

VOTER APATHY AND NIGERIA'S ELECTIONEERING PROCESS: A SYNOPSIS ON THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Many scholars have argued explicitly that electioneering is a major component of democracy. As a matter of fact, to these scholars, it is the main yardstick used to determine the level upon which countries in the international system have been able to embrace social equality. This process presents the citizens of a given country the opportunity to decide who represents them in governance at the local, state and national levels. It is therefore unarguable that elections are very fundamental to the stability of democracy, as it regulates representation of popular will. However, quite ironical, the Nigerian elections over the years and even in recent times have been bedeviled with wanton level of political apathy. There have been regular displays of lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, civic obligations and electioneering processes. Voters' apathy which is a subset of political apathy has continued to haunt Nigeria's voting exercise. This is in fact evidential in the last election. Despite the electrifying effect of the general elections, it was discovered that less than half of the registered voters, 42.76%, officially voted. Logically this implies that millions of Nigerians felt that the election was irrelevant to their lives. During the states elections, major low turnouts of voters were recorded also across the federation. This paper, thus seeks to unravel practical reasons behind the level of voters apathy in the just concluded elections in Nigeria. This paper concluded with some workable solutions to abate the continuance of this calamity in the country's electioneering process.

KEYWORDS: Voter apathy, political apathy, electioneering process, popular will, democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuing dialogue on the subject of global decline in voter turnout during elections has raised major concerns not only among political scientists, intellectuals, researchers but also among different renowned electoral institutions, governments and as a matter of fact, among concerned citizens of the globe. While the decline in voter turnout perpetually marvels a good number of the world's population, certain schools of thought have been raising serious doubts over the expediency of the theory and practice of the highly regarded concept of democracy, as it presents itself in contemporary times. Because the basic prerequisite of democracy is the representation of popular will, these schools have continued to affirm the necessity for member nations in the international system to internalize the dividends of democracy. Albeit it will be untrue to postulate that low voters' turnout at elections has some level of peculiarities in the globe, as it is a universal problem yet, it is of great importance to note that the level of decline in voter turnout globally cannot be commensurate. This is so as a great chunk of scholars have revealed that voter turnout varies widely across countries. Overwhelming studies have shown that most developing countries in Africa, Asia and in Latin America have the highest percentage of decline in voter turnout. These studies are not coming unanticipated primarily because over the years elections in most developing countries, above all in Africa both historically and in recent times have been bedeviled with wanton level of electoral irregularities ranging from violence, gender discrimination, malpractices, strenuous voting process and nonfulfillment of electoral promises by politicians. These mounting setbacks in most African countries illuminate not only the impracticability of the respected Western styled democracies on the African soil, but also any other styled democracy for that matter that is overtly devoid of the understandability of African social realities and conditions. Elections, which principally determine the level upon which countries have been able to achieve social equality, as it presents to the citizens the opportunity to decide who represents them in governance, is elementary to the stability of democracy. The duly deserved opportunity the masses have to elect those that represent them in governance is fundamental to democracy because it regulates representation of popular will. However, persistent display of lack of psychological involvement in Nigeria's electioneering processes by the citizens over the years has been the major clog in the developmental wheel of the country's democracy. In the case that Nigeria's representative form of government was potent, the incessant decline in voter turnout over the years, as it will be examined in this paper,

will never be a nightmare for the political dispensation of the country. To further flesh out our argument on the nexus between elections and democracy, scholars like Powell (1986), Wattenburg (2002) have explicitly argued that low voter turnout decreases the legitimacy of democracy. It is an undisputable fact that if the masses of a particular country refuse to fulfill their electorate obligation, then there is disconnect between the masses and the government, thus bringing to question the democratic right, acceptability of the government. It is then clear that decline in voter turnout is nothing but a reflection of the failing authenticity of democracy. The rate of voter turnout in elections, whether high or low will forever be a fundamental component of representative democracy because this encapsulate the evaluation of public influence on the management of their affairs by politicians. However, as stipulated hitherto, decline in voters' turnout is a general phenomenon. This is so because by nature people appear to be unwilling to engage themselves in any voting procedures for distinct reasons that cannot be totally explained. In fact the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance once put it that voters' turnout has always been below 40% of the general registered voters (IDEA, 2006). Yet, despite the generality of decline in voters' turnout throughout the globe, if a country records a major low turnout of voters in an election, it brings forth the question of the legitimacy of the government that emerges from such an election.

It is a generally accepted notion that democracy as far as legitimacy is concern is a game of numbers. Thus from this notion, it can be deduced that it is only right when a government records majority backing through election. This majority backing must as a matter fact commensurate with the increasing total population of the electorate in the country because this is a *sine qua non* for the growth of democracy. What it means to have this majority backing consequently is an indication of how the citizens in a given country have been able to maneuver their way into the driver seat by emerging as the decider of their political and economic fate. On the contrary, indolence, political apathy, voting apathy and nonchalant attitudes have continued to hinder the entrenchment and sustenance of representative democracy in Nigeria. While many scholars have been able to come up with several potential reasons as to why people do not vote, little or no attention has been paid to what is known as the contextual and systematic factors hindering voters' turnout. A handful of empirical studies have shown that Nigeria's elections over the years have been toeing the line of major decline in voters' turnout as a result of wanton level of violence and most importantly the obvious disconnect between the citizens and the

politicians. However, it is of the contention of this paper that low voters' turnout would never surface had not been that the country's electioneering process is not only at its primeval stage but also deteriorating even at playing its primeval responsibilities. Scholars have explicitly articulated the factors emanating from the electoral system concerning the current decline in voters' turnout to contextual and systematic factors, individual and social factors (IDEA, 2006). Notwithstanding, our focus is centred on the contextual and systematic factors, but this is not to say our focus will be limited to just these two factors. But then, it is only logical to conclude that Nigeria's elections are bedeviled with apathy because the system has failed, for had not been the system has failed potential electorates would not be scared or uninterested to go out and perform their civic duties. It can therefore not be gainsaid that the contextual and systematic factors, in determining low voters' turnout, are not only superlative to other factors like the social and individual factors, but are more encompassing.

Overall, the electioneering processes of Nigeria over the years have been characterized by several untoward tendencies ranging from massive frauds, rigging, intimidation of both opponents and potential voters, state interference, lack of ideological conviction of the ruling class, lack of continuity, violence, to mention a few, hence apathy naturally sets in. Despite the electrifying effect of the Nigerian 2015 general elections, it was discovered that less than half of the registered voters, 42.76%, officially voted (INEC, 2015). In fact as it would be argued in the course of this paper, since 1999, the country witnessed its major lowest voters' turnout during the just concluded 2015 elections. This which has been pecked at 43.65% compared to the 54% in 2011 or the 57% in 2007 and lastly the 69% and 52% in the 2003 and 1999 elections respectively (see fig.2). What this can only mean is that the lowest rate of voters' turnout in the last election is a continuous spillover of the yet to be mitigated overtime increase of voter apathy in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper opines that until there is a drastic change around in the country's electioneering process, the electoral body manning up over their responsibilities, this misfortune will continue to aggravate. With respect to the level of backwardness of the political culture in Nigeria, this which is basically characterized with violence, unideological, money, ethnic and quite recently, religious politics; this paper is of the contention that the electoral body must as a matter of urgency rise to the task of revitalizing the country's electioneering process. In doing this, the electoral body must move beyond its well-known responsibility of just conducting elections and explore the best possible means at which

the country could record high voters' turnout just like their counterparts, other electoral bodies, are doing in most countries. As it is in most countries that have experienced drastic increase in voters' turnout over the years, Nigerian electoral body will be required to precipitate a profound, unending political education sessions for the rank and file of the Nigerian society in order to brace up their political consciousness. To encourage voters' turnout in most countries, different electoral bodies have incorporated into their responsibilities the need to always certify the accountability of the politicians to the masses. The Nigerian electoral body therefore has the most significant roles to play in ensuring the augmentation of voters' turnout by leading the role in enhancing the political awareness of the masses through education and by holding the politicians accountable to the people. However, it will be wishful thinking to assume that the Nigerian electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will be able to play these roles flawlessly without first disentangling itself from the manipulation of the politicians. In Nigeria's political dispensation of today, it is an undisputable fact that the autonomy of INEC to some extent is a fantasy, as the supposed independent body receives its funds from the President and also reports to the President. Taking into empirical study the just concluded 2015 elections, this paper will examine the major reasons behind the decline in voters' turnout; this which was certainly caused by apathy as the effects of the irresponsiveness of the electioneering processes to the main issues concerning apathy cost the election. Our understanding of voter apathy in the elections was procured from the low voters' turnout which this study was able to ascertain by analyzing the total voters' registration percentage and the voters' turnout percentage. By voters' registration percentage, we mean the percentage of voters that actually registered for the elections, while voters' turnout infers the total percentage of voters that eventually cast their votes during the elections.

2. VOTER APATHY, ELECTION AND DEMOCRACY; A CONCEPTUAL NEXUS

Many scholars like Powell (1982) have espoused that voter apathy in actuality is a subset of political apathy. Political apathy conceptually is the decline in political participation of the citizens of a given country. In other words, it is the decline in the involvement of the citizens of a given country in the political system (Arowolo and Aluko 2010). Since political participation encompasses the whole political system like community activities, public opinions, formulation of policies, civic responsibilities, election of political leaders, to mention a few, it can only mean that voter apathy is a product of the bigger picture, political apathy. Nevertheless our focus is

voter apathy for it overtly has a direct link with the electioneering process. Voter apathy has attracted the attention of several scholars over the years because of its growing detrimental effect on the democracies of countries in the international system. The direct effect voter apathy has upon democracy cannot be farfetched against the background that voting itself is an essential part of the political process in a democracy. Crew et al. (1992) in their work posits that apathy denotes a lack of feeling of personal responsibility, a passivity and indifference for political affairs. Subsequently, it denotes the absence of a feeling of obligation to participate. Thus, voter apathy ensues when eligible electorates in a given country failed to vote in public elections basically on purpose. On a more general note, it has been ruminated over by several electoral institutions that voter apathy more than often stems from voters total disappointment with either the political process, which encompass the electioneering process or with the politicians. Notwithstanding, it is of the contention of this paper that both the problems that emanated from the politicians and the political process or to say electioneering process in discouraging voters' turnout are not what the electoral body in a country cannot find lasting solutions to. This aspect of the paper explains the essentiality of electoral reforms in the country of study. Because of the direct effect voter apathy has on the viability of democracy, the subject has become the basic yardstick to further entrench the need to build a workable society with minimal apathy. The unconcerned, uninvolved, apathetic feelings most citizens in a given country express during elections illuminate the level at which representative democracy is derailing. This is so owing to the undisputable fact that without sufficient turnout, there can be no true elections, for elections depict the masses preference. A low voters' turnout reflects, not the preference of the majority of the people but a majority of few. This which brings into question the legitimacy of the government that expressly comes into power. But a high voters' turnout will not only ascertain the credibility of an election but also the legitimacy of the government.

