

INEC and Electoral Outcome in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Voters' Apathy in the South East

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ABSTRACT

The study is an interrogation INEC and Electoral outcome in Nigeria, with a focus on voter's apathy in the south-East. The board objective of the paper is to ascertain whether the role of INEC in the conduct of an election accounted for voter's apathy in the South East. The paper engaged structural functionalism as the theoretical perspective. The data were generated through secondary source while content analysis was employed to analyze the data. It was discovered that poor electoral management and near absence of voters sensitization hugely accounted for voters apathy in the region. From the finding, the paper recommended that INEC should imbibe the modern global technological trend of concluding election and finally fine tune voters education processes.

Key words: Independent National Electoral Commission (INCE), voters' Apathy, Election Management, Electoral Outcome, South-East.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of the globalization process, election is adjudged to be the modest form of leadership recruitment. To achieve this, nation-states across the globe have electoral bodies that are saddled with the responsibility of conducting election. In this order, therefore, Nigeria keyed into this modern demand in 1999, with the independent National Electoral Commission as the electoral umpire. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria assigned specific roles to the electoral body. The constitution in section 15 part 1 and section 2 of 1999 Electoral Act (as amended) stipulated these roles as:

- Organize, undertake and supervise all elections to the office of the President and vice-President, the Governors and Deputy Governors of the state, to the membership of the Senate, the House of Assembly of each state of the Federation.
- Register Political Parties in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and Act of the National Assembly.
- Monitor the organization and operation of the political parties including their finances, conventions, congresses and Party Primaries.
- Arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties and publish the result of such examinations and audits for public information.
- Arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election under the constitution.
- Monitor Political Campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties.
- Conduct voters and civil education.
- Promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes and Conduct any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 constitution or any other law or act.

From the above, it is crystal clear that election management entails the critical areas of logistics, staff training and management, voters' education and mobilization, political parties and candidate management and continuous voter registration. It also serves as a tool developed by the commission with the active support of the international foundation for Electoral systems (IFES) and so, it sought to provide a management framework to support the planning, execution, monitoring and output assessment of all activities outlined within an Electoral cycle.

The question at this juncture is: to what extent has the management of electoral process in Nigeria accounted for Voters apathy in the southeast from 1999-2019? Thus, the major task of this paper is to investigate how the management of the electoral process by the electoral umpire has contributed to voters' apathy in the southeast geographical zone.

EXTANT LITERATURE

Conceptually, political apathy is evidence of mass collective behavior but has its origin at the level of the individual psyche. It usually starts with an individual showing signs of disappointment, distrust and faithlessness in the electoral system and encroaches like a virus to other members of the society. In the aggregate political apathy is revealed by attitudes and absence of expected activity. When people cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society and perform entirely nominal acts on none at all in political institutions or organizations, apathy is indicated. Apathy therefore, negates the true meaning of democracy as opined by Cleon in 422 BC which in words is "That shall be democratic which shall be of the people, by the people and for the people" (Ifedi, 2019 P.556).

Voter apathy shows citizens disinterestedness or non-chalant attitude towards the nation's political status, which manifest itself in absconding from the election processes, voting, legislation and political parties in the nation. And this political indifference of voters is caused by politicians attitude of using extortion, being dishonest, corrupt and public discontent (Umeh, L.C, in WWJMRD 2021:7(7) 35-42).

It is obvious, therefore, that as a subset of political behavior, voter apathy is multidimensional, operating as it does at the intersections of psychology, Sociology, economy and geography, history and the contemporary laws and structures, process and actors-memory, rent and perception, among others (INEC, 2011).

Commenting on Political apathy in Nigeria, Jega, maintained that the existing voter apathy in Nigeria is no longer contentious voter turnout in the just concluded 2015 elections had provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voter apathy and disinterestedness of sections of the electorates in elections. This ugly scenario has implications for populace participation and governance (Odebode, 2011).

