

ELECTORATE PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: 2002-2023

ABRAHAM OWUGBOSIA STEWART, PhD.

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt.

abrahamstewart69@gmail.com

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GRAHAM NSIEGBE, PhD.

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo,
Port Harcourt.

ABSTRACT

This paper is anchored on Electorate participation in presidential elections in Nigeria: 2002-2023. Voter's turnout simply means the percentage or number of persons of voting age population for the percentage of registered voters, who actually participated to vote in an election. Elections are the means by which the people choose and exercise some degree of control over their representatives. There are two main types of elections. These are direct and indirect election. The frequent use of electorate participation in literature to explain the reason why people vote tends to question the feasibility of the survival of democratic process in Nigeria. It also basically raises a credible question to the organization and structure of the electoral institutions in this case (INEC) Independent National Electoral Commission. The main objective of this study is to find an explanation to the socio-dynamics of electorate participation in Nigeria by using figures of voters in the Nigerian presidential election covering the period under review. This paper relied on secondary data and adopted Rational Choice theory as its theoretical framework. The finding is that electorates vote on the ground of patrimonial and primordial attachment. The study concluded that there exists a sharp difference between the number of registered voters and votes cast in Nigerian presidential elections covering the years under review. It recommends among other things that voters education campaign should be intensified to enhance electorate participation in Nigerian elections

Keywords: Electorate, participation Election:

Introduction:

Electoral process refers to a series of actions that are taken to bring about changes in government through the selection of leaders. electorate participation in a country can be measured by considering the nature of political culture, political participation and political socialization, this simply means the behavioural disposition of the citizens towards the government in a democratic government of the day vis-a-vis every other political activity in the country.

Nigerian election from 2002-2023 is not actually showing profound evidence of a growing tenet of democratic activities as is concern voters active participation in the electoral process. According to Mozaffar (2022, p.86), the conduct of credible election is essential in any democracy, and is at the core of citizens democratic rights. Elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and help to secure the legitimacy of the political system, in this context, the body that is established and charged with the responsibility to conduct elections by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended, and the electoral Act (2010) is the guard for (INEC) Independent National Electoral Commission.

According to Ibrahim, Liman, and Mat (2015), the nature of voting behaviour in Nigeria has remained constant from the first republic with only little changes in the fourth and fifth republic, hitherto, Nigerian choices were determined by ethnicity, tribalism, regionalism, religious affiliation etc. Gilbert and Barigbon (2015) further revealed in their study that from 2002, Nigerians fully monetized politics and money-politics shaped their voting behaviour, and the reason for their participation was for monetary gains. Poverty, lack of democratic consciousness and rigging nature of election has resulted in this political menace. Similarly, Idike (2014), stated that “political parties have rather brought into government, so many people of doubtful integrity and character who became guilty of corruption and their cases helped in accentuating the political apathy scenario”

The broad objective of this paper, describe electorate participation in presidential election in Nigeria, 2002-2023:

Electorate Participation:

The term electorate participation refers to the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in an election. Roberts, (2019, p.33) conceived electorate participation as the total number of people that vote in a given election, sometimes given as a percentage. Defining participation as the share of population that has cast its votes is correct but not necessarily complete. Geys (2016, pp. 34-35) opines that, when participation is defined as a share of the population, a clear operationalization of the population variable is also needed. The ratio of the number of voters to the entire population, to the population of voting age, to the eligible population or people registered to vote must be considered.

The number of electorates who participated to vote for their government is important in understanding people's political participation. Voter's participation emerged from indirect democracy, as members of democratic society where obligated to elect their representative through a