It is a widely accepted notion that elections constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance (INEC and FES, 2011). While electioneering simply refers to the activities by which politically interested actors, bodies seek to canvass and win votes for a particular candidate of preferred choice, electioneering processes have to do with the totality of the activities involved in campaigns and mobilizing the citizens of a country for elections, these activities do not exclude the electoral body conducting the elections (Okoye, 1996). Elections no doubt play a vital role in democracies as they ensure representation of

popular will, it is therefore not surprising that voting is the most visible and widespread of citizens involvement in the democratic political process of a country. With this however, there exists a major decline in voters' turnout in most countries, Nigeria inclusive. Elections are considered extremely vital to the processes of democratization and democracy consolidation because they are the most visible benchmark needed to evaluate citizens' political participation. Thus, there can be no democracy without a free and fair election deeply rooted in mass participation by the rank and file of the people in a given country. Elections are thus clearly the first necessary step towards democracy (Molutsi and Singh, 2003). While issues like respect for human rights, rule of law, separation of powers, existence of transparent and accountable governance to better the lives of the citizens, are equally what configures a viable democracy yet, the listed issues above cannot be actualized without a legitimate, free and fair election deeply rooted in mass participation. It suffices to note at this juncture that a democratic based election according to this paper goes beyond the quality of the day of the election alone, but also on the basis of the roles that needed to be played by the electoral body after polling exercise. In respect of the increasing current global challenge of voter apathy, electoral institutions have posited that electoral bodies must as a matter of urgency beef up their aggregate roles towards ensuring a boost in voters' turnout. Many scholars have espoused that the way and manner in which elections are managed are the key reason among other reasons responsible for low turnout during elections (Rakner and Svasand, 2005). This is to infer that the electioneering processes go a long way in shaping people's opinions, perceptions about the conducts of elections, this which stands out to be a must recipe for democracy. The management of elections if properly handled by the electoral body, beyond any reasonable doubt has a bandwagon positive effect on the people. This is particularly true because elections widely perceived as genuinely competitive tend to increase interest and voters turnout (Ballington and Masterson, 2005). There is therefore no gainsaying the fact that the standard of an electoral body has a direct impact on voters' turnout, either low or high. With the persistent decline in voters' turnout in Nigerian elections over the years, it can only then imply that the electoral body, INEC, has refused to assumed its proper role towards ensuring a democratic based outcome of elections.

The main thrust of this paper is then well-grounded against the backdrop that voters' turnout in an election is very important since increase turnout implies a reasonable participatory democracy, while decline in voters' turnout implies dissatisfaction with both the political class

and the political system, electioneering process inclusive. It is then glaring that for an election to be considered democratic, and free and fair, it must record a major turnout as an indication for having moved beyond voter apathy. This explains the relationship between the concept of voter apathy, election and democracy. Besides, it is a well-known perception that no measure of democracy can be considered an accurate representation of its basic character without directly including participation as a core component. Ligphart (1997) has argued that low turnout during elections creates a bias in favour of the upper classes, who are most likely to vote and, consequently, be represented. And so to have thought that the theory and practice of democracy relies heavily on representation by the masses, brings forth to question the pragmatism of democracy. As it will be seen in the course of this paper, a great chunk of Nigerian potential electorates failed to perform their civic duties both by registering and voting, during the just concluded general elections because they have lost hope in the country's electioneering process. This implies that the people can no longer trust their electoral body and the politicians, hence apathy prevails. Low turnout during elections not only has an immediate effect on governance but also a long term effect. Outside the facts that decline in voters' turnout affect the legitimacy of a government and the representative power of the masses, it also undermines the accountability power of the masses. Accountability power of the masses is self-explanatory; voters' apathy usually gives the politicians the incentives needed not to do the right thing while in office, for there is no threat whatsoever over not being reappointed. Low turnout therefore relegates one of the basic functions of elections, which is the sanctioning tool it has to command the politicians to have the best interest of the people at heart (Sylvia et al, 2013). Since elections are meant to make the government accountable to the people, apathy therefore creates no incentives for politicians to come up with policies in the interest of the people (Chinisinga, 2003). With all this notwithstanding, elections in Nigeria have been characterized with lack of psychological involvement, responsibility, emotional detachment and indifference for political affairs which we have synopsisized as voter apathy. This paper in a bid to unravel the causes of voter apathy in Nigeria using the 2015 general elections and also in unraveling the best possible solutions for voter apathy, will at this juncture examine an overview of the said general elections.

3. THE 2015 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

March 28th through April 11th 2015 marked another shift in Nigeria's pursuit history of a democratic based election devoid of any form of irregularities; but as the case has been with

practically all previous elections, the chase has not been productive. On the different days of elections, Nigerian electorates took to the polls to elect the next set of leaders into different political offices ranging from Presidential to National Assembly, Governorship and then to State Assembly positions. The elections, conducted witnessed the emergence of the opposition party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari, as the new President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The winner of the Presidential election, General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC is a former military ruler and a Muslim from the Northwest region of the country. Marking his fourth attempt under a different political platform, Buhari emerged victorious with 15,424,921 votes; having him earned 54% of the total votes against the incumbent's (President Goodluck Jonathan) 12,853,162 votes which made up 45%. Thus Buhari won with about 2.5 million votes. However, it is sufficed to note that this is not a wide margin when compared with past elections since the return of civil rule in 1999 (DSM publication, 2015). In the House of Representatives, the former opposition party, APC, won about 225 seats over 125 seats of the former ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), thus having the APC emerged as the majority party in the house. In the Senate, APC, yet again won 60 seats compared to the 49 seats of the PDP (Nigerian Tribune, 2015). Also, Muhammadu Buhari's All Progressive Party (APC) won a landslide in elections for powerful State governors, ending the hegemony of the former ruling party, PDP. The APC in the state elections was able to win 19 out of the 28 states, thus winning two-third of the country's 36 states (Nivedita, 2015). The incumbent, former President Goodluck Jonathan's party, PDP, since the end of the Military Rule in 1999 suffered its worst ever defeat in the 2015 elections in entirety. Nigeria's March 28th, 2015 Presidential election was perhaps, one of the most bitterly fought in the annals of the country's electoral history. For the first time in the history of the country, since 1960, as an independent country, a ruling party, PDP, was roundly defeated in an election. Albeit, 14 political parties fielded their respective candidates for the Presidential election yet, the contest was basically among the two biggest elite political parties, the ruling PDP and the opposition party, APC. The 2015 general election was the 5th periodically (four-year period) election to be held since 1999. The elections occurred after a controversial six-week postponement following insistence by security agencies that it should be pushed forward for them to accelerate the battle against the insurgency in the Northeastern part of the country (Premium Times, 2015). The elections were first scheduled for the 14th of February 2015 but were moved to the 28th of March.

Outside the insurgency or insecurity factor, reports have it that the elections had to be shifted because the electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was not able to reduce the increasing poor distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). As part of the preparations for the 2015 general elections, INEC introduced the use of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), Continuous Voters' Registration (CVR) and the biometric card readers into its procedures in order to abate irregularities, massive rigging that have marred Nigerian electoral processes. The PVC is a smartcard with an electronic readable microchip that stores each voter's unique personal and biometric data, while the CVR is a process engaged to constantly maintain and update register of voters meant to be used for successive elections. The biometric card reader is a portable electronic voter authentication device, configured to only read the PVCs issued by INEC (Thisday, Live, 2015). The card reader was designed basically for the purpose of accreditation and confirmation of the electorate before voting. The electoral body, INEC commenced PVCs distribution and the exercise of CVR by arranging a timetable of three major phases and dates. Phase one took place between 23rd May and 1st June 2014, Phase two between 15th and 25th August 2014, while Phase three was between 7th November and 17th December 2014 (Daily Post, 2014). Despite the electoral body efforts to ensure a participatory distribution of the PVCs and successful CVR exercise, it is important to note that the body recorded a major feeling of apathy among potential Nigerian electorates. Albeit, it is of the opinion of this paper that INEC's inconsistency, shortage of staff, were among many other reasons that ignited the nonchalant attitude many Nigerians turned on during the different phases of distribution of PVCs and registering of voters. The apathy shared by Nigerians was so high that in the early months of the year 2015, the INEC chairman expressed his disgust over the low turnout for the collection of PVCs. As it will be seen in Fig.1, from a pre-election report given by Election Risk Management (ERM), as at the 9th of January 2015, the number of registered voters across the country was still amazingly small.

Amidst several efforts, initiatives conceived by INEC to ensure a free and fair election, the election did not come to an end without numerous recorded technical hitches and sporadic incidents of violence. Despite the various measures adopted by the electoral body to help reduce vote fraud or other irregularities; measures such as the explained newly introduced voter registration system, the biometric card readers, the consistent training activities of electoral staff, to mention a few, yet several observers resolved that the election was not so free and fair after

all. One issue that did not escape the attention of most observers both international and local, was the extreme level of apathy Nigerian potential electorates expressed freely during the course of the elections (Nigerian Tribune, 2015). In spite of the overwhelming effect of the Presidential election, as following the announcement of the results in the evening of Tuesday 31st March 2015, there were several spontaneous jubilations across the country yet, it is most fundamental to espouse that in the election, less than half of the registered voters, 42.76%, officially voted (DSM publication, 2015). What this simply means is that a great chunk of Nigerian potential electorates have totally lost confidence on the importance of electoral processes in the country. Reasons against this cannot be farfetched against the background of the continuing failures of the ruling elites to fulfill their electoral promises. In fact in a pre-election poll (see fig.5) carried out by Gallup World Polling (GWP) it was revealed that only 13% of Nigerians had confidence in the honesty of elections (Loschky, 2015). Outside the high level of apathy that was recorded, there were still cases of rigging and violence. In the report of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) given days after the elections, it was recorded that across the country over 50 people were killed in the course of voting processes (Vanguard, 2015). There were also wanton cases of late arrival of voting materials, late arrival of INEC officials, which implies late opening of polling units, also there were several agonizing cases of failures of the biometric card readers. Irregularities such as underage voting, inflation of results were also alleged by the different observers present during the elections. Besides, it was well-known that voting was extended in many polling units due to technical problems with the card readers.

However, one of the most significant aspects of the just concluded 2015 elections, especially the Presidential election, was the enormous amount of money that was spent by the two leading political parties, the PDP and the APC. The enormous money that went into campaigning, billboards, adverts, rallies, meetings, jingles, and hate documentaries were so much that they earned the election the most expensive election ever to be held on the African continent (BBC, 2015). At a point in time, many analysts contended that the election campaigns were all about money contest between two rival wings devoid of any ideological conviction whatsoever. It is therefore ironical that despite the whopping sum of money that went into the elections, a great chunk of Nigerian potential electorates felt uninterested in voting, as the elections witnessed a major decline in voters' turnout in the history of the country. As it will be seen subsequently in the paper, albeit the electoral body, INEC, working closely with different

civil society organizations and with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) took the leading role in voter education in the just concluded elections yet, there was no positive reflection of the outcome of such education during the elections. This lacuna was reflected in both the general low turnout and the high number of rejected votes. The body failed to attempt a broader voter education programme for the masses, most especially those dwelling in the rural areas. The Nigerian media despite its major flaws before and during the elections, played noticeable roles in voter education, as many of these outlets funded several jingles aimed to secure the interest of eligible Nigerian electorates. But sadly the several magnanimous roles played by the different Nigerian media outlets to attract voters for the elections were bottled-up because of their bias reportage on the electioneering. Financial reliance on specific members of the political class and intimidating factor were some of the imposed constraints on editorial independence and quality of journalism during the elections. Many of the media outlets became vulnerable to the control of the political class prior to the elections, thus instead of educating the masses about the elections, some of these renowned media outlets were just brainwashing the masses.

Predictably, in the analysis of result of the Presidential election, of the 67,422,005 registered voters, only 31,746,490 (47.08%) were accredited for the election. Yet again, while 29,432,083 of votes were cast, it suffices to state that it was only 28,587,564 votes that were valid. The 2015 elections most especially the Presidential election in the eventual outcome was in many ways different from other elections because of the increase in apathy and some cases of irregularities recorded. All this consequently endangers the possibility of a veritable democratic dispensation in the country. The main issue is that, the failure of the political class and the electoral body to build the confidence of the generality of people in the country has continued to create a feeling of indifference or lack of enthusiasm for political participation or electoral processes. This is reflected in the general low turnout as we have seen in the Presidential election; the Governorship elections were no different. During the 12th of April State elections, a great chunk of the people failed to turn up as expected by both the electoral body and the politicians. Taking Lagos State, where the lowest turnout was recorded for an instance, out of the 5,827,846 registered potential voters, quite depressing, only 1,495,975 people actually voted. At this juncture, this paper will delve into a critical study on the level of voter apathy recorded during the just concluded 2015 elections. In understanding the decline in voter turnout as an effect of apathy, this paper will make a comparative analysis with the previous elections held

since 1999. It is the contention of this paper that the decline in voter turnout in the last election is a continuance of the yet, unabated menace in the political and electoral system in the country.

