

Governance, Political Participation And Voter Turnout In General Elections: Nigeria's Fourth Republic In Perspective

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Abstract

As a vital ingredient of democracy, political participation is utilised to authenticate and legitimise a government for general acceptance. Voter apathy is a potent protest against outrageous irregularities in electoral process and bad governance in Nigeria. In the last two decades, non-political participation of voters in Nigeria's electoral processes has become the country's major perennial challenge in election administration. The study interrogated governance, political participation and voter turnout in general elections in the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Reciprocal determinism theory was used to explain how the political environment serves as stimulus to voter apathy in the electoral processes. The study used descriptive qualitative method supplemented by descriptive

statistics to analyse the data garnered. The findings revealed weak institutional framework, incompetence, bad governance and corruption as voter apathy determinants. The study, therefore, recommends inclusive democracy, strong and autonomous institutional frameworks; and liberty of the people to foster sustainable democratic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Voter apathy, political malfeasance, governance, political participation, inclusive democracy, corruption*

Introduction

In a democratic setting, elections play a vital role in fostering political participation, as well as institutionalization of other foundations of democracy-mutual competition among power contenders and legitimacy (Lindberg, 2004, Omotola, 2010). Participatory election is one of the vital ingredients of ensuring true representation of popular will in democracies. Without sufficient and massive voter turnout, there can be no true elections that would reflect accurately the people's choice. It is absurd for a minority to give credence to an election, while majority of the voters withdraw from participation as an overt expression of distrust, lack of interest, and eloquent vote of no confidence on the political system (Ellis, 2004; Forler, 2013; Nwagwu, 2016; Dahl et al., 2018). The rate of political participation and voter turnout in elections in any clime is a function of governance. Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority is exercised. It is the capacity of the government to formulate and implement sound policies, manage scarce resources, and deliver, or ensure the delivery of services to the citizenry (World Bank, 2010).

Owing to governance challenges, Nigeria has in the last two decades witnessed increasing trend of political apathy characterised by overwhelming voter abstention, emotional detachment of electorates from fundamental civic obligations, lack of interest in political activities like voters' registration, voter education, and indifference in collection of permanent voters' cards. Voter turnout is determined by the percentage of exact figure of registered voters using integer of votes cast (valid and invalid) at the end of vote counting (Ojetunde, 2019). The manifestation of dwindling trend of voter turnout in the six general elections (1999-2019) held within the Fourth Republic shows the adverse effect of voter apathy. Voters are seemingly scared to come out and participate in voting during elections due to insecurity scenarios surrounding the entire electoral processes, coupled with uncertainties and unpredictability of politicians and electoral results. Low voter turnout remains a critical factor adversely affecting consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and some other African countries. In this regard, Zhelnina (2019) notes that evidence of decline in civic participation, especially in contemporary traditional forms of politics, such as in voting and party membership, have been a common scene in the advanced democracies.

According to Ojetunde (2019), the 2019 presidential election recorded the lowest rate of voter turnout with 34.8% since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. This poorest number of voter turnout ironically reflects also as second to the lowest percentage in the history of election in Africa. For example, in 1999, Zimbabwean presidential election recorded 32.2% voter turnout as the lowest rate. Rwanda's presidential election in 2017 recorded 98.2% of voter turnout. Other African countries with higher voter turnout rates in their last elections include Equatorial Guinea (2016) – 92.7%; Angola (2017) – 90.4%; Seychelles (2015) – 90.1%; Zimbabwe's voter turnout in 2018 improved to 86.8%. Also, in 2018, Sierra Leone recorded 84.2%; Kenya (2017) – 79.5%; Liberia (2017) – 75.2%; and Burundi (2015) – 73.4% respectively. In all, Nigeria, the largest economy in Africa, and the ECOWAS sub-regional power, is ironically the least to foster participatory democracy.

