157) yielded a sample size of 400. To account for possible attrition, reduce the level of error, increase sample representativeness, and the confidence level, the number of subjects was increased to 1,200 (that is 400×3). This action became imperative since the sample of 400 represents the minimum standard

sample required for the study to produce a 95 per cent confidence level in line with Yamane's formula. The questionnaire comprising open-ended question sets was utilized for the study. Primary data formed the nuclei of data collection for analysis, and contingency tables were the mode of data presentation. The data were analyzed using the descriptive-analytical technique.

Table 1 “Tabulation of the selection process- 1

GEOPOLITICAL ZONES	SELECTED ZONES	SELECTED STATES	SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS
NORTH- EAST			
NORTH- WEST			
NORTH- CENTRAL	NORTH- CENTRAL	PLATEAU KOGI	JOS SOUTH DEKINA
SOUTH- EAST			
SOUTH- WEST	SOUTH- WEST	OYO EKITI	IBADAN SOUTH WEST EKITI WEST
SOUTH- SOUTH	SOUTH- SOUTH	RIVERS DELTA	DEGEMA UGHELLI SOUTH

Source: Compiled by the Researcher”

“Table 2 Tabulation of the selection process

SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	PERCENTAGE (Per cent)
JOS SOUTH	311, 392	250	21
DEKINA	260, 968	209	17
IBADAN SOUTH WEST	283, 098	227	19
EKITI WEST	179, 600	144	12
DEGEMA	249, 461	200	17
UGHELLI SOUTH	212, 638	170	14
TOTAL	1, 497, 157	1, 200	100

Source: Nigeria Data Portal, (2006)/Researcher”

In Table 2 above, the sample size was arrived at by multiplying the population figure of each local government area by the total sample figure. The answer was further divided by the total population of the six selected local government areas. The percentage of the sample size was derived by multiplying each sample size by 100, divided by the sample size figure.

Data collection and analysis

For this study, a total of one thousand two hundred (1,200) copies of the questionnaire were administered, out of which one thousand and sixty (1,060) were completed and returned by the respondents. Out of the 1060 respondents, majority of them were males, representing **57.1 per cent (605)**, while the females represented **42.9 per cent (455)** of the sample. The age distribution shows that **50 per cent (514)** of the respondents were between 18 and 25 years; **38.2 per cent (405)** were 26- 40 years old, while **11.8 per cent (141)** were 41 years and above. This analysis shows that majority of the respondents who took part in the study constituted the youthful and virile age necessary for political participation. Also, **26 per cent (275)** of the sampled respondents were married; **69.3 per cent (735)** were unmarried, and **3.3 per cent (35)** of the respondents were divorced, while **1.41 per cent (15)** belonged to the “others” category. Moreover, **0.94 per cent (10)** of the respondents were primary school certificate holders; **21.7 per cent (230)** were post-primary certificate holders; **34.4 per cent (365)** were OND/NCE certificate holders, while **43.0 per cent (455)** were postgraduate certificate holders. This distribution shows that majority of the respondents had sufficient education and, thus, were equipped to make informed responses useful to the study. Furthermore, **22.2 per cent (235)** of the respondents belonged to the paid employment cadre; **32.5 per cent (345)** were self- employed, while **45.3 per cent (480)** were unemployed. Finally, **60.4 per cent (640)** of the respondents were Christians; **31.6 per cent (335)** were Muslims; **7.07 per cent (75)** belonged to African Traditional Religion (ATR), while **0.94 per cent (10)** belonged to “other” religions. Thus, the distribution indicates that the respondents cut across the religious divide.