4. VOTER APATHY; THE 2015 EXPERIENCE

The lack of grounded and perpetual concentration on the national subject of voter apathy is very astonishing. It is mind-boggling to accept as true that despite the fact that apathy has characterized Nigeria transitional elections since independence, little or no concrete research work has been done on voter apathy in Nigeria. However this is not to suggest that there have not been earliest works done on decline in voters' turnout in Nigeria, Oyediran and Aworolo (1981) in their work provided insight into the voting behaviour and other general issues during the 1979 Presidential, Senatorial and House of Representative elections. Yet, while many of these works freely proved the existence of voter apathy, just few were able to clearly shed light on the causes of apathy during elections and its consequences. These few works no doubt have aided this research in understanding and interpreting voter apathy, voter turnout under the Nigerian context. It has been posited unarguably by many experts on voter apathy that factors ranging from psychological, historical, socio-political, institutional and systematic factors are the core issues responsible for decline in voters' turnout during elections or electioneering processes (Chinisinga, 2003). It suffices to state that these core issues are certainly applicable to the country of study yet, not without some peculiarities. The 2015 elections despite its electrifying effects quite surprisingly went down as one of the worst elections so far on the issue of voter apathy, as a major decline in voters' turnout surfaced. To prove the validity of the basis of this research work, a 2015 Voter Apathy Study was carried out with greater reliance on the results of the elections conducted, the recent findings of different concerned electoral institutions on voter turnout in the country and on a selected survey carried out by the researcher in Southwestern Nigeria, Lagos specifically; this which was designed to measure a far-reaching explanations as to why people do not get involved in the electioneering process or vote as the case may be. This survey thoroughly examines the core reasons given by the selected respondents for not going to the polls to carry out their civic obligation during the 2015 elections. It is these explanations that then characterized the recommendations given in the later part of this work by the researcher. However under this survey, it suffices to note that particular attention was paid to factors having to do with age, gender and occupation, for the purpose of understanding better the political attitudes of the potential electorates in the country, both the young and the old. Nigerians of

voting age were randomly selected in Lagos, one of the most populated states in the country, and were interviewed to provide a basis for our understanding. There was high concentration on civil servants, students and artisans. Results are based on approximately 1,000 encounters with different Nigerians ranging from age 18 and older. This survey as rightly said was conducted with residents of Lagos with questionnaires, from the 1st of June to the 15th of June, 2015. The study employed content analysis of available data on elections both past and present. The electoral body, INEC, officially gazette elections results were used to assess voters' turnout trend at both the national and the state level. All the above mentioned approaches encompassed the 2015 Voter Apathy Study of this research work. Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that the only field research done with exactly 1,000 respondents was to ascertain the core reasons behind their display of apathy towards the concluded elections. The selected areas wherein this field research was carried out were six major local government areas in Lagos state. These local government areas are Agege, Alimosho, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, Surulere, and Ikeja. To approach the already outlined primary aspect of this paper, we will be tracing voter apathy right from the pre-election period down to the period of elections cycle. This implies that a critical look at the decline in masses involvement in the pre-election processes has a proper way of helping us to understand the underlying issues behind voter apathy. Under the pre-election stage of manifestation of apathy in electoral process, issues that can be identified are involvement in political campaigns, violence, engagement in political discussions and voter registration by the masses.

4.1. PRE-ELECTION PHASE AND APATHY

We wish to reiterate that under the pre-election stage of manifestation of apathy in electoral process, issues like involvement in political campaigns, violence, engagement in political discussions and voter registration by the masses are our major concerns. It is germane to note that as electioneering process demands, it is necessary for the different political parties vying for political offices to sell out their manifestoes, agendas to the masses in order to secure their votes during actual voting, this is commonly known as political campaign. Bassey (2013) in his work has explained that electioneering also involves an effort persuade or dissuade prospective voters in an attempt to gain partisan advantage in the electoral process. Political campaigns in Nigeria over the years have reflected and still reflect the level of political backwardness of the politicians who in actual fact are vying for one office or the other. The unfortunate desperate orientation of

party politics in Nigeria has found expression in all aspects of the electoral process, so much that campaign grounds are not platforms where politicians spelt out extensively to the masses their agendas but are platforms where politicians sets the masses meanly, gullibly against their opponents. Little wonder why the pre-election campaigns have always been plagued with political killings and clashes between supporters of different rival political parties. It is quite important to note that the 2015 pre-election period was basically characterized with this menace. In fact, it is of the submission of this paper that political campaigns in Nigeria are most of the time likely synonymous to times for political killings. Fagbehun (2013) has noted that campaign proceedings in Nigeria are invariably marked by pettiness, intolerance and violence. It is plausibly against this backdrop that many Nigerians, not expecting anything different from the political class automatically develop the feeling of apathy towards pre-election process. The 2015 pre-election period was not so different from other previous ones, the parties' political manifestoes were neither based on ideology nor any lofty ideas, thus a great chunk of Nigerians found themselves uninterested in the campaigns of the political parties. One of the most unforgettable poor turnouts of the masses during the 2015 pre-election campaigns was the Presidential campaign rally of the Peoples Democratic Party aspirant, President Goodluck Jonathan at Kaduna. The Punch newspaper (2015) reported that the poor turnout was the worst ever as a stadium of 25,000 Capacity was not even half filled because many people shunned the rally. This instance and several others indicated that a good number of Nigerians were not interested in political campaigns during the last election, and of course this was recorded as one of the reasons for the general low turnout in voter registration.

Voter registration is a crucial aspect of conducting a genuine election. Several electoral institutions have posited that one of the major perquisites for a legitimate election is having a key voter turnout population that commensurate with the actual population of the eligible citizenry. However, this aspect of elections will not be possible without a reasonable turnout on voter registration, albeit, a high increase in voter registration does not necessitate an increase in the total number of votes' casts in any election yet, it forms the basis of any election. It is therefore logical to conclude that voter registration is a basic yardstick for political participation in Nigeria; this is so because without getting registered, a person of voting age will not be allowed to vote. We wish to reiterate that an act of getting registered does not necessarily mean an individual is going to vote, although in actuality an act of registration is supposed to be an

evidence of an individual's determination to vote but this is not pragmatic. Studies have shown that many people get themselves registered for virtually different reasons outside voting itself. Despite reasons ranging from the need to use the voters' card for identification, need to acquire money from the political aspirants or enjoy the benefits of the voter's card, to mention a few, it suffices to note that in Nigeria, because of the excessive feeling of apathy, a great chunk of eligible citizenry do not concern themselves with getting registered when elections are on sight. This was evidential in the last general elections, wherein during the pre-election period, many Nigerians failed to turn-up for the voter registration processes. The low turnout for voter registration in 2014 was so devastating that the electoral body had to persistently extend the registration period; it was such that many weeks away from the elections, people were still registering. In a pre-election report compiled by the Electoral Risk Management (ERM) forwarded to the electoral body INEC, it was revealed that up till the 9th of January 2015, a great chunk of eligible Nigerians have not completed their voter registration processes (ERM, 2015). While some have done the manual aspect of the registration, a lot failed to show up to collect their Permanent Voters Card (PVC). According to the Daily Independent (2014), it was revealed that outside the fact that a good number of Nsukka residents are not coming out to register for the 2015 elections, many of these residents who have been registered are not coming out to collect their cards, which without the registration is incomplete. There were many recorded cases across the country during the pre-election period. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons as to why the elections were eventually postponed was because people failed to come and collect their PVC as expected. It was reported that only around 45.1 million of the 64.8 million registered voters had received PVC's. While there are several reasons that can be given to the low turnout during voter registration in Nigeria, as we shall see in the subsequent discourse, it is important to note that the core factor behind this is apathy. Little wonder why over the years the total number of registered voters in the country has always been irregular despite the persisting increase in the total population of the country. A quick instance of this is the 2011 elections; regardless of the logistical challenges and other irregularities recorded, over 73 million registered voters were documented. But in the 2015 elections, just over 67 million voters were recorded in spite of the increase in the voting age population that was at 91,669,312 million, compared to the 81,691,751 million in 2011. It was against this background that the total percentage of voter turnout in the 2015 Presidential elections declined to 44% compared to the 54% voter turnout in the 2011

elections (see fig.2). This can only mean that the furtherance of the failures of both the political elites and the electoral body to secure the confidence of the rank and file of the Nigerian society has continued to manifest itself during the electioneering processes. The low turnout for voter registration in the country can be well grasped by the mapping given by ERM.



KEY: GREEN (LOW), YELLOW (MEDIUM), WHITE (NO DATA)

Fig 1: A mapped index on voter registration as at the 9th of January, 2015 (ERM, 2015).

This is a reflection of the intense feeling of apathy a great chunk of Nigerians shared towards the 2015 general elections. Despite the importance of the voter registration processes to actual voting itself, people failed to turn-up in their numbers across the federation. It should in fact be noted that this report came in as at when the Election Day has not been rescheduled from the previous 14th of February to the 28th of March. The interpretation of this is that at about a few weeks away from the elections, an amazing number of eligible Nigerians because of the feeling of indifference have refused to turn-up for voter registration. It cannot be gainsaid therefore that the low turnout for voter registration among other factors was one of the primary reasons why the electoral body, INEC had to reschedule the elections dates, postponing it by six weeks. As

indicated in the above mapped index, a mind-blowing number of 26 states recorded low turnout for voter registration, while just 8 states plus the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, recorded a medium turnout, there was no data for Borno state because of the insurgency. There is no doubt that with this report one can easily prognosticate voters' apathy in the elections, for the people en masse failed to engage themselves in the voter registration processes regardless of the noticeable increase in the total population of the voting age. However, it suffices to state at this juncture that perhaps the low turnout for voter registration would not have been so outrageous had not been that several anomalies were of course recorded on the part of the electoral body during the registration of voters and the distribution of the Permanent Voters Card (PVC), this will be well encapsulated in subsequent discussions. Under the context of this work, we will be able to link the rate of apathy recorded during the pre-election period, most especially in the course of voter registration processes, to the general low turnout that was recorded during the main elections.

4.2. ELECTION PHASE AND APATHY

The revelation of apathy was in no doubt more glaring during the 2015 main elections itself, as the case has been with the previous elections. Because the main elections required the eligible citizenry to come out from their different places to cast their votes in designated polling units, it naturally creates an opportunity to quantify the level of apathy under the terminology voter apathy, across the federation. Just like we have looked into the refusal to register for elections by the people, we are at the verge of looking at the rate of the refusal to vote even among those that successfully registered for the elections. This is the main variable in which we use to determine voter apathy in the last general elections in Nigeria. The first election was the Presidential election held on the 28th of March which involved 14 main political parties. Voters also had chance to elect their representatives to the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Governorship elections were held on the 11th of April in 29 states, just two weeks after the Presidential election. As it has been rightly said, despite the electrifying effects of the 2015 elections, in fact it was considered as the most expensive election ever to be held on the African continent yet, the election voter turnout was the lowest ever in Nigeria's democratic history since 1999. The elections in spite of the increase in the population of the voting age in the country was engrossed with high level of voter apathy, this which clearly infers that a great chunk of Nigerians felt the elections were irrelevant to their lives. For this study, we are able to operationalized voter apathy in the last Nigerian elections using the well-known paradigm. By

arriving at the total percentage of voter turnout in the last elections, this study is able to come to the earlier conclusion that voter apathy was most prevalent during the 2015 elections compared to other previous elections. However, the total percentage of the voter turnout can be obtained by dividing the number of total votes cast by the number of registered voters. In the case of the 2015 general election, the total votes cast was 29,432,083 while the number of the registered voters was 67,422,005. To derive our total percentage of voter turnout, we then have to divide 29,432,083 by 67,422,005 which mathematically gave us 43.65, approximately, 44%. The total percentage of the voter turnout in the 2015 general election was 44%, this is the lowest ever compared to the 52% in 1999, 69% in 2003, 57% in 2007 and 54% in 2011 (see fig. 2).