The poor turnout of voters is generally attributed to inability of government to keep to terms with its social contract with the people; loss of faith in the electioneering process; election related violence; voters' inability to exercise their franchise in tensed environment where their votes would not count; and absolute lack of interest of voters in political activities (Ojetunde, 2019). Furthermore, the organisational methods for vote counting and collation of results have been so cloudy and suspicious in Nigeria. This has created apathetic response amongst eligible voters not that they are not willing to vote; they generally share the belief their votes would not count. In addition, the perception of politics as a medium through which sectional interest is aggregated and fierce struggle for acquisition of political power and economic benefits to serve personal and sectional interests rather than protection of the interest for the common goods of the electorates make election warfare. Against this background, the study interrogated governance, political participation and voter turnout in general elections in the light of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Methodology

Due to its qualitative nature, documentary method of data collection was adopted. Documentary method centers on descriptive analysis of all documents with relevant information pertaining to phenomenon under investigation. According to Mogalakwe (2006, p. 221), "the use of documentary methods refers to analysis of documents that contain information about phenomenon under study". Documentary method of data collection has an inherent flexibility in information generation through use of public or school libraries, government records or reports on events or personal accounts on experiential incidents, retrieval of facts and figures from statistical records on social issues or from the archival sources, books, journals, the media, and internet sources. Therefore, documentary technique was utilised to establish information gaps in literature that required to be filled through review of plethora of existing knowledge. The study exposed the researchers to a wide stream of literature on voters' apathy. Thus, it adopted qualitative descriptive method of data analysis to analyse data garnered. In analysing data generated, the researchers used descriptive statistics. According to Burnham, et al., (2004, p.114):

Descriptive statistics is a range of basic statistical tools for describing data. The main appeal of descriptive statistics is that it is a powerful and economical way of measuring, analysing and presenting political phenomena such as voting behavior, political participation, and social and political attitudes generally.

Governance, voter apathy and political participation in Nigeria: A theoretical analysis

Reciprocal determinism theory was adopted in the study. It holds that a person's behavior influences and is being influenced by social world and personal traits. It is a model made up of three outstanding elements that influence behavior, namely the environment, the individual, and the behavior. The theoretical model explains that the three factors are interdependently interacting with one another to produce reflective responses.

As the environment exerts influence on individual behavior, the individual's responses play vital role in influencing the environment.

Therefore, the theory explores the role people's behavior plays in the environment. It was first propounded by a psychologist, Albert Bandura. Bandura's theory has demonstrated a vital paradigm modification from behavioral perspective to a social-cognitive approach to understanding behavior. It was the belief of behaviorists that the environment wholly influences individual behavior, but Bandura appreciated the relevance of the bidirectional relationship between individuals, their behaviors and the environment. To a reasonable extent, it reveals that while individuals are really affected by their personal experiences in the environment, they as well possess ability to exert modifications on their situations and circumstances through self-determinations and behaviors (Singh, 2018). Other proponents that expounded on the theory were Judith Rich Harris (1998), Akoul Gregory M. (1998) and Larry J. Siegal (n.d.). Akoul elaborated on the earlier assumption as they relate to a child who suggests that infants were uninvolved recipients of environmental influences, which portrayed them as being easily shaped or molded in whatever manner the parents or school teachers or other caregivers design to operate. The theory of reciprocal determinism argues that children exhibit more active and interactive role in the environment as the environment influences them. Hardly do they react as the effects of learned associations or reinforcements; considering that their individual traits, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors impact on how they interact with and respond to environment (Cherry, 2018; Singh, 2018).

The central theme of the theory, according to Harris (1998), is the nexus between environment and behavior, whereby the environment influences the human behavior. In other words, the environmental factors which translate to bad conducts of public office holders, activities of government in power to provide good governance, public service delivery capacity, provision of infrastructural facilities and welfare of the public, poor representations of the parliamentarians, ineptitude of government functionaries and individual experiences of eligible voters informed the basis of their respective dispositions on the political environment. For example, the fairness, trueness, credibility, transparency and accountability in governance and on the electoral processes informed the mindset of electorates on how to respond to the environment. Cherry (2018, p.2) stresses that:

The environment component is made up of the physical surroundings around the individual that contain potentially reinforcing stimuli, including people who are present (or absent). The environment influences the intensity and frequency of the behavior, just as the behavior itself can have an impact on the environment. On the other hand, the individual component includes all the characteristics that have been rewarded in the past. Personality and cognitive factors play an important part in how a person behaves, including all of the individual's expectations, beliefs and unique personality characteristics.