According to Orjme (2019), the continuous decrease in the number of eligible voters during elections since 1999 has remained persistent. Collations by INEC in states such as Abia, Enugu, Rivers and Ebonyi has progressively witnessed low voters turnout. The magnitude of the voters decline in the political process according to the collation amounted to less than 30 percent of the registered voters.

Writing on the subject matter, Omotola and Aiyedogban (2017) revealed that voter turnout since 1999 has generally been low, hovering around 50% on slightly below. The scenario responsible to this kind of political behavior according to them rest on the disposition of the government (ruling party) towards free and free elections, campaign issues, the level of political education and mobilization, voting experience, among others.

In the view of Omotola (2009) the INEC management process seems to be characterized by irregularities that hugely account for voters' apathy. Among the irregularities include: inadequate voting materials, omission of names or pictures of some candidates from ballot papers, late commencement of voting in many parts of the country, lack of secrecy in the voting process, prevalence of under-aged voting and rampant cases of ballot bag snatching at gun point by party thugs and militias.

Concerning the electoral or voting behavior of individual in the state, some scholars are of the view that the massive electoral fraud witnessed in the past is responsible for voters' apathy. The presence of such electoral

fraud according to Lopez Pinton (2010) undermine the democratic process in Nigeria.

Taken cognizance of the literature perspective, the scholars have been able to give reasons for voters' apathy in Nigeria but the deficiency in the views is that the situation in the southeast was not properly captured, hence this paper sets out to address such lacuna.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study adopted structural functionalism theory propounded by Almond Gabriel in the 1970s as framework for analysis. The structural functional approach is derived from the earlier use of functionalism and systems models in anthropology, sociology, biology and political science. Structural functionalism assumes that a bounded (nation-state) system exists, and studies structures in terms of their function(s) within the system. The goal is to find out whether something actually does happen in a political system, as opposed to what it is supposed to do.

Structural functionalism is based on a systems model for analytical purposes, the political system is considered to be the nation-state, and the environment is composed of the interactions of economic, social and political variables and events, both domestic and external. The idea is that there are a number of actors in the national political system (political parties, the military etc) and that the actions of all these actors affect each other as well as the system. The political analyst must determine the importance of these actors in particular political system. This is done by analyzing the functions performed by the various actors. Any change in the system will also affect all the actors and change in the functions of the actors will affect the system (Jdeiner, 1999).

Varma (1975, p.45) further notes that beside the concept of function, another very important concept in Structural Functional analysis is that of structure while function deals with consequences, involving objectives as well as processes or pattern of actions, structure refers to those arrangements within the system which perform the functions. A single function may be fulfilled by a complex combination of structures just as given structural arrangement may perform functions which might have different kinds of consequences for the structure.

In terms of the analytical categories that depict this theory as a framework for explaining the subject matter, it is important to note that a political system comprises many structures, all working or performing certain functions to make the system work. For any political system to work, several activities need to be performed and certain institutions are created to perform some of these roles or functions for the society to keep the system going.

There, the basis of structural functionalism stated that there should be an institution which must constitute the structures that perform certain functions and such institution in the case of Nigeria is Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with its function as assigned to it by 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as early demonstrated in the paper. The different structures of INEC are expected to perform the functions earlier mentioned in order to ensure transparency of the electoral process.

From this theoretical perspective, it can be proposed that the management of the electoral process in Nigeria by INEC is responsible for voters' apathy in the South East geographical zone.

METHODOLOGY

Documentary method of data collection was engaged in the gathering of information for the study, Content analysis was employed in the analyses of the data collected.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The South East geo-political zone of Nigeria is composed of the igbo speaking states-Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Nigeria as a nation-state stands on tripod tribe namely; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. This means that South East geo-political zone is one of the major ethnic tribes in Nigeria even though Nigeria is composed of 250 ethnic groups.

Since the Nigerian political independence in 1960, politics in the country has been dominated by the three major ethnic groups and covertly or overtly shaped the political development of Nigeria. For instance, in the first republic, 1960-1966, the formation and development of political parties gamut around this ethnic configuration. Within this era, major political parties like the Northern people congress (NPC), the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) had ethnic colorations of the three tribes.