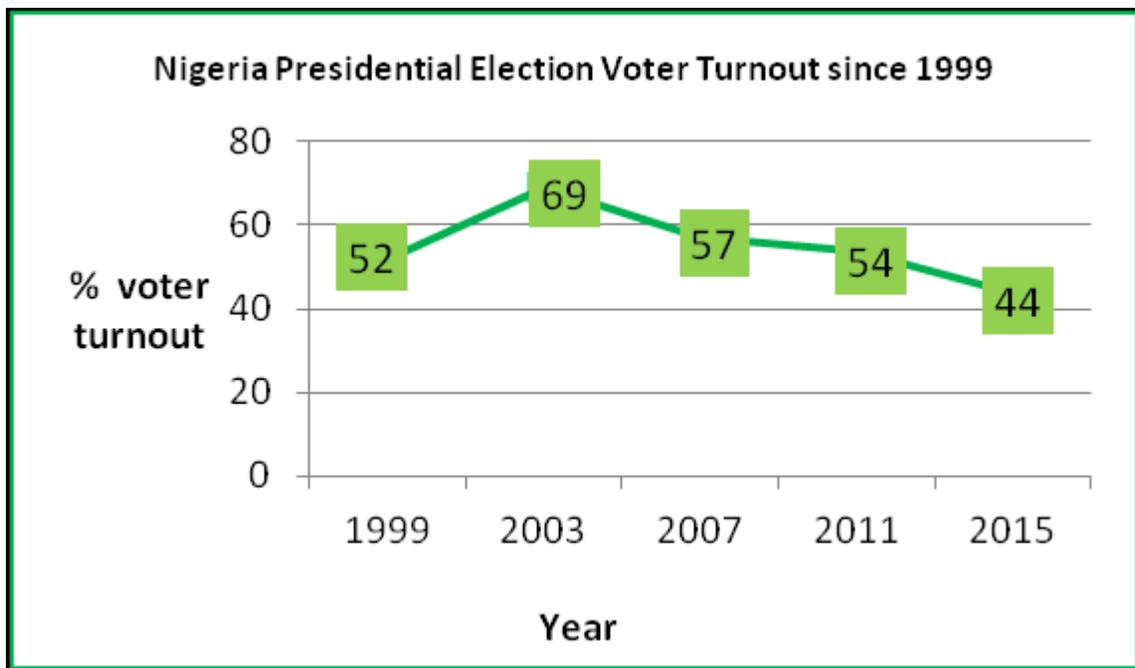


Fig 2: A chart showing approximated total percentage of voter turnout in Nigerian Presidential elections since 1999-2015 (CPP, 2015).

The chart above presents electoral trend of Nigeria at the national level since the return of civil democratic rule. Voter turnout in the year 1999 was at 52%, a turnout many analysts hoped will increase in subsequent elections. In the 2003 Presidential election, the voter turnout was impressive as the country experienced the highest percentage so far standing at 69%. However, the hope for further increase in the voter turnout was crushed when the 2007 election voter turnout declined to 57% despite the boost in the total population of the voting age in the country. And so from 2007 down to present, the voter turnout has been retrogressing, as indicated in the

chart. During the 2011 Presidential election, the voter turnout further reverted to 54%. The 2015 Presidential election was way far from other elections conducted so far, as the voter turnout drastically declined to 44%. Our understanding of voter apathy in the 2015 elections can further be justified by analyzing the number of registered votes and the votes cast, which in actual fact gave us our voter turnout (see fig 3).

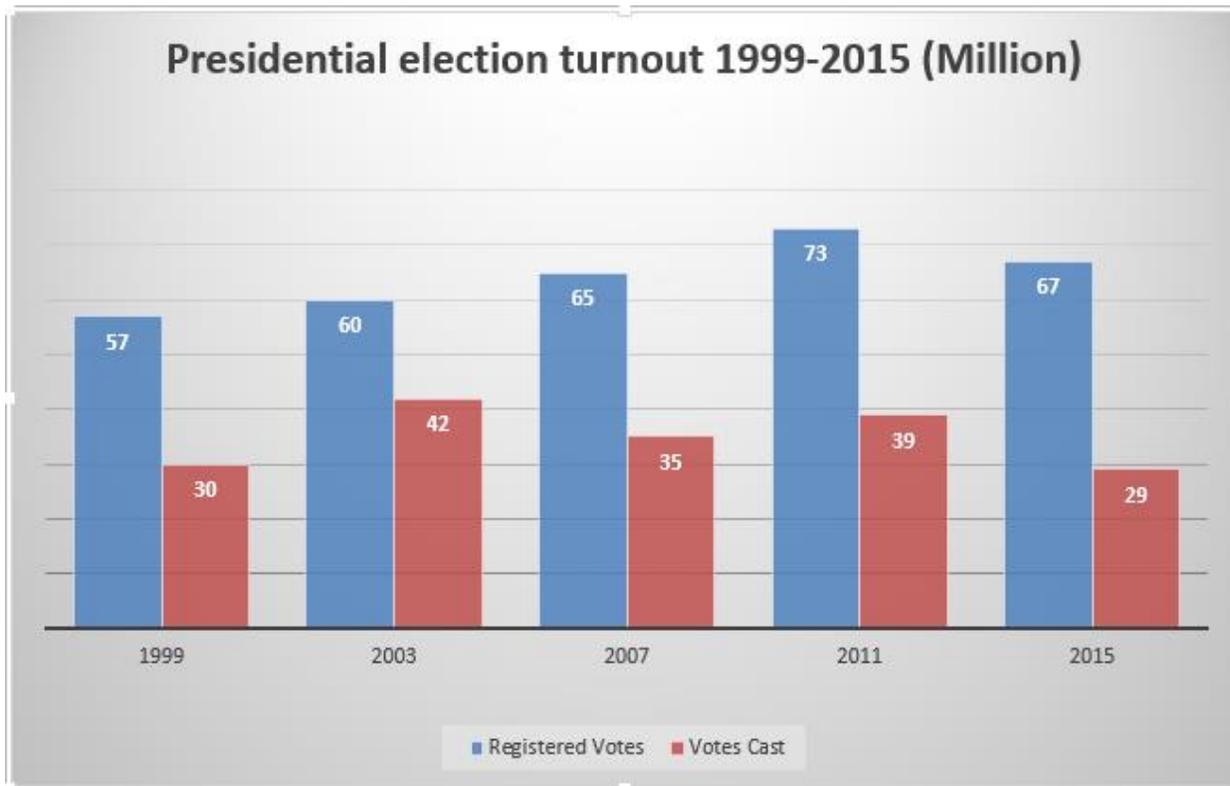


Fig 3: A bar chart showing the total registered votes against total votes cast from 1999-2015 Presidential elections.

We have earlier said registration of voters is a very important aspect of the Nigerian elections, as this prevents any form of rigging or irregularities yet, we stated that registration does not in any way leads to actual voting, as people decides to get registered for different purposes. The above bar chart is an indication that people can get registered but that does not mean they are going to cast any votes. The disparities in the number of registered voters and votes cast in the five bar charts above are beyond belief yet, over the years, little or no attention has been paid to this catastrophe. This is not to say the electoral body has not been trying possible means to mitigate voter apathy in the country but all these efforts have not amounted to any change because of the inconsistency of the body. Starting from the 1999 general election, out of a total population of

108,258,350 million people, only a population of 57,938,945 million people registered as indicated in the 1999 chart above as 57%. However, out of the 57,938,945 million registered voters only the population of 30,280,052 million people actually voted, as represented in the chart as 30%. In 2003 elections, out of an increased population of 129,934,910 million, the number of registered voters increased to 60,823,022 million and quite impressive the number of votes cast increased to 42,081,735 million as indicated in the 2003 chart as 42%. But in the 2007 elections, regardless of both the increase in the total population and the number of registered voters, the total votes cast dropped significantly. With a population of 131,859,730 million people, a number of 65,567,036 million registered voters were recorded but the total votes cast declined to 35,397,627 million as represented in the chart as 35%. This same phenomenon befell the 2011 elections, as with the population of 155,215,570 million and a total number of registered voters as 73,528,040 million, only 39,469,484 million total votes were cast, represented as 39% in the 2011 chart above. In the 2015 election, which of course went down as the most historical election in the history of the country since 1999, a great level of apathy was recorded. Out of 181,562,052 million Nigerians, 67,422,005 million registered voters were recorded, while just 29,432,083 million total votes were recorded, represented as 29% in the chart. The total votes cast in 2015 are the lowest ever since 1999.

The greatest decline in 2015 occurred regardless of the overwhelming effects of the election. The huge sum of money spent on campaigning; money spent on sponsoring hate documentaries and so on, were unable to revive both political and voting participation of the people. With the matchless decline in voter turnout in the 2015 Presidential election, it is therefore self-evident that more than any other time in the history of the country, a great chunk of Nigerians are harbouring the feeling of apathy. Voter apathy is now apparently a cancer that has eaten deep into the Nigerian elections fabric, so much that if nothing is done, what looks like democratic systematization in the country might totally fall to pieces. The low turnout recorded in the 2015 Presidential election for this study can still be proven by analyzing the decline in all the geopolitical zones in the country. The purpose of this analysis is to illuminate the level of apathy shared across the country regionally. Compare to the 2011 outcome, it is of our understanding that all the geopolitical zones except the Southwest region experienced major decline in the voter turnout of the 2015 election (see fig.4). Studies have shown that on a state by state analysis, it is only 13 states out of 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory that were able

to make 50% voter turnout. Lagos State despite its relatively peaceful state recorded the lowest turnout with just 26%. This is a clear indication of the general apathy felt by many Nigerians towards the most expensive elections in the history of the African continent.

Nigeria Presidential election: regional voter turnout		
Zones	2015	2011 approximate
North Central	43.47 ▼	49 ▲
North East	45.22 ▼	56 ▲
North West	55.09 ▼	56 ▲
South East	40.52 ▼	63 ▲
South-South	57.81 ▼	62 ▲
South West	40.26 ▲	32 ▼

Increase ▲

Decrease ▼

Fig 4: A table showing the decline of voter turnout in all the geopolitical zones except South West in the 2015 election with comparison to the 2011 election.

The table above is a further indication of voter apathy during the 2015 Presidential election, as the level of voter turnout geopolitically experienced a major decline, except the South West zone. According to the table, the North Central zone experienced a decline from 49% in voter turnout during the 2011 Presidential election to 43.47% in the 2015 election. In the North East zone, voter turnout fell from 56% in 2011 to 45.22% in 2015, in North West zone from 56% to 55.09%, and in South East zone it decreased from 63% to 40.52%. As represented in the table, the general low voter turnout also affected the South-South zone, as a decline from 62% to 57.81% in 2015 was recorded. However, the only increase in voter turnout experienced was in the South West zone, a zone that ironically recorded the lowest turnout in the 2011 election. Although, in the 2015 election the zone is second in the list of the lowest voter turnout, coming after the South East zone yet, it recorded an increase from 32% in 2011 to 40.26% in 2015. We wish to reiterate that the 2015 elections did not elapse without several irregularities, as issues ranging from arrival of electoral officers, materials, riggings, violence, malfunctioning of

the card reader, underage voting, to mention a few, were all recorded. It is against this backdrop that this paper questioned the general perception that the election represented the true mandate of the generality of the people. But of course the electoral body did initiate enough measures to abate the prevalence of irregularities; nonetheless, this paper is of the stance that the body could have done more. Despite the irregularities observed in the election, it suffices to state that there was no single massive protest recorded, albeit pockets of protest were held in places like Rivers State, Edo States, to mention a few, yet, the fact that there was no massive protest further illuminate the level of voter apathy in the country.