The cause and effect of fraudulent activities of politicians in Nigeria's election periods such as rigging, under-age voting, ballot box snatching and stuffing, mutilation of elections results, sustainability and flourishing of army of political thugs, purchase of permanent voters' cards from gullible voters, manipulation of biometric voters' accreditation devices, involvement of the military in election matters, etc as stimuli/environmental influences on the electorates; and abstention from political activities.

Eligible voters unwillingness to vote, refusal to register, to collect permanent voters card, to attend political rallies, refusal to participate in electoral education awareness programme to sensitise voters, refusal to take part in any political activity are responses to the stimuli.

Nigeria political environment from 1999 to 2015 general elections

The 1999 elections were generally relatively peaceful because the military organised and superintended over the entire exercise; and the electorates were enthusiastically willing to participate in voting to ensure a successful military handover of political power to a democratically elected civilian government. Due to predominant presence of stern-looking combat-ready soldiers, stationary armored-combat vehicles, heavy machine-guns and armored personnel carriers in all strategic locations of the country, voter turnout was not impressive as it failed to correspond with the high level of enthusiasms exhibited by the populace having recorded 52.3%. Subsequent, general-election in 2003 registered a higher turnout of voters with an increase of 16.8% as the military was back to barracks; but the exercise was marred by reemergence of electoral malfeasance. There were cases of political intrigues to outwit one another, brazen rigging, ballot-box snatching and stuffing, multiple voting, overt manipulation and mutilation of election results, violent conflicts, non-issue based campaigns, interparty bloody clashes, loss of lives, litigations against elections outcomes and political parties' forceful imposition of unpopular candidates on the electorates (Bekoe, 2011; Yoroms, 2017). This kind of crude scenario discourages voters not to exercise their civic rights to vote not because they are not keen; they have lost confidence in the system. Table 1 depicts some cases of political parties' forceful imposition of unpopular candidates on the electorates as parties' flag-bearers in some states in Nigeria in 2007 general elections.

Table 1: Cases of political parties imposition of candidates on electorates in 2007 general elections in Nigeria

State	Contestants and Events in 2007	Verdict of the Judiciary
Rivers	Rotimi Amaechi vs. Celestine Omehia. Amaechi won the gubernatorial primary election, but Omehia was imposed as PDP flag bearer. Amaechi challenged party action in court.	Appeal Court ruled in favor of Amaechi, and he won the election.
Imo	Ifeanyi Araraume vs. Engr. Charles Ugwuh. Araraume won the PDP primary election, but Ugwuh was imposed as party flag bearer. Araraume challenged action of the party in court.	Appeal Court declared Araraume winner of the election, but he lost the governorship election.
Edo	Adams Oshiomhole vs. Oserheimen Osunbor. Osunbor was returned elected in the governorship election under PDP. Oshiomhole (Labour Party) challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court declared Oshiomhole winner of the election.
Ondo	Segun Mimiko vs. Agagu Segun. Agagu was reelected as governor under PDP. Mimiko (Labour Party) challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court declared Mimiko winner of the election.
Ekiti	Kayode Fayemi vs. Segun Oni. Oni was reelected as governor under PDP. Fayemi challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court declared Fayemi winner of the election.
Delta	Great Ogboru vs. Emmanuel Uduaghan. Uduaghan was reelected as governor under PDP. Ogboru (ACN) challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court nullified the election and ordered a rerun within 90 days. Uduaghan was returned elected.
Osun	Olagunsoye Oyinlola vs. Rauf Aregbesola. Oyinlola was reelected under PDP. Aregbesola (ACN) challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court declared Aregbesola the winner.
Anambra	Chris Ngige vs. Peter Obi. Ngige was declared winner of governorship election under PDP. Peter Obi (APGA) challenged the election result in court.	Appeal Court declared Peter Obi the winner.