Results and discussion

Results

Tabulation of Qualitative data Showing Respondents' Responses

Question One

Are you of the opinion that elections are important in Nigeria?	
Majority (Yes)	*Elections guarantee the democratic arrangement and ensure change and continuity in governance. *Elections are important in Nigeria only when they are properly conducted.
Minority (No)	*Votes do not count. *Leaders are picked at the interest of the godfathers.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Two

Can voting help to pick the right leaders in Nigeria? If yes, why and if no, why do you think so?	
Majority (Yes)	*If due process is followed. *If the political officials would stop hijacking the electoral process to ensure free and fair elections.
Minority (No)	*The people's votes do not count because of manipulation of the electoral process. *The political process is very porous; godfathers pick their loyal subjects, and elections are not free and fair. *The process is full of bribery and corruption.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Three

Did you register as a voter in the 2019 general elections? If yes, state why and if no, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *To vote out non-performing government *To select desired candidates *In the interest of patriotism
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Insecurity *manipulation of elections *Leaders are not chosen by vote cast. *Stressful registration process

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Four

Are you eager to vote during elections? If yes, why and if no, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *It is an opportunity to vote out bad leaders, but such opportunity is not available because the electorates votes do not count in the Nigerian situation. *If it is free and fair
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *It is a necessity. *Previous votes cast amounted to nothing; votes did not count in Nigeria, and there is no good governance. *It amounts to time wasting to vote for nothing. *Elections are not free and fair. *Because of electoral violence.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Five

Do you know of any person who registered but did not vote in the 2019 election? If yes, do you know why?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Inability to access voter's card. *The people's votes will not count. *It is useless to stand under the sun to vote and at the end the votes would be manipulated. *Cumbersome voting procedures *Insecurity and violence *To use voter's card for other purposes- such as opening of bank account.
Minority (No)	*Respondents had no such experience.

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Six

Are you of the opinion that the electoral process in Nigeria (registration and voting) is violence-prone and marked by insecurity?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Violence and insecurity have become norms in Nigeria's elections for many years now. *Violence and insecurity obstruct free and fair election and scare people away from casting their votes. *Insecurity and violence are among Nigeria's major electoral problems. *people always lose their lives during elections in Nigeria.
Minority (No)	*Respondents had no such experience.

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Seven

Are you of the opinion that many Nigerians of voting age are eager to cast their votes during elections but do not because of fear of violence on Election Day?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *No one wants to become a victim of electoral violence no matter how patriotic. *People had gone out to vote in series of elections only to end up being shot or killed.
Minority (No)	*Respondents had no such experience.

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Eight

Do you have implicit confidence in the INEC capability to deliver a free and fair election? Give your reasons.	
Minority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The INEC is overcoming several limitations to conduct credible elections in Nigeria. *If INEC is autonomous. *If INEC is allowed a free hand to operate by the government and political officials.
Majority No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *INEC tends to favour the political party in power. *INEC officials are induced with money most of the time. *INEC officials are corrupt. *INEC does not have the capacity to deliver free and fair elections. *INEC is not independent; so, they cannot conduct credible elections.

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Nine

Are you of the opinion that many people of voting age want to participate in voting but do not? Give your reasons.	
Majority (Yes)	*The votes would definitely not count. *Godfathers secure elective positions unduly for their desired candidates so that the people's votes do not count.
Minority (No)	*No sufficient evidence to believe so

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Ten

Are you of the opinion that the registration and voting process in Nigeria is very cumbersome, and, therefore, can discourage many Nigerians from voting?	
Majority (Yes)	*People line out under the sun and at the end they do not get registered. *Very cumbersome process.
Minority (No)	*Not cumbersome if it will reflect the people's votes. *Wrong assumption and belief by some people.

Source: Field Survey: 2019".

Question Eleven

How would you rate Nigerian political officials' fulfilment of electoral promises? Satisfactory or unsatisfactory? Please comment.	
Majority (Unsatisfactory)	*The political officials believe that with their money they can manipulate elections and neglect the electorates to serve themselves. *Electoral promises are just propaganda meant to induce eligible voters to vote for the political officials in their bid to capture power. *Political officials have failed to fulfil electoral promises.
Minority (Satisfactory)	*Very few of the politicians are fulfilling their promises to their constituencies.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Twelve

Are you of the opinion that majority of Nigerians want to participate in the electoral process, but do not because they believe that political office has been hijacked by political elites/godfathers and, therefore, electoral promises would not be fulfilled?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Electoral manipulation takes place at every level of the Nigerian state. *Electoral manipulation is very visible in the Nigerian political process. *It is the godfathers' game.
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *It is the corrupt politicians that hijack political offices and not the elites.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Thirteen