In 1999, when Nigeria embraced the nascent civilian rule, the level of political participation in terms of the exercise of franchise in the South East when compared to other geo-political zones in Nigeria has remained low. The development became worrisome to political elites in the zone and so the question is: (a) Why this magnitude of political apathy in the zone (South East). (b) What then can be done to ameliorate voters' apathy in the south –East?

An insight into the below electoral results from 1999-2019 brought out clearly, the ugly development of voters apathy in the South-East. The percentage of votes was got using: $\text{Votes/Registered Voters} * 100/1$.

ANAMBRA STATE

YEAR	REGISTERED. VOTERS	VOTES CAST	PERCENTAGE
1999	2,221,284	1,029,815	50.89%
2003	1,859,795	878,212	47.22%
2007	1,844,819	701,801	41%
2010	184,415	301,232	16.3%
2013	1,770,127	442,242	25%
2017	2,064,134	428,771	20.77%
2021	2,466,638	249,631	10.12%

Source: INEC NIGERIA...<https://www.inecnigeria.org>

ABIA STATE

YEAR	REGISTERED VOTERS	VOTES CAST	PERCENTAGE
1999	1,321,895	717,771	41%
2003	1,285,428	823,347	64.05%
2007	1,365,641	617,761	40%
2011	1,499,351	641,158	41%
2015	1,952,892	690,579	45.5%
2019	1,932,892	444,376	22.99%

Source: INEC NIGERIA...<https://www.inecnigeria.org>

EBONYI STATE

YEAR	REGISTERED VOTERS	VOTES CAST	PERCENTAGE
1999	902,327	517,893	55.16%
2003	1,002,771	809,224	80.7%

2007	929,375	700,100	40%
2011	1,020,011	412,465	20.10%
2015	1,365,001	414,684	30.30%
2019	1,432,528	493,002	34.41%

Source: INEC NIGERIA...<https://www.inecnigeria.org>

IMO STATE

YEAR	REGISTERED VOTERS	VOTES CAST	PERCENTAGE
1999	1,321,895	717,771	51%
2003	1,630,494	838,347	89%
2007	1,372,975	1,059,073	90.98%
2011	1,672,666	627,355	40%
2015	1,662,032	806,764	45%
2019	2,221,008	739,485	33.28%

Source: INEC NIGERIA...<https://www.inecnigeria.org>

ENUGU STATE

YEAR	REGISTERED VOTERS	VOTES CAST	PERCENTAGE
1999	1,466,472	837,370	57.35%
2003	1,479,542	1,140,012	77.05%
2007	1,201,697	787,306	50.89%
2011	1,324,197	502,213	39.54%
2015	1,429,221	501,880	39%
2019	1,944,803	479,241	21.46%

Source: INEC NIGERIA...<https://www.inecnigeria.org>

From the tables, the percentage of total voters cast in the zone under the period of review attested to the assertion of voters' apathy in the South-East. To get the peoples view on the question of the magnitude of voters' apathy in the zone, efforts were made to engage purposive or judgmental sample technique across the five states of the region. Here, a total number of 30 persons were interviewed via the social media handle. The composition of the interviewed is 6 persons from each state, composed of 3 traditional rulers and 3 presidents-general town union.

From the aggregate response of the 30 respondents to the question on voters' apathy in South East from 1999-2019 their submission indicates as follows: Failure of INEC to conduct a free, fair and credible poll from 1999-2019. Since the new democratic dispensation in Nigeria especially, from 2003-2019, general election conducted by the electoral umpire in the country is everything but free. This development made the people especially the South East to lose confidence in the electoral process.

Electoral violence: since 1999, the political gladiators in Nigeria are so desperate to win election at all cost, hence, election in Nigeria since the emergence of democracy has become a matter of do or die affair. This scenario that has plunged the electoral process into all manners of electoral violence, ranges from hijacking of

electoral materials and intimidation of voters to arson and maiming of political opponents. This development instilled fear into the voters especially the South Easterners and so, they become disinterested in exercising their franchise because of fear of losing one's life.