Source: Nwagwu, Ejikeme J. 2011.

Elections and party politics in Nigeria: Lesson after fifty years. In Nigeria at fifty: issues, challenges and agenda, ed. Ezeudu Samuel Agozie., Ezeani Emmanuel Onyebuchi., Onuoha Jonah and Nwizu Stella, 130 - 147. Enugu: Timex Enterprises. These indices

highlighted informed why voter turnout in 2007 general elections decreased by 11.4%. Voters became apprehensive about insecurity of lives and properties and intolerable electoral irregularities orchestrated by bad governance and poor leadership. Voters seemingly lost hope in obtaining credible election results in non-free and fair exercise; and general lack of interest in political activities was exhibited.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was very ineffective, incompetently weak in administering elections and quite incapable of regulating the unbridled activities of political parties and politicians as the body enjoyed no administrative independence or financial autonomy. The Chairman of INEC in 2007 elections, Maurice Iwu aptly asserts that:

Here is a system in which individuals primitively acquired such enormity of resources that embolden them to challenge the state and become laws unto themselves with their own army and all; a system in which political parties brazenly deny their members who won primaries the ticket they won and allocate same to others for one reason or another; a system in which some individuals solely pick candidates for a political party in an election; a setting in which majority of the political aspirants do not believe there is any benefit in campaigning and convincing the electorates, but that with money and massive arsenal of coercion the electorates will be subdued...this is the environment of Nigeria's electoral democracy from where elections without flaws are expected (Iwu, 2009, p.5).

The winner of 2007 presidential election, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua condemned the processes through which he became the President and acknowledged that the exercise was full of flaws, and promised to reform the electoral processes. Accordingly, on August 28, 2007 he constituted a 23-member Electoral Review Committee with Justice Mohamadu Uwais as the chairman, to look into means of enhancing election administration in Nigeria. The Committee's Report and Recommendations submitted to the Presidency on December 11, 2008 were considered by the National Assembly and the outcome of the exercise is the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). Some gubernatorial aspirants and other political contenders who felt that political parties' hierarchies shortchanged or denied them their rights to contest and the parties' failure to observe the provisions of the respective party constitutions in intraparty business, and others who were convinced that they were rigged out of the contest by opposition political parties, Independent National Electoral Commission official, and sponsored thugs, instituted legal actions against the outcomes of the elections in their respective designated Election Tribunals. The aggrieved contestants filed in 1, 282 election petitions in 2007 (Daily Trust, Friday, January 3, 2020). The intra-party contentious issues in People's Democratic Party (PDP) before the 2011 election was a conventional unwritten zoning agreement which provided for rotation of presidency between north and south of Nigeria. Olusegun Obasanjo from south-west of Nigeria won the party primaries and was nominated the presidential candidate in 1999; and was elected with Atiku Abubakar as running mate from north-east for two terms. Umaru Musa

Yar'Adua, a northerner from north-west won PDP primaries to become the presidential candidate of the party in 2007 elections with Goodluck Jonathan, the then Governor of Bayelsa State in south-south, the running mate. The duo emerged victoriously in an election tainted by massive irregularities. However, Yar'Adua died of sickness in 2010 after three years in office. His Vice, Jonathan was sworn-in to replace the deceased. After a year, as the first term was approaching to an end, serious tussle erupted within PDP over Jonathan's justification to contest the presidency in 2011 election. A splinter-group contended in favour of Jonathan's right as former Vice-President and incumbent President to contest; the other splinter-group sustained upholding PDP's conventional rotation-agreement that north should be given an opportunity for another four years to fill the lacuna created by Yar'Adua's death, but Jonathan's supporters won (FGN Report, 2011).