What do you think is/are the reason(s) why registered voters do not vote on Election Day?	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Violence and insecurity *Thugs' activities and killings *Ballot box snatching *Hijacking of electoral materials *Tedious registration and voting processes *Stress in waiting endlessly for electoral materials *Corruption and godfathers' undue influence on the electoral process *The feeling or belief that votes will not count
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *It is not everybody that votes during elections; some of the people are just lazy, while others are unpatriotic and self-serving.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Fourteen

What should be done to encourage people to vote?	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Use of electronic transmission to reduce fraud, manipulation and stressful voting procedures *Provision of adequate security *Ensure free and fair elections *Ensure that the electorates' votes counts *Eliminate corruption *Discourage godfathers' undue influence
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *People should be patriotic no matter the situation and go out and vote; there is no perfect system. *To educate the electorates on the need to exercise their franchise

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Question Fifteen

If you will not vote during an election, please list three factors that would make you decide not to vote.	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Violence or fear of violence *Insecurity *Irregularities in the voting process *Corruption, rigging, godfathers' influence *Manipulation of votes *Vote buying *Cumbersome voting process *Delay of electoral materials *Failure of political officials to keep to electoral promises *Dictatorship of godfathers
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *I will vote no matter what *It is my right to vote *I am a patriotic Nigerian; after all, Rome was not built in a day; Nigeria is still developing.

Source: Field Survey: 2019

Discussion

The respondents' responses are categorized and analyzed in line with the research proposition.

What is the impact of unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance on voter abstention?

Respondents' responses to questions eleven and twelve clearly show the impact of unfulfilled campaign promises on voter abstention. In question eleven, majority of the respondents' rated the fulfillment of electoral promises by political officials as unsatisfactory. They stated that political officials had failed to keep to electoral promises, and that electoral promises were just propaganda meant to induce voters' to vote for them during elections. Responses to question twelve indicated that a majority of the respondents opined that many Nigerians decided not to participate in the electoral process because they believed that political office had been hijacked by political elites and godfathers; therefore, electoral promises

would not be fulfilled. Thus, in response to question sixteen, majority of the respondents listed the failure of political officials to keep to electoral promises as one of the reasons why they would not vote on Election Day. The respondent responses are corroborated by Campbell et al (1954) and Glasberg & Shannon (2010) that the alienated hold the view that political officials are incompetent, self-seeking and corrupt; therefore, the citizens' are suspicious and distrustful of them. Moreover, the citizens felt that their interests were not well represented by those leaders. Therefore, the outcome of research Question One shows that unfulfilled campaign promises by political officials had a negative effect on voter participation in the electoral process of Nigeria.

What is the impact of electoral corruption/fraud on voter abstention?

The impact of electoral corruption/fraud on voter abstention can be understood from respondents' responses to questions nine and eight. Responses to question nine showed that majority of the respondents were of the view that many Nigerians did not vote during elections because they felt that their votes would not count due to manipulation by electoral and political officials. Respondents' responses to question eight indicated that majority of the respondents opined that they did not have confidence in the INEC to conduct credible elections in Nigeria; that was because the body was not independent in its activities and tended to favour the political party in power. Thus, in response to question four, majority of the respondents were eager to vote during elections only if the process was free and fair. They opined that votes cast in previous elections amounted to nothing; it is, thus, a waste of time to go out and vote and then the election will not be free and fair. Also, in response to questions five and thirteen, one of the reasons given why registered voters' did not vote on Election Day was that their votes would not count due to manipulation or electoral fraud. The opinion of the respondents was supported by Glasberg & Shannon (2010) who posited that although the politically alienated citizens desired to vote, their feeling of insignificance to the system restricted them. Further submissions by scholars, such as Bowler & Donovan (2002); Kim 2005; Catterberg & Moreno (2006), described political alienation

as a blend of a feeling of inefficacy and a lack of confidence in political institutions. Hence, the citizens believed, according to Campbell, et al (1954), that the political process as a whole was fraudulent, a betrayal of public trust and a charade. Thus, the outcome of research Question Two shows that electoral corruption/fraud had a negative effect on voter participation in the electoral process of Nigeria.