The Voter Apathy Study of this research work, the findings and conclusions by and large are not coming as a total shock. This study in actual fact is an attestation to the widely gained acceptance observation of the democratic institution, Gallup. As the country prepared for the 2015 elections back in 2014, this institution in a survey revealed that only 13% Nigerians express confidence in the honesty of elections (see fig 5).

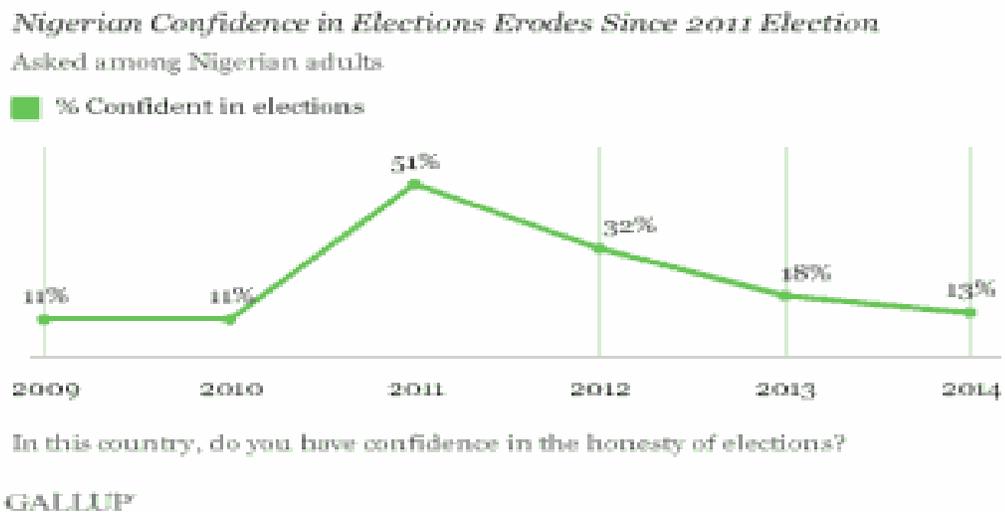


Fig 5: A chart put together by Gallup to determine the confidence of Nigerians in the honesty of elections (Gallup, 2014).

This skepticism shared by many Nigerians over the electioneering processes can be drawn for their past experiences, such as rigging, violence, intimidation and so on. Over the years, accusations of voting rigging, killings, intimidation have largely discredited most of the elections. The 2003 and 2007 general elections were observed by the European Union observers as the worst they had ever come across. Little wonder, that an amazing number of Nigerians have little or no faith in the country’s electoral processes as a result of the past irregularities. In fact,

the Friedrich Elbert Stiffing Foundation in a conducted research did reveal that the lack of transparent elections, election violence and politicians noncommittal to their campaign promises are the major reasons that are responsible for voter apathy in the country (Odebode, 2011). As represented in the chart above, in the year 2009, it was recorded that only 11% of Nigerians have confidence in the electoral processes in the country. In 2011, the percentage increased significantly to 51%, but it dropped to 32% in 2012 and since then it has not been revived. In 2013, it furthered decline to 18% and in 2014, it stood at 13%, of which this was bad for a country that has a general election in about some months' time. At this juncture, we shall be looking at the plausible causes for voter apathy in the 2015 elections, to complement this discourse will be recommendations, if which implemented have the potentials to mitigate voter apathy in Nigeria.

5. CAUSES OF 2015 VOTER APATHY

To discuss the several factors that led to the decline in voter turnout in the 2015 elections, it is germane to state here that as we have seen in the survey given by the democratic institution, Gallup, a great chunk of Nigerians before the elections had no confidence whatsoever in the electoral processes of the country. The sharp decline is a reflection of the people's depreciates feeling towards voting. It is striking to note that in the earliest part of this work, we did mention that different scholars over the years have been able to attributed clearly four main factors that have led to voter apathy across the world. These factors are the contextual and systematic factors, individual and social factors. While this discussion will encompass the whole factors, it is imperative to note that utmost concentration will be on the contextual and systematic factors, because it is the submission of this paper that the individual and social factors are basically the end product of the earlier mentioned factors. Albeit, it cannot be denied that all these factors contributes to the level of voter apathy. Examining the contextual and systematic factors, our major issues surrounds both the model of the political party system and the electoral system, that is the issues that have emanated over the years against voter turnout due to the backwardness of the systems in which the country is operating politically and electorally. These factors are important to our understanding of how the general decline in political participation can have a direct adverse effect on the views of the masses over electioneering processes. Contextual factor is more concerned with the necessary yardsticks to elevate the degree to which citizens believe that different election outcomes lead to significant differences in the direction and impact of

government (IDEA, 2006). Under this context, the competitiveness of the election is also a germane issue, as this has the potential of naturally arousing the interest of the masses. It is against this background that this factor infers that elections must be ideologically and strategically based with lofty issues, as this heightens the electorate's expectations of governmental responsiveness. The nature of the political party is also instrumental to voter turnout. The undemocratic nature of political parties in the country over the years no doubt have cost the country a good number of voters, who believe they are no part of the selection processes within these parties. Under the systematic factor, issues having to do with the model of the electoral system are of major concern. In actuality, this factor probes into how the electoral body, under this context, INEC, handled the pre-election and election processes. However to be candid, it suffices to state that the basic elements responsible for voter apathy in Nigeria are no doubt INEC, the government, politicians, and the media.

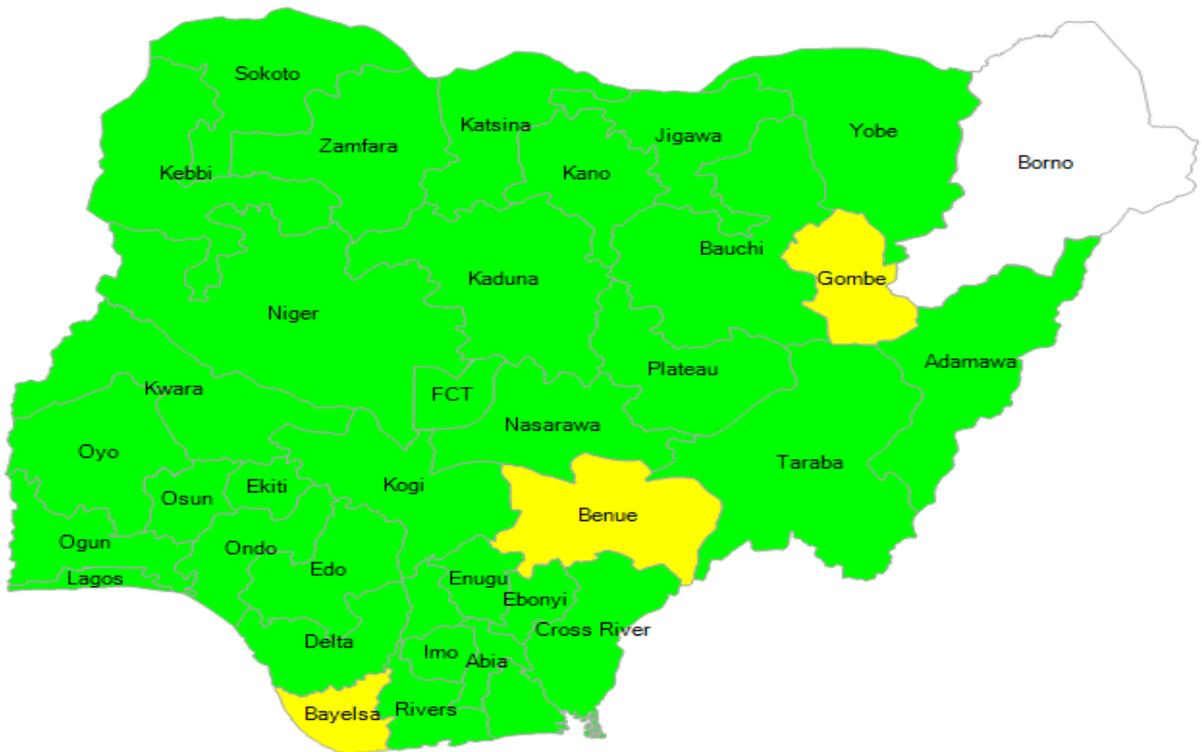
5.1. THE ROLE OF INEC

There is no gainsaying the fact that generally electoral bodies have the most imperative roles to play in mitigating voter apathy. While several electoral bodies globally have taken the initiative in their respective countries, surprisingly the Nigerian electoral body, INEC has refused to rise to the occasion. The possibility of a concise electoral reform has continued to faint in the country. The inability but not unwillingness of the electoral body to manage and administer elections credibly has affected the confidence of the masses in the electoral processes. The electoral body consistently faces similar problems during electioneering periods and instead of mitigating these problems, they persistently get worse. The inability of the body to learn from past mistakes has continued to haunt its reality. Consequently, this has alienated a great chunk of the people from electioneering processes. Several studies carried out have indicated that most voters do not vote because they perceive that their votes do not amount to anything since INEC's conducts more than often has led to wanton cases of irregularities. In the 2015 pre-election period, voter registration was characterized with serious logistical challenges. These challenges unfortunately ended up disenfranchising eligible Nigerians in their lots. The cumbersome nature of the voter registration process as laid down by INEC was majorly responsible for voter apathy at the earliest stage into the election, as evident in the low turnout. An instance is the nationwide complaint that was popularized by several states about the uncomfortable conditions prospective voters had to go through before getting registered for the elections. People were made to queue

under the scorching sun for hours so just to get registered yet, after passing through the stress of getting registered many people could not get their voter's card. The voter's card is important, as it is necessary for voters to possess one before voting. But because of factors ranging from lack of adequate number of officials, mistakes, missing names, electronic failures, to mention a few, many prospective voters were automatically disenfranchised as their cards could not be traced by the electoral officials (Ibrahim, 2015). It is to be noted that the distribution of the PVCs differs from states to states, this which further illuminate the unpreparedness of the electoral body to abate unlawful disenfranchisement. While some states had about seven months during the first phase of registration for the distribution of the cards, some states under the second phase only got a month. Even the Chairman of the electoral body admitted that the slow PVCs distribution was a major challenge in one of the stakeholders meetings (Ibrahim, 2015). At few weeks to the elections, when many eligible Nigerians have not gotten their voter's card, several appeals were made to INEC to shelve aside the usage of the PVCs for people to vote with their temporary voter's card. But the electoral body did not honour this appeal.