The 2011 general elections, particularly the presidential election on 16th April, were widely adjudged by domestic and international observers as one of the best elections Nigeria had ever conducted and the worst bloodiest ever experienced in the history of election in the country. INEC was broadly acclaimed to have significantly improved in administration of the election. Essentially, new voters' register was created and there was tremendous improvement in reporting results transparently with a public pledge to hold accountable individuals who contravened the electoral rules. In spite of the improvements, there were incidents of electoral malfeasance – politically motivated bloody-violence, vote-buying, mutilations, inflations, and manipulations of election results in the incumbent's strong holds where official results in some areas recorded 100 percent voters' turnout, partisanship of law enforcement agents, seizure of ballot-boxes and stuffing by party thugs mostly in southeast and Niger Delta region. Eruption of violence was linked to grievances of unresolved party issues, underlying issues of inter and intra-party tensions, mudslinging, inconsistencies and controversies in party primaries and other hangover issues on campaigns.

The pre-election violent incidents recorded 165 casualties, excluding the assassination of All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) governorship candidate, Alhaji Modu Fanammi Gubio, a leading governorship aspirant in Borno State in January 2011. Bomb blast occurred in Bayelsa, Borno, Kaduna and Niger States with trailing casualties. There were also bloody clashes between rival parties' supporters in some parts of Nigeria (Diallo, 2011; EU-EOM, 2011; WANEP, 2019; Sahara Reporters, 2011). An official pronouncement of the presidential election results and the declaration of the incumbent President as the winner of the contest triggered off violent protest in the northern states. The Hausa/Fulani Muslim youths, supporters of Buhari, the opposition candidate from the Northern region, took over streets in northern towns and cities of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara States with crude and dangerous weapons like axes, machetes, sticks, knives and bows-and-arrows in three-day rioting and sectarian killings, INEC offices and other public buildings were destroyed. Human Rights Watch (cited in Diallo, 2011, p.1) notes that "the protest claimed 800 lives of innocent citizens". On April 18, 2011 violence erupted in Kano, Kaduna, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa and Taraba States against rigging of the presidential election. Churches and Mosques, government and PDP members' properties, religious leaders perceived to be

PDP supporters, INEC buildings were destroyed. Some INEC personnel and ten ad hoc staff from NYSC were killed in Bauchi State. The stronghold of Sultan of Sokoto, the supreme Muslim power in the country was assaulted. The demonstrators confronted security forces and many lives were lost (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2011).

Subsequently, a 22-member Investigation Panel superintended by retired Grand Qadi Sheikh Dr Ahmed Lemu, known as ‘Lemu Panel’, was constituted to look into 2011 Election Violence and Civil Disturbances. The Panel identified the remote roots of the savagery to include “a widespread desire for change following failed promises of government to fix infrastructures, corruption, zoning policies that turned the election into an ethno-religious contest, rumour-mongering and negative campaigning, and individual actions of some candidates” (FRN, 2011, p.5).

Table 2 illustrates the degree of fatalities, injuries, and destruction of properties in northern states.

Table 2: Number of persons killed, injured displaced and properties destroyed in 2011 post-election violence in Northern Nigeria

Location	Fatalities	Persons Injured	Displaced Persons	Properties destroyed	Suspects arrested
Kaduna	827	71	65,000	1) 350 Churches	500
Bauchi	36	200		2) 224 houses	
Adamawa	26	158		3) 837 market Shops	
Gombe	20	147		4) Numerous vehicles and motor-cycles	
Niger	9	27		5) 6 Mosques	
Kano	8	22			
Katsina	7	59			
Borno	3	10			
Jigawa	1	38			
Yobe	1	3			
Total	938	735	65,000	1,417	500

Sources: Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. 2011. The 2011 elections in northern Nigeria post-electoral violence: Origins and response”. <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org>. Accessed 16 March 2020. Diallo, Seyllou. 2011. Nigeria: Post-election violence killed 800”. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/16/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800>. Accessed 21 January 2020. The report remarkably identified the inflammatory public statements of the presidential candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which stated that “voters should protect their votes” was misunderstood by party supporters in northern states to mean recourse to violence. The high magnitude of insecurity in a volatile political environment was sufficient to heighten fears and negatively influence the behavior of voters not to participate in political activities, particularly in voting. Numerous inadequacies affected the worth and integrity of the election results, including 4.36% decrease in voter turnout if compared with last general elections voter turnout which was a reflection of electorates’ unfavorable dispositions.