What is the impact of electoral violence on voter abstention?

Respondents' responses to Questions Six and Seven clearly show the impact of electoral violence on voter abstention. In Question Six, majority of the respondents opined that the electoral process in Nigeria was enmeshed in violence and insecurity, and obstructed free and fair electoral process and scared people away from casting their votes since people always lost their lives during elections. Respondents' responses to Question Seven indicated that majority of the respondents were of the view that many Nigerians who wanted to vote during elections decided not to for fear of violence. Also, responses to Question Three show that some of the respondents did not register or vote in the 2019 elections because of fear of insecurity and violence. Similarly, one of the reasons given by respondents on why they were not eager to vote during elections in response to Question Four and why registered voters decided not to vote on election day listed in Questions Five, Thirteen and Fifteen was the fear of violence and insecurity. They opined that people had gone out to vote in a series of elections only to end up being shot or killed. The opinions of the respondents were reinforced by Seeman (1959), Roberts (1987), and Finifter (1970) who averred that the notion of alienation was fundamentally based on the erosion of the individual's liberty and power to make political decisions. From this submission, it can be deduced that when citizens perceived any form of danger in participating in the electoral process, their freedom and desire to vote is short-circuited. From this perspective, according to Seeman (1959: 784), "alienation can be conceived as the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks." The implication of the above submission is that even though the citizens wanted to participate in the electoral process, they

were constrained to stay away because of the perceived danger of electoral violence. Thus, the results of the research Question Three show that electoral violence has a negative effect on voter participation in the Nigerian electoral process.

The above analysis of the research results shows congruence with the statistics on voter turnout in the review of literature. The statistics revealed a declining voter participation in the Fourth Republic with the lowest being 34.75 per cent turnout in 2019. The low turnout figures represented declining voter participation; however, this study revealed that the declining participation is due to alienation of voters' from the electoral process. Bad governance, electoral fraud and violence during elections have mainly been identified as the causes of voter abstention. From the findings, it is evident that the citizens wanted to vote but were constrained by the environmental factors, such as those enumerated above. Thus, the research objectives have been achieved as the results of the study clearly revealed the causes, nature and impact of voter abstention in the Nigerian electoral process

Research findings

From the results and discussion, the following are the findings of the study.

1. Voter abstention in the Nigerian electoral system is a factor of alienation.
2. Voters' perception of feeling of alienation in the Nigerian electoral process is a factor of bad governance.
3. The failure of elected political officers to fulfil electoral promises and work for the interest of the citizenry concerning policy formulation and implementation is responsible for voter abstention in Nigeria.

4. Voter alienation is a factor of electoral fraud perpetrated by the political officials, parties and the INEC officials, which undermines the votes cast by the Nigerian electorates during elections.
5. Electoral violence as perpetrated by political opponents and parties during elections affects electoral participation and, therefore, responsible for voter alienation in the Nigerian political system.
6. The electoral process (registration and voting) in the Nigerian political system is cumbersome, and, thus, discourages many citizens from registering for elections, as well as voting.

Supporting Findings

1. Cumbersome electoral process (registration and voting) is responsible for the alienation of voters and low turnout during elections in Nigeria.

The results show that majority of the respondents stated that the very stressful and rigorous registration and voting processes in Nigeria discouraged eligible voters' from voting during elections. They opined that the unusually long hours spent in the queue, either during voter registration or voting, was very stressful and discouraging.

The results thus revealed that majority of the respondents interviewed showed interest in the political system, political process and political participation. They are therefore willing to cast their votes during elections but are inhibited by some environmental factors in the political system which caused them to become alienated from the political and electoral process. These factors represent the major and supporting findings of the study already highlighted above. To buttress the above point, majority of the respondents opined that elections were important in Nigeria; that an election could help to pick the right leaders in Nigeria, and that they registered for the 2019 general elections. A majority of the respondents said they were eager and willing to vote during elections only if the election was free and fair, while majority were not mobilized to register for the 2019 general elections, but did so willingly and of their own accord. It can thus be argued that the low turnout of eligible voters' in the Nigerian elec-

toral process was the result of political alienation of voters' by inhibitive factors in the Nigerian political process.