In addition, even before actual voting, because of insufficient voter registration materials at the various centres, potential voters in their lots were being turned down more than often, thus setting in the feeling of apathy. During the third phase of the distribution of the PVCs, in November, it was recorded that several residents of Lagos took to the streets to condemn INEC misconducts in the voter registration processes. During the protests, the road to INEC's office was blocked (Chioma, 2014). Many of these residents complained bitterly about the unavailability of the INEC officials to distribute the PVC's. Some residents also complained about registering for the elections but could not locate their names on the INEC list. At the end of the voter registration processes, an amazing number of people were automatically disenfranchised. All these glitches have a way for infusing into the minds of the eligible citizenry a feeling of apathy in the next general elections. Major newspaper outlets during the pre-election period reported several cases of failures in the distribution of the PVCs across the federation. Public outcry and frustration across the federation according to reports, trailed the registration exercise. Non-functional registration centres were recorded across the federation during the exercise, thus excluding potential voters from performing their inalienable right. The timing of the registration processes was widely criticized by the people. Despite the shortage of registration officers, the electoral body in several states slated just 48 hours for registration

exercise. In places like Kano, Jigawa and several other Northern states, people had to take to the streets to demand for the extension of the hours. In Kano, the electoral body was forced to extend the registration exercise by 24 hours (Chioma, 2014). The most noticeable reason over the failure of INEC to intensify en masse participation in the voter registration exercise was the inability to create awareness. Voter education was not done properly most especially in the rural areas. There was not concrete voter education to bring to the awareness of the people that the distribution of PVCs was still on, this which explains the major low turnout in the collection of the cards generally. In the report of ERM, as at the 9th of January, there was no state across the federation that recorded a high citizens' turnout during the distribution of PVCs (see fig 6).



KEY: GREEN (LOW), YELLOW (MEDIUM), WHITE (NO DATA)

Fig 6: A mapped index on citizens' turnout during the collection of PVCs as at the 9th of January, 2015 (ERM, 2015).

Many reports have shown that during the registration exercise several complaints were made by potential voters against the electoral officials in charge of the registration. Many of these officials were said to have lacked the basic techniques in handling minor issues during the processes. In Anambra, reports had it that in Awka, Onitsha and several other places, people had to demand from INEC qualified officials (Ibrahim, 2015). This must have naturally prevented

several potential voters from continuing with the processes. In handling the pre-election events, it suffices to state here that the electoral body performed poorly. The electoral body despite its statutory powers failed to regulate the electioneering processes in terms of the modus of campaigns by the political parties and unbiased media coverage to all the political parties. This paper is of the opinion that INEC failed in ensuring that the political parties in their campaigns stick to basic lofty issues in order to attract the interest of potential voters. Like other electoral bodies more than often challenge existing political parties in their various countries during pre-election periods to strive to be ideological and issues based in the course of their electioneering, one would have thought INEC was going to follow suit. But this was not the case as reports have it that campaigns of most of the existing political parties involved in the 2015 elections were devoid of basic fundamental issues. The campaigns of many of the parties were stuffed with petty issues, hate speeches, these which basically have its own way of discouraging potential voters from getting involved in the elections, which many considered to be less or not facts-based.

Since electoral campaigns are to be neutral so as to supply potential voters with adequate information to help construct their choices, this paper is of the opinion that the electoral body without any form of doubt has major roles to play in this aspect. During the elections, the media outlets were used as a mouthpiece to some selected political parties thus, denying the potential voters the necessary information needed to construct their opinions positively. The Nigerian masses in their lots had cause to listen, watch and read of several hate, baseless speeches sponsored by political parties against one another therefore, misinforming the society at large. In the 2015 elections, it was widely known that the gubernatorial elections held two weeks after the presidential election experienced the lowest turnouts, as eligible voters failed to come out en masse. Investigations have revealed that both the electoral body and the media were responsible for the low turnout. The electoral body fixed the election just two weeks after the presidential election thus making it rather difficult or too expensive for potential voters to return to their respective states to cast their votes. During the pre-election period, it was no news that the several media outlets were most interested in the presidential elections than the states elections; as such the people naturally became more involved with the presidential election at the detriment of the states'. The federal politics was given more media coverage than the state politics. Away from the pre-election period, it is important to state that the cumbersome nature of the voting

process set aside by INEC was also responsible for voter apathy, as a great chunk of registered voters failed to turn-up for accreditation. It was generally expressed that the fact that voters had to queue under the scorching sun for hours so just to cast their votes prevented a number of voters even with their PVCs from voting. Because of the widely witnessed failure of the Smart Card Readers (SCRs) in the polling units, investigations revealed that several voters failed to perform their civil duties by not voting. Voters were not encouraged by the electoral body as result of the hitches experienced by the card readers, as the machine failed to detect the fingerprints of many registered voters. The ex-President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan who was contesting under the platform of PDP was not spared of the card reader hitches and so his wife and other prominent politicians across the federation. Several reports also have it that during the elections many of the electoral officials were not adequately trained. The handling and operation of the card reader machine revealed that many of these officials were not well trained. It was therefore not too surprising that there was a huge disparity between the registered voters and the accredited voters. Instances can be drawn from states like Osun, Abia, Enugu, Ogun and several other states. In Osun, the total number of registered voters was put at 1,378,113 million however; it was only 683,169 thousand that were accredited. In Abia, while 1,349,134 million registered, only 442,538 thousand were accredited. In Enugu, 1,381,563 million registered and 616,112 thousand were accredited. And in Lagos, 5,827,846 million got registered and only 1,678,754 million were accredited.

On the basis of these figures, it cannot be gainsaid that an amazing number of people failed to turn-up for the elections because of issues arising from the cumbersome nature of the voting exercise. Reports have it that in Ward 11, Unit 1, Amukankan of Abeokuta, Ogun State, 500 names were in the voter register, but surprisingly only 9 voters were able to vote, while others did not because of the PVCs (Gbenga, 2015). Similar scenarios occurred in several communities during the elections, potential voters were disenfranchised by the inability of the electoral body to conduct an unproblematic voting exercise. Nonetheless, it is commendable that the electoral body could come up with the introduction of new forms of technology, but it is only proper when these new innovations are enhancing voter turnout and not worsening it. The late arrival of the electoral officials was among several issues that were recorded across the country on the days of elections. Voting materials in most polling units did not arrive on time. It is quite unfortunate to note that in most polling units across the country, accreditation process did not

commence not until 4.00 pm, this was for elections that were expected to be concluded by 4.00 pm (National Daily, 2015). In most polling booths, activities continued well into the night. The low turnout recorded in the gubernatorial elections therefore came against the backdrop of the experiences of the people during the presidential election. All the enumerated factors above no doubt are some of the major reasons as to why the 2015 elections were bedeviled with voter apathy.

5.2. THE ROLE OF POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The role played by both the politicians and the political parties they represent are basically one of the primary realities that continues to trigger voter apathy in Nigeria. Because people have the perception that elections are meant to enhance economic growth and development, it therefore naturally comes unjust when elections are not playing these roles. Under the Nigerian context, the sustained periodic elections over the years have failed to improve the living conditions of the voters as a result of the failure of the politicians to keep to their campaign promises. This reality has formed the irrefutable conclusion of a great chunk of the people that elections does not have any value whatsoever, as it does not correlate to neither growth nor development. The general feeling of apathy has been formed by the people against the background that electoral outcomes do not have either direct or indirect positive effects on their livelihoods. Investigations, reports of all kinds have attested to the fact that Nigerian elections over the years have brought in successful candidates into the corridors of power but surprisingly candidates who do not either keep at all or bother to follow up on their campaign promises. It cannot be denied that since 1999 to 2015, Nigerian electorates have been fantasized to rely on the promises of the politicians in providing the basic social amenities. The sad reality is that Nigerian politicians are most known for their dubious, insincere attributes. Campaign promises are jettisoned once the politicians are being declared victorious, thus denying the people of their mandate. One of this study's respondents expressed that;

I didn't bother to vote, why do I have to vote?

The truth we must face is that those in power don't care about us, and we will be fooling ourselves thinking our votes are going to make any difference. It does not matter who emerges victorious, they will still dupe us like they have always done (Irabor, 2015).

This is a clear position of a great chunk of Nigerians who did not bother to turn-up during the 2015 general elections. As such, there is a great deal of disconnect between people, that is the electorates and their supposed representatives in political offices. Nigerians in their lots therefore view politics as a platform where individuals venture into primarily to enrich themselves at the detriment of the country. The point is that while the political elites awash with fabulous wealth and luxury by involving in primitive accumulation and impunity acquisition of wealth, those whose votes brought them into power, the teeming population, continue to wail in abject poverty. Little wonder, that even the countless billions of Naira lavished on campaigns of the 2015 elections did not to any length enhance voters' turnout. On the contrary, the wasteful, senseless spending ended up scaring eligible Nigerians away from both the registration and voting exercises. People more than ever were uninterested in putting politicians into political offices where they can pursue their own personal interests. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, a general low turnout was recorded as people in their numbers are beginning to question the rationale behind voting when their so called leaders do not represent their priorities. It is also an undeniable fact that in Nigeria, parliamentarians do not in any way represent their distinct constituencies, on the other hand they represents their pockets, their self-comforts. Reports have shown that the parliamentarians are most often interested in partisan issues, issues having to do with the protection and promotion of their impunity acquisitions instead of germane issues having to do with their constituencies. While those they are meant to represent are living in miseries, while they are languishing in poverty, the parliamentarians are often busy with the luxurious life of Abuja and other urban centres. The verdict of the people therefore is that by and large, the politicians and the system they represent have failed them, the politicians in the country's dispensation are the oppressors, ensuring the marginalization of those that brought them into power, and thus the only way the people have decided to respond to this misfortune is by staying away from the polling booths. It is of the stance of this paper that the 2015 elections recorded a major low voter turnout because of the unprincipled, unideological nature of the existing political parties also. The Nigerian politics is very unprincipled that politicians cross carpet from one political party to the other in order to suit their ambitious tendency. Prior to the general election, the APC was joined by several former loyalists of PDP in order to secure relevance in the political dispensation of the country. This only poses danger to the so called democratic survival of the country, as this has a direct way of accelerating voter apathy. The

effect of the groundless decamping of former loyalists of PDP to APC is that a good number of Nigerians felt cheated, they felt the whole scenario is about having the same old wine in a new bottle, thus the enthusiasm was not there during the electioneering processes. And the most frustrating aspect of this reality is that the people are virtually powerless in abating the continuance of such baseless decamping, and as a way of accepting this fact, many potential voters decided not to perform their civil duties.

In a sane society, political parties are the basic prerequisites in a democracy as they provide the platform in which people are being engaged politically. Political parties formulate conceivable policies to move the economy and the lives of the people forward. However, political parties in Nigeria over the years have failed woefully in delivering what is supposed to be their basic functions to the rank and file of the society. This is not actually coming as a total shock because these parties are of a fact devoid of any ideological clarity or conviction. This of course makes it easy for some of the party members of these various parties to be able to decamp easily. Nigerian political parties since 1999, and in fact before, have been most involved in what can best be called money politics; this has been most reverberating among both the ruling party and the major oppositions. This can only be the situation owing to the fact that those going into politics in this part of the world are doing so on the basis of selfish and parochial interests. Political parties in Nigeria are widely known to be most plagued with high level of party indiscipline and lack of internal democracy. That is to say while these parties hoodwink the masses that they are the nuts and bolts of democracy, their own house-system is usually far from democratic. Ideology is the basis of any political party in most countries; in fact many scholars have posited that the first and the most important vehicle of a political party, under an ideal situation, should be its ideological stance (Shola, 2009). But in a country like Nigeria over the years, ethnicity and religion have taken the place of ideology. Investigations have revealed that basically there is nothing to choose between the whole political parties existing in the country on the basis of ideological learning. None of these parties have convincing policies that are to be used as a basis for mobilization among the masses. The implication of this is that these parties are evidently not in competition with one another, as a result the interests of the masses are naturally missing. The bareness of ideology has made many of these political parties to always sweet-talk the masses on the basis of ethnicity and religion during electioneering period, the 2015 pre-election period was not guiltless. This was the case as there were several reports of

prominent politicians openly lobbying for the votes of Nigerians on the basis of ethnic and religious inclinations. Consequently, instead of political parties effecting growth and development in the country, they are widely known among the populace, at least the conscious ones, to be tools for promoting sectionalism and opportunism. It can therefore be argued that reasons for voter apathy are not just based on the voters feeling that their votes would not be counted, but also on the basic fact that there is this feeling among Nigerian voters that there is often so little to choose from among the existing political parties.