Voter turnout and political environment in 2015 general elections

The 2015 general elections was a continuum of party wrangling, politically motivated violence in an unstable terrain. There was intra and interparty 'war' of supremacy raging within the two major contending and overbearing political parties: PDP and APC.

PDP had experienced terrible internal crisis that structurally threatened its fabrics, between those who earlier supported the reelection bid of President Jonathan in 2011 and others against the ambition. Some strong pillars of PDP from northern extraction that were not in support of the reelection plan in 2011 and 2015 defected to the opposition party, APC.

The argument was that presidency should rotate according to the internal zoning policy of the party; in this case, it should be the turn of the north to produce the presidential candidate for 2015 election. This was hinged on the argument that the demise of former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, truncated their turn to three years instead of eight.

The faction argued that it was wrong for Jonathan to re-feature in 2015 to contest for the presidency. The northern elites vowed with serious threat that if President Jonathan insisted on contesting the 2015 election, they would make Nigeria ungovernable for him. As aptly observed by WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) (2019, p.1), "There are already concerns regarding election security and consolidation of the democratic structure in Nigeria. Recent reports generated by WANEP suggest underlying issues of inter and intraparty tensions, mudslinging, politically motivated violence and reoccurrences of carpet crossing of prominent politicians". The controversially unresolved problems destroyed the foundation of the party and rendered it hollow. The emergence of demeaning strategy to woo unwilling electorates with such dreadful verbal war against opponents, threat of physical war, pre-election politically motivated killings and destruction of public and private properties, religious bigotry, hate speeches and inflammatory statements during campaigns between the two major contending dominant parties; the herdsmen extremism, Boko Haram insurgency and political instability heightened apprehensiveness of eligible voters and fear debarred them from coming out to participate in political activities. CLEEN Foundation (2014, p.1) observed that:

Preparation for the February 2015 General Elections is amidst increasing concern of high levels of insecurity and violence in the election days and the days immediately after. The concerns are that the current security situation such as continued insurgent attacks in the North East, increased activities of militants and/or cult groups in the South-South, incursion by Cattle Herdsmen openly armed with AK47 rifles in the South East, political killings and proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), would fuel an outbreak of violence.

Besides, electioneering campaigns were devoid of issues and ideologies, lack of decency in approach and poor management of language skill, and absence of articulation of problem solving policies and programmes to address pressing national issues bordering on corruption, high rate of poverty, unemployment, free and accessible functional education, healthcare delivery system, transportation system and other infrastructural deficits in Nigeria. The imminent danger looming in some flashpoints or danger-zones of the country

was highlighted by West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network to the effect that:

The relatively peaceful elections and political transition in 2015 have elicited public discussions with high expectations on INEC and security agencies to conduct a credible electoral process. In the findings of a recent risk assessment study in Nigeria conducted by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) as well as a baseline assessment by WANEP, there are indications of high risk of political violence in Kaduna, Ekiti, Rivers and Kano, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Lagos, Benue, Kwara, Plateau, Sokoto and Adamawa States (WANEP, 2019, p.4).

Consequently, voters' turnout in 2015 general elections was 43.6 percent with 10.1 percent decline from 53.7 percent in 2011 general elections' record.