Conclusion

Credible elections are relevant in achieving an enduring democracy and democratization process, and, in essence, good governance. Electoral participation serves as the instrument for the attainment of a viable and representative government in democratic societies. Voting then becomes the contact linkage between the representatives and the citizenry, and provides the foundation for discussions, deliberations and citizens' engagement in the operation of the political system. Consequently, if turnout declines, the primary linkage between the citizen and the political system may become weakened; this may threaten the legitimacy of the democratic system.

Citizens' participation in the process of governance is necessary to accomplish an equitable and civilized society. These tenets will not be achieved if a majority of eligible voters continue to stay away from voting during elections. It is on record that more than half of the population of eligible voters have not voted since the Fourth Republic, and also that about half of registered voters or less have not voted during elections. This situation calls for concern, especially as it is worsening. If the trend of voter alienation is allowed to continue, it will pose a threat to the credibility of elections and the electoral system, the legitimacy of elections and the overall stability of the political system. This scenario would impede the endurance, sustenance and consolidation of the democratic arrangement. The need to address this phenomenon becomes imperative since the level or degree of voter turnout serves as a parameter for measuring popular will, credibility and legitimacy of elected officials. Besides, they are vital to political socialization and serve as the bedrock for democratic stability.

The findings of this study have been exhaustively discussed in the relevant section above. It is hoped that the relevant institutions and stakeholders would take cognizance of these findings and the recommendations here-

after, and address the voter alienation challenge. It is also expected that the study would engender more scholarly investigations and interest in the electoral system and voting process in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the research findings, the following suggestions, as solutions to voter alienation in Nigeria, are made.

1. The elected political officials should ensure good governance based on meeting the yearning, expectations, needs and demands of the citizenry. The qualities of good governance like transparency, accountability, rule of law, fairness and equity in resource distribution should be ensured. The citizens' basic needs, such as food, shelter, water, adequate power supply, access roads, as well as sustaining an enduring market should be provided and maintained.
2. The electoral system of Nigeria as it is presently cannot engender confidence in the electorates. Thus, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be strengthened to institute credibility in the electoral process. The INEC should be more independent to effectively manage the electoral process. Political interferences from the political leaders and rulers should be discouraged. Also, the political parties and electoral candidates should be sensitized to ensure fair play and a level playing field in party primaries and other elections. The use of electronic transmission should be encouraged and mandatory to reduce electoral fraud and manipulation. Fraudulent practices during elections should be strictly penalized with appropriate sanctions to serve as deterrents to others.
3. The federal and state governments should put on modalities to mitigate the incidences of violence during elections. This could be ensured by designating adequate security personnel to man elections in Nigeria. The security personnel should be made to take seriously the responsibility of forestalling violence and preventing any act that negates the electoral regulations and consequently often lead to violent outbreaks during elections. Also, adequate and effective intelligence and monitoring team should be

assigned to cover all election centres during elections in Nigeria. Also, the activities of the security personnel should be monitored.

4. The federal and state governments should put up modalities to free up the often stressful registration and voting processes to encourage more people to participate in the electoral process. This can be done by ensuring that the various electronic gadgets for registration and voting are in good working condition, using well-trained and experienced staff, re-delimitation of registration and polling units to reduce the population to a manageable level and to ensure that the registration and voting centres are opened on time and that electoral materials and officials arrive at the designated venues at the stipulated time.

Recommendations for further research

The author suggests that survey research should be conducted to determine the degree of political alienation and political apathy concurrently in the Nigerian political process. The study is required so that the challenges posed by both phenomena can be ascertained and addressed since the result of one leads to the other - alienation resulting in apathy.

Ethical Consideration

I hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to the study.

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