The undemocratic nature of nomination of candidates has always been another pointer to the backwardness of Nigerian political parties, this which in turn more than often scares potential voters away from elections. Through the primary election system many Nigerians are usually of the opinion that the parties are fond of imposing candidates on them to contest in elections. The 2015 elections were of course involved in this undemocratic system, as parties had primary elections amongst their chief members only to nominate their candidates for the elections, an act which many considered autocratic. The point is that over the years, the primary elections have failed to provide the people with credible leaders and outside from this, the elections have always been awash with several irregularities ranging from violence, threats, riggings, to mention a few. According to the ERM report, during the pre-election period, there was a widespread of rejection of primary results by contestants. Also in this report it was indicated that violence broke out during party primaries across the federation, most especially in Ondo, Delta, Rivers and Abia (ERM, 2015). It therefore suffice to state at this juncture that the seemingly unending gap between those who govern and those being governed appears to be one of the fundamental reasons for low electoral participation in the 2015 elections.

5.3. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Several works on low turnout in elections have suggested that voter apathy is accelerating in most African countries because electoral violence over the long years has created and still create an atmosphere of apprehension in the minds of the potential voters. Against the backdrop of this reality, eligible voters have decided to stay put in their various places during electioneering processes in order not to become victims of electoral violence. In Nigeria, this is more pronounced. This is so as electoral violence has continued to prevent potential voters from performing their civil duties. Prevalent forms of electoral violence often take the form of assassinations, arsons, thuggery, discriminations, snatching of ballot boxes, to mention a few.

While intra-party violence is a phenomenon in the country, that is the eruption of violence among members of the same political party, inter-party violence over the years, this which usually involves two or more political parties has always been prevalent. The sad reality of this violence is that it does not only involve just party members and supporters but also the innocent members of the public usually share the brunt of electoral violence. Despite the beef up in security across the federation for the 2015 elections, reports have it that over 50 people were killed during the presidential election. There was reported violence in Rivers state where about four deaths including that of a soldier were recorded in election-related violence. This was in spite of the 360,000 police officers deployed nationwide at strategic areas with sniffer dogs also as well as mobilization of the army (DSM, 2015). As a social factor, there is no denying the fact that electoral violence over the years has been a major clog in electoral participation in Nigeria. The fierce struggle to win elections and control state apparatuses and invariably exploit the situation for self-aggrandizement has always been the basis of electoral violence in Nigeria. The general perception in Nigeria is that elections are a matter of do or die affair, as such eligible Nigerians are always skeptical of participating in any of the electioneering processes. The 1999, 2003, 2007 and most importantly the 2011 elections in Nigeria have been rife with several cases of electoral violence, during the 2011 elections alone, over a thousand lives were lost to post-election violence. All these factors must have no doubt discouraged a good number of eligible Nigerians from participating in the 2015 elections. Because of the increasing violence in Nigeria, the political climate in the country has been deeply rooted in hostility, uncertainty and instability. The recorded violence in Rivers state clearly explains the effects that hate-speeches can have during an election. In the pre-election period, it was widely aired that political aspirants in the state instead of campaigning with their supposed innovative ideas to project the state and the teeming population forward, were most concerned with hate-speeches. This of course manifested itself during the actual voting exercise, as organized assassinations were recorded in Rivers state. This was the same scenario in some other states. This paper is of the opinion that electoral violence as a matter of fact can be abated by INEC, if only the body would arise to the occasion. This can be done by setting compulsory guidelines for the politicians and their political parties that will ensure a violence-free electoral process. And in addition, it will be expected from the electoral body to further its obligated voter education mission to the nooks and crannies of the country, as a way of educating the masses about their political rights. The education is apparently

germane owing to the fact that over the years the field actors of this violence have always been the poor masses who are vulnerable to the exploitation of the political elites who are the real instigators, because of their miserable state. The factors behind voter apathy in the 2015 Nigerian elections can be numerous and complex but we have been able to sub-group these factors into contextual, systematic and social factors. These factors no doubt touch on all aspects of electioneering processes. At this juncture, we shall be examining our findings on the field in the course of interaction with our 1,000 respondents on the basic reason behind their refusal to be involved in the 2015 electoral processes.

6. 2015 VOTER APATHY FIELD RESEARCH

The importance of this field research is basically to complement the secondary sources that have guided this work so far with the results from the fieldwork carried out in Lagos state. The focus group discussion was carried out in Lagos because it is the second most populated city in the country after Kano. However, the fieldwork was most importantly carried out in Lagos since the state despite its vast population was said to have recorded the lowest voters' turnout in the 2015 general elections, with 29% voter turnout, while Rivers state recorded the highest voter turnout with 71%. With a total number of 5,827,846 registered potential voters, quite depressing, only 1,495,975 people actually voted in Lagos during the March, 28th elections. The fieldwork was basically focused on eligible set of Nigerians, men, women and youths dwelling in separate local governments. In six major local governments in Lagos, our respondents were randomly selected. The selected local government areas are Agege, Alimosho, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, Surulere, and Ikeja. These local governments were selected on the basis of their sizes and importance in the state. The rationale for selecting these different local governments is to find out if the perceptions, opinions of the respondents will differ from one another over the electoral processes in general in the country and on issues having to do with their feeling of apathy. The 2015 voter apathy field research was carried out from the 1st of June to the 15th of June, 2015. The field research was carried out on a representative sample of 1,000 respondents. Potential voters were given questionnaires and few of these respondents were interviewed across the earlier mentioned local governments to provide empirical information on the causes of voter apathy, as such all the respondents engaged did not vote during the 2015 elections despite the fact that many had their PVCs with them. To fast-track the data collection from these local governments, the researcher employed the support of two research assistants. The research team dispatched to various local

governments in the first week that is from the 1st of June to the 7th of June, covering Agege, Alimosho and Mushin local governments. In the second week (8th of June to 14th June) the research team was able to cover Oshodi-Isolo, Surulere and Ikeja local governments. While the last day of the field research, that is the 15th of June, was used by the lead researcher for data processing, as the collated questionnaires were processed and entered adequately by the researcher. The demographic characteristics of the citizenry engaged as said earlier were 1,000. In the fieldwork, 600 (60%) males and 400 (40%) females were involved. This field research focused mainly on civil servants, artisans, undergraduate students, and menial workers. The rationale behind the use of the listed set of eligible Nigerians was based on the fact that many under this category have the utmost tendencies of not involving themselves in electioneering processes. It is important to state that all the 1,000 respondents were literates in English and Yoruba; as such the questionnaires were well understood. The mean age of the respondents was 24:70. The research team distributed 200 questionnaires in each local government except Surulere and Ikeja local governments, where 100 questionnaires each were distributed. The respondents were required to circle either “Yes” or “No”. About 47% of the respondents were self-employed, while 39% were employed and the remaining 14% were undergraduate students. In all it should be noted that about 65% of the respondents had PVCs, while 35% did not have PVCs. That is to say 65% were registered for the 2015 elections but they did not vote and 35% were not registered at all. The research revealed that most of the respondents that actually registered for the 2015 elections did so not because they were interested in voting but they did so against the backdrop of the importance of the voters’ card. Most of the 35% of the respondents that did not register for the elections posited that they were not just interested in the voter registration exercise. One of the registered respondents interviewed expressed that;

I decided to register for the elections not
because i was interested in voting,

I just needed the voters’ card in my place of work (Jerome, 2015).

Another respondent interviewed for not registering for the elections at all did say;

I was never interested in the processes right from day one,

I have work to do and family to feed

or is INEC going to feed my children for me (Adenike, 2015)?

The table below is a descriptive data on the reasons behind both the failure to register and for registering for the 2015 elections among the respondents.

Reasons for registering	Reasons for not registering
1. was mandated to register= 122	was involved in other activities= 62
2. for the purpose of voting= 13	was uninterested in the processes= 128
3. usage of the voters' card= 357	because of the level of insecurity= 22
4. was just interested= 158	hitches of the voter registration= 138
Total registered= 650	Total unregistered= 350

It is apparent from the above that a great chunk of the respondents shared utmost feeling of apathy prior to the 2015 elections because of most of the already discussed issues. The data above depicts the responses from the respondents on the significance of voter registration during the pre-election period. As depicted in the table, most of the respondents decided to register for the elections not because they hoped on voting but on the basis of the importance of the voters' card. While a small number of 13 respondents posited that they registered for the elections primarily to vote but as said earlier on, they were not able to cast their votes eventually because of distinctive reasons. Some other respondents also espoused that they decided to register for the elections on the ground that it was mandated for them and for some; they were just interested in the exercise. On the other hand, about 138 respondents espoused that they refused to register for the 2015 elections primarily because of the overwhelming hitches of the voter registration exercise. We have earlier posited that the voter registration was majorly bedeviled with several irregularities, these which automatically made potential voters uninterested in the exercise. Other reasons stated in the table for refusing to register for the elections include the busy schedule of the respondents, the feeling of indifference in the processes and the level of insecurity in the country. It can therefore be sum-up that many of these respondents who eventually did not participate in the voting exercise had different issues with the electioneering processes. In order to trace voter apathy in the 2015 elections, the respondents were given the task of identifying the very stage during the electioneering processes when they eventually opted out. The stages

classified in the questionnaire were the pre-election and the election periods. Under the pre-election period, voter registration, campaigns, and political party activities were stipulated in the questionnaire. Under the election period, the voting process was the only factor stipulated in the questionnaire. The table below is an analysis of the findings of this fieldwork on the particular stages in manifestation of voter apathy by the respondents in the course of the 2015 elections.

Stages of voter apathy	Yes	%	No	%
1. Voter Registration	287	29%	714	71.3%
2. Campaigns	178	18%	822	82.2%
3. Political party activities	346	35%	654	65.4%
4. Voting processes	189	19%	811	81.1%

The table above represents the answers gotten from the respondents on the different stages they opted out from the 2015 electioneering processes. It appears that from the first stage, which is on voter registration, about 287 potential voters began to nurse feelings of indifference over the elections. Reasons ranging from the hitches of the voter registration exercise and the unsuccessful registration of some of these respondents were responsible for the feeling of apathy. Under this stage, a number of 714 respondents revealed that they had no issue with the registration exercise. The second stage is on campaigns, as depicted in the table, 178 respondents became uninterested in the 2015 elections because of the uncompetitive nature of the political campaigns of many of the aspirants. This implies that the failure of the electoral campaigns to be rooted in policy and fundamental issues was responsible for 178 respondent's apathy, as campaigns prior to the elections were based on pettiness. In this stage, 822 respondents posited that the backwardness of the electoral campaigns was not the factor that prevented them from performing their civic duties. In the third stage, 346 respondents espoused that the undemocratic nature, activities of the existing political parties disgusted them from engaging in the 2015 elections. While a number of 654 respondents identified that the activities of the political parties were not major reasons they opted out for the elections. The last stage which is on voting processes depicted that 189 respondents became unconcerned in the 2015 elections as a result of the recessive voting processes, while 811 thought of other issues as to why they did not perform their civic duties. By and large, it is evident that most of the respondents have no confidence

whatsoever in the political parties, as such many decided to stay away from electioneering processes. On the question over the specific bodies responsible for voter apathy, respondents were required to choose between the options of the electoral body, politicians, media and the security agencies.