Governance and voter turnout in 2019 general elections

The 2019 general elections were keenly competitive even though during the periods of campaigns, the competitors such as opposition political parties – People's Democratic Party, Accord Party, etc. did not enjoy equal rights and privileges in accessing public facilities (e.g. Nigeria Television Authority, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and public stadia for political rallies) exhibited by power of incumbency. Private media organizations were being censored on what they should not air in favour of any opposition political party or clients perceived to be in opposition. For instance, the controversial withdrawal of operational license of Daar Communications Plc by Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) for allegedly airing on issues pertaining to presidential election petition matters was considered illegal. Justice Inyang Ekwo of the Federal High Court, Abuja, nullified the purported deferral of working authorisation of Daar Communications Plc, affording African Independent Television/Ray Power temporary reprieve to operate. The Court urged the Federal Government and NBC to exhibit reason why a relapse to 30th May, 2019 status quo ante bellum sought by Daar Communications Plc should not be consented (Nigerian Democratic Report, 2019). Observing the ethics of the media profession, the rules and guidelines as regulated by NBC code during electoral processes was not the issue. Rather, prevalence of petty politics, witch-hunting, and blackmailing were predominantly championed. Daar Communication Plc accused government of being highhanded in using every instrument of power to threaten, intimidate and harass Daar Media Organisation. It was alleged that any broadcast perceived to give a dissenting perspective to the position of government on any contending issue is misconstrued as a threat to national interest. The government appears to be haunted by its shadow because all discourse, reference and reports emanating from various quarters of Nigeria concerning injustice, inequality, iniquity, nepotism, despotism, impunity or highhandedness were perceived as threats to national security (Nigerian Democratic Report, 2019). The abysmal rate of voter turnout was an overwhelming manifestation of feelings of dissatisfaction amongst eligible voters in casting their votes. The extreme poor performance of the government in terms of militarisation of electoral processes, insecurity of lives and properties, an illusion of job creation, high rate of poverty, fuel price increases, infrastructural decay, ethnic politics, favoritism or prebendal politics, lopsided

appointment of key public officers, and economic hardship seem to have divided the country along ethnic cum religious lines more than ever before (Oluwole, 2019).

Table 3 and figure 1 illustrate integer of registered voters and percentage of voter turnout from 1999 to 2019 presidential elections.

Table 3: Registered voters and voter turnout in the Presidential elections in Nigeria, 1999-2019

SN	Year of Election	Registered Voters	Total Number of Voter Turnout	Valid Votes	Invalid Votes	Voter Turnout (%)	Voter Turnout Increase Rate (%)	Voter Turnout Decrease Rate (%)
1.	1999	57,938,945	30,280,052	29,848,441	431,611	52.3	-	-
2.	2003	60,823,022	42,018,735	39,480,489	2,538,246	69.1	16.8	-
3.	2007	61,566,648	35,419,262	35,397,517	-	57.4	-	11.04
4.	2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	38,209,978	1,259,506	53.7	-	4.36
5.	2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	28,587,564	844,519	43.6	-	10.1
6.	2019	84,004,084	28,614,190	27,324,683	1,289,607	34.8	-	8

Source: Abdallah, Nuruddeen M. & Krishi, Musa A. 2019. How voter turnout shapes Nigeria's elections. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-voter-turnout-shapes-nigerias-elections.html>. Accessed 26 March 2020.

One of the motivating factors that persuade massive voters to participate in political activities is good governance, whereby the government is accountable to the electorates and the welfare of the people is paramount on a functional and realistic agenda. Poor performance of government embedded in incompetence, corruption, faulty and anti-people economic policies undermine the high aspirations of the governed to receive dividend of democracy. Poor governance is a facilitator of impoverishment in the sense that it reduces the value, dignity and integrity of mankind. The abysmal performance of government in power in security of lives and properties, socio-economic development and ethnic incitement adversely influenced the voters' behavior in 2019 presidential election as illustrated above. Out of the estimated 180 million people, 86.9 million Nigerians (representing 50% of the populace) live in excessive poverty. Kazeem (2018) observes that Nigeria's poverty level has exceeded that of India with larger proportion of the population living in extreme poverty. Although India's population is seven times bigger,

the slothful efforts of Nigeria to move more people out of extreme poverty seem to be indictments on past governments that have ineptly and corruptly managed massive proportion of national wealth. Also, the government has been trailed with high rate of inflation worsened by the fuel price increase from ₦87 to ₦145 per liter on May 24, 2016; and unemployment rate since 2015.