The political behavior of the political parties in power: since the emergence of democracy in Nigeria, the political parties that occupied offices at both the Centre and state levels were often times seen in engaging the government machineries to manipulate the electoral outcome in their favor. Thus, the people began to feel that their votes never count in elections and so they became discouraged to participate in the electoral process.

The activities of the security men during election: the security men who are drafted to secure the voting environment and the entire process most of the time end up in aiding and abating electoral malpractices in favor of the political heavy weights in the contest.

Perceived marginalization of the South Easterners by the two dominant political parties in Nigeria- APC and PDP since 1999, these two political parties have dominated the political outings in the country in terms of producing a victorious presidential candidate. From the structure that surrounded the emergence of a presidential candidate in each of the political party, there seems to be a consensus on rotational principle among the major tribes in Nigeria – Igbo Hausa and Yoruba. The Yoruba and Hausa have had their fair slot in the presidential candidacy. Unfortunately, when it was glaring that it was the turn of the Igbos to pick the presidential slot, their seem to be a kind of conspiracy by the Hausas and Yorubas against the Igbos and so the Igbos have overtly or covertly schemed out of this predigious political office – open marginalization of the Igbos. This situation has made the Igbos to feel humiliated and neglected in the Nigerian political system, hence, their open apathy to participate in election.

The prevailing economic mode of production in the South East that favors entrepreneurship and mentoring: The average Igbo man is enterprising by nature and therefore, is self-reliant because of his private engagement in economic activities. The process has a mentoring mechanism, hence, such business enterprises or venture passed from one generation to another. Because of this, every adult Igbo person frowns at shooting down his business premises for a whole day or more just to go and participate in an electoral process that is hugely characterized by irregularities.

Then, on the question of what to do to address the problem of voters apathy in the South East, the inference drawn from the reactions of the respondents captured some salient solutions: In the first place, all the respondents attest to the fact that voters apathy is a political solution among the solutions they preferred inter alia:

- The use of electronic voting: The electronic device in voting has gained ground globally because it restores some high level of confidence in the electoral process. So, for the people's confidence especially the Igbos to be restored in the electoral process in Nigeria, the electoral umpire has to engage the use of electoral voting system in Nigeria.
- Intensification of voters education in the South East: All the stakeholders in the South East region – traditional institutions or rulers, president-general of town Unions, Age grades, women organizations and religious leaders, among others should work in synergetic with the INEC department of Public Enlightenment and voter-education to intensify the voter education in the South East, such education must reintegrate the importance of voters participation in an election. The essence is to reawaken ones more the political consciousness of the Igbos.
- The activities of the security men, the security agencies, the police and other allies should stick to their conventional functional duties of safeguarding and protecting the electoral environment during election, instead of engaging in some shout practices that frustrates the voters during election,
- The need for legislation on voters participation in the South East: there is the urgent need for the Igbos stakeholders especially, the traditional ruler and president-general of town unions to cooperate with the legislative council of the various Local Government Areas to come up with by-laws on voters participation. Such by-laws must indicate clearly the punishment that awaits any defaulting adult.

- Good Governance: Democracy is a social contract between the people and the political leaders. The people most of the time cast their votes for the candidates of their choice in anticipation of dividence of democracy. But when election is over and dividence of democracy becomes ‘stomach infrastructure’ of the victorious candidates, the people will become disappointed and discouraged to participate in future elections. To address this problem therefore, the government in power must imbibe the spirit of service delivery to the people.

CONCLUSION WITH FINDINGS

Election is seen as a very important democratic principle and the participation of people in this democratic process underscores the substance of representative governance. It was discovered that poor electoral management and near absence of voters’ sensitization hugely accounted for voters’ apathy in the South East region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the findings the paper recommended the following;

- Good management of the electoral process: good management of the elections is the first step to the fulfilment of this democratic principle,
- Sensitization of voters; voters’ education remains essentially one of the good election management strategy through which citizens’ massive votes’ turnout could be achieved.
- INEC should imbibe the modern global technologic trend of conducting election

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