Bodies responsible for voter apathy in 2015 elections	Total no	Total %
Independent National Electoral Body (INEC)	397	39.7%
Politicians	403	40.3%
Media	143	14.3%
Security Agencies	57	5.7%

In the table above, it is evident that a great chunk of the respondents are of the opinion that the politicians are the major elements responsible for the voter apathy experienced during the 2015 electioneering processes. The politician's involvement in this unfortunate reality that has bedeviled Nigerian elections over the years has been well analyzed in the preceding discussions, but it should be noted that in approaching the failures of the politicians one can rarely detached the discussion from the regressive nomenclature of the existing political parties. The failure of the politicians over the years to fulfill their electoral promises has continued to deter eligible citizenries from performing their civic duties. While 403 respondents believed that the politicians are majorly the ones behind voter apathy, about 397 respondents held the electoral body, INEC responsible for the widespread low voter turnout. The fewest number of the respondents fingered the security agencies for voter apathy on the basis of their failure to provide security for the potential voters during the pre-election period. On the whole, the 1,000 respondents were asked to identify the main reason behind voter apathy in the 2015 elections. In the list of these reasons are electoral fraud, violence, hectic electoral processes or voting processes and nonfulfillment of electoral promises. In the results of this particular research it was adduced by most of the respondents that the nonfulfillment of electoral promises by the politicians was the most significant factor that affected their participation in the 2015 electioneering processes.

L.G.A	Voting processes	Electoral fraud	Violence	Nonfulfillment of electoral promises
Agege	45	40	28	87
Alimosho	64	17	40	79
Mushin	48	18	53	81
Oshodi	73	30	22	75
Surulere	40	15	11	34
Ikeja	31	13	15	41
Total	301	133	169	397

The table above clearly depicts the responses from the totality of the 1,000 respondents this fieldwork basically relied upon. This data further aided our understanding as to why a good number of eligible Nigerians failed to participate in the just concluded 2015 elections. Voter apathy as we have seen hitherto is a consequence of several factors; however, as represented in the table, there are perhaps some most significant factors. Out of the four stated reasons, adduced by the respondents for voter apathy in the 2015 elections, nonfulfillment of electoral promises and voting processes were the most fingered factors. With a total number of 397 respondents across the six local government areas, the failure of the political elites to keep to their promises during campaigns was the primary reason why a good number of eligible Nigerians failed to perform their civic duties. Second to this is the hectic electoral processes many prospective Nigerian voters could not bear for several reasons, as such many decided to stay away from the registration and automatically the voting exercises. What this simply means is that nonfulfillment of electoral promises and the strenuous electoral processes are more crucial in determining voter apathy in the last elections, other than the factor of violence and the factor of electoral fraud, which are of course crucial in their own rights.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to empirically examine the fundamental reasons behind voter apathy, using the 2015 election. The dramatic decline in voter turnout in the 2015 general elections surprisingly despite its devastating state did not exert a pull on the interest of many Nigerians, as at the moment many are still euphoric about the outcome of the elections. The widespread low turnouts recorded in the elections are clear indications that great deals of things

are still fundamentally wrong with the country's overall electoral processes. The deteriorating significance of the electioneering processes has continued to force potential voters in their numbers away from elections in the country. This misfortune in actuality should call for a great concern primarily because while decline in voter turnout is a general phenomenon, persistent low voters' turnout is threatening the survival of any country's democratic paradigm under whatsoever political system. If the current declining trends in voter turnout are therefore not immediately mitigated against by relevant stakeholders, there will be a huge threat to the aspirations of the country in achieving a functioning democracy. To have thought that the country was going to experience a major low voters' turnout in the 2015 general elections, in spite of the increase in the total population of the people, sends an impending state of vulnerability of the country's so called democracy. It is against this background that this study has been able to identify the plausible factors responsible for voter apathy or the recorded low turnout, with utmost concentration on the 2015 elections. These factors in entirety touch upon all aspects of the country's electoral cycle. From factors emanating from the management and administration of the electoral processes, also known as the contextual factors down to the systematic organization of political parties, modus operandi during electioneering periods, and also the social factors, voter turnout are usually been influenced either positively or negatively. As we have espoused in this study, the electioneering processes in the country instead of encouraging mass participation during elections have been responsible for discouraging potential voters in their lots. This is not coming as a total shock as investigations, reports have revealed that the 2015 general elections was characterized with voter apathy because issues like hectic voting and registration processes, pockets of violence, electoral frauds, nonfulfillment of electoral promises reared their ugly heads during the electioneering processes. Arising from the foregoing, the following recommendations have been proffered.

The basic truth is that voter mobilization is a fundamental antidote for voter apathy. But this will not be possible without the coming together of relevant stakeholders to get organized to ensure maximum mass participation in electioneering processes. The seemingly stakeholders under this context are the electoral body, INEC, politicians, the media and the government. There is no doubt that there is a need to restructure, empower INEC for the purpose of ensuring improvement in the administration of the electoral processes. This is very germane, for if the confidence of the people is to be attracted INEC must as a matter of fact effect in house changes

that have the tendencies of having it commanding public respect as an electoral body. Some of the urgently needed areas for changes include;

1. The electoral body should be independent from the influence of the head of the executive arm of government, which is the President. The President power to appoint and dissolve the head of the electoral body has to be abolished. This is important in ensuring the maximum autonomy of the body in discharging its management and administration duties over electoral processes.
2. The electoral body for the purpose of efficiency has to break the burden of having to depend on the political elites for funding before discharging its duties and obligations. This is very fundamental in ensuring the self-reliance of the body as this has way of having the electoral officers owing allegiance to the politicians.
3. There is need for well-planned, comprehensive training programmes for the electoral staff. In order to ensure competence, INEC must as a matter of fact be awash with permanent staff. Some competent NYSC staff periodically could be employed permanently.
4. The electoral body has to device means of always engaging the citizenries periodically on relevant issues having to do with knowing their political rights. Voters' education should be intensified.
5. INEC relevance must not only be felt during elections, adequate structures must be put in place to encourage prospective voters by ensuring that politicians and their political parties are accountable to the masses.
6. Voter registration and voting exercises are meant to be stress free in order to attract the attention of potential voters. Early arrival of election materials is also a way of enticing the general public.
7. To further improve the electioneering processes the electoral body has to rise to the occasion of setting the electioneering guidelines for the political parties in order to prevent the outbreak of pre-election, election and post-election violence.
8. INEC as a way of attracting en masse participation has to not only urge political parties but also set the rules of campaigning, which should be based on ideological issues and not on pettiness, which consequently has intensified voter apathy in the country.

9. INEC should devise measures to ensure internal democracy among the existing political parties on aspect having to do with party primaries.
10. For proper correspondence, INEC should ensure a great deal of compliance with electoral procedures throughout the country during electioneering processes.
11. Because of the level of backwardness of many of the political parties, INEC has to insist on the distribution of their manifestoes among the rank and file of the Nigerian society in order to reduce voter apathy.
12. INEC in order to further encourage en masse participation have to allow independent candidacy in the electioneering processes.

Political parties and politicians as we have rightly pointed out in this study play one of the fundamental contributory roles towards voter apathy in the country. Besides it has been allude by many of our respondents that the politicians played the most instigating roles towards their failure to participate in the 2015 elections. This study has revealed that the existing political parties in the country lack well-articulated polices, programmes because they are devoid of any ideological conviction, as such a great chunk of Nigerians perceives many of these parties as the same. This factor has affected the interests of Nigerian youths, despite the fact that they are the most populated, as many are uninterested in the country's elections because of the failure of the political class. It is against this background that a good number of this study's respondents failed to perform their civic duties. Reforms have to be made under this context in order to mitigate the increasing feeling of apathy by the people.

1. Politicians and the political parties they represent have to begin to articulate the essence of their existence to the rank and file of the Nigerian society, in form of stating clearly their ideologies, if they have any, and their distinctive policies and programmes.
2. Politicians during campaigns for the purpose of attracting the attention of the potential voters have to raise concrete, lofty issues devoid of hate-speeches, thus furthering preventing the outburst of any violence.
3. One crucial issue that has long detached an amazing number of eligible Nigerians from both the politicians and the political parties they represent is the persistent failure of these politicians to fulfill their electoral promises. Politicians for the purpose of encouraging voters' turnout as a matter of fact must all time fulfill their promises.

4. Over the years the inability of the Nigerian political parties to embrace internal democracy has estranged them from a good number of Nigerians. Political parties have to embrace and promote intra-party democracy as this has its own way of projecting them well in the eyes of the people. The masses as a matter fact must not be alienated from the so called party primaries activities.
5. The inability of many of these political parties to accept defeat, most especially the two well-known political parties, whenever they lose has caused the country many lives. Parties have to therefore learn ways to accept election results without any form of manipulation. The concept of politics of “do or die” has to be jettisoned.
6. Political parties and politicians to encourage en masse participation during electioneering processes have to be responsible by obeying the rules and regulations of the electoral body, INEC. Parties have to desist from attempting to bribe both the electorates and the electoral officers during voting exercise.

The media no doubts plays unprecedented roles during electioneering processes, as they are in fact the most closest to the people. In Nigeria, most media outlets however, are yet to grasp their significances during electioneering processes, as many are often cajoled to be the mouthpiece of distinctive political parties, thus depriving the masses of unbiased, fair reportage on the contesting political parties. The 2015 elections witnessed several media outlets playing the propagators for major aspirants by airing hate documentaries against their opponents, this which in actual sense can lead to violence. It is therefore of our candid suggestion that the following reforms must be made;

1. With regard to the state-owned media outlets, it is fundamental that the President or the Governors, as the case might be, refrains from appointing the Director General and the Board, as this is basically ridiculous, for these media outlets activities will always be pro-government in power, thus misinforming the public about several issues.
2. In addition, the state-owned media outlets have to be financially independent from the government in order to be able to ensure unbiased coverage or reportage.
3. The media outlets in order to ensure en masse participation during electioneering processes must work with the electoral body, INEC, in sharing reports about paid advertisements and nature of advertisements for the purpose of not hindering the people’s participation.

4. The media outlets during electioneering period have the responsibility of educating potential voters about the elections in order to elevate their interests.
5. Media outlets in respect of their journalistic ethics have to refrain from accepting bribes from the politicians and the political parties they represent, as this is detrimental to fair hearing in the course of the electoral processes.

Government roles in ensuring en masse participation during the electioneering processes cannot be overemphasized. This is so against the backdrop that in fact the legitimacy of any government largely depends on the numbers of votes that brought such government into power. Since democracy is a game of numbers and electioneering is also a game of numbers, it is therefore germane for all governments to try as much as they can in their various countries to ensure utmost participation from the people during elections. Quite depressing, the Nigerian governments over the years have failed and continue to fail in this aspect by refusing to create a level playground for all contesting political parties whenever an election is on course. What has been in vogue is that because of the overambitious nature of many of these governments and their loyalty to their distinct political parties, against Nigerians, state resources are usually monopolized by the government in power at the disadvantage of their opponents. Federal, State security services, media outlets, to mention a few, are usually monopolized by the government in power, thus instead of promoting voters' turnout, governments over the years have been aggravating voter apathy in the best possible ways. Perhaps these reforms will be of relevance;

1. In order to promote voters' turnout by abating voter apathy, government will be required to support INEC over the course of becoming independent. Genuine electoral reforms have to be allowed by the government to take due course for the purpose of salvaging the country's so called democracy.
2. It is the duty of the government to solicit for en masse participation in electioneering processes by creating platforms for general public enlightenment on the need to vote.
3. Because violence and insecurity have always bedeviled Nigerian elections many eligible Nigerians more than often keep their distance during elections, it will be expected from governments to provide adequate security during electoral processes.
4. It is germane also for government in the most possible way to stay away from any form of interference in the electoral processes.

5. Governments as a way of encouraging voters' turnout, day in day out have to persistently fulfill their electoral promises, for it is only through this the citizenry can have confidence in the system.

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