Nigerian citizens have been traumatised with unprecedented high rate of inflation due to unfriendly economic policies. Inflation rate in 2014 was 8.05%, and rose to 9.01% in 2015. The post-election inflation rate in 2016 was 15.7 percent; in January 2019, 11.37% was recorded, it rose to 11.85% in November and in December 2019 it rose to 11.98%. In 2015, US\$1 is equivalent to US\$1.06 in 2018, recording a difference of US\$0.06 over three consecutive years. The 2015 inflation rate was 0.12%. In 2018, the inflation rate rose to 2.44%. The 2018 inflation rate appears higher in comparison with average inflation rate of 2.17% per annum between 2018 and 2019.

Altogether, the average family of five in Nigeria hardly sees food on the table each day. The potent protest of abstention from voting was an indictment on government in power due to deplorable conditions of living (Adebayo, 2018; Sahara Reporters, 2019).

Unemployment rate in Nigeria has astronomically risen. In 2017, it was 18.1%. In third quarter of 2018, it increased to 23.10% from 22.7% in second quarter; while underemployment rate was 20.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The economic situation in Nigeria was the main thrust of debate in the 2015 electioneering campaigns. President Buhari promised to fix the economy and reduce poverty and unemployment rates if the electorates voted him into power. The first term of his administration was marred by economic recession and its slothful recovery in 2017 exacerbated poverty and unemployment rates. Nigerians are overtly not happy with the situation of things in the country. Generally, there is grudge, apportionment of blames and counter blames amongst political leaders, party supporters and electorates about poor and irritating performance of past and present administration on the erring economy, insecurity of lives and properties, biased war against corruption and unlawful use of the military and other national security apparatuses against the masses. This incident depleted the number of eligible voters who actually came back home to participate in voting; while most voters who stayed back were scared by the intimidating presence of soldiers on all roads and polling stations. Thus, massive electoral irregularities, explicit disrespect for rule of law and injustices that pervaded all electoral processes from 2007 general elections gave rise to plethora of electoral petitions from aggrieved stakeholders. The number gave credence to the monumental electoral flaws acknowledged by national and international election observers that discredited outcomes of entire exercise. Table 4 depicts election petitions from each geo-political zone in Nigeria, 2007 – 2019.

Table 4: Election petitions from each geo-political zone in Nigeria, 2007 – 2019

SN	Geographical Location	Total
1.	South-East	819
2.	South-South	772
3.	North-Central	542

4.	South-West	524
5.	North-West	460
6.	North-East	323
7.	Federal Capital Territory	26
	Total	3,466

Source: Azu, John . 2020. 3,479 petitions filed in 4 election cycles ... Despite reforms. [https:// Dailytrust.com.ng/3479-petitions-filed-in-4-election-cycles.html](https://Dailytrust.com.ng/3479-petitions-filed-in-4-election-cycles.html). Accessed 24 February 2020.

The analysis of election petitions arising from the six geo-political zones of the federation indicates that South-East took the lead, followed by South-South. In South-East, Anambra topped in the zone with 286 petitions; while Delta and Rivers followed with 197 and 186 petitions respectively.

Conclusion

The study highlighted perennial nature of political environment in Nigeria and argued that none of the elections Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been devoid of electoral malfeasance which is the major determinant of voter apathy. In the last two decades, non-political participation of voters in Nigeria's electoral processes has become a major perennial challenge in election administration. As a vital ingredient of democracy, political participation is being utilised to authenticate and legitimise government for general acceptance. Voter apathy as potent protest against irregularities in electoral process and bad governance is demeaning in modern democracies. It is the character of a post-colonial country where elections have turned into warfare. The findings revealed weak institutional framework, bad-governance and corruption as voter apathy determinants.

Recommendation

To rekindle confidence of electorates in the polity, the study recommends radical reforms of subsisting Electoral Act entrenchment of strong institutional frameworks with practical autonomy, legal powers to bite when necessary, visible democracy and liberty of the people being guaranteed to foster sustainable democratic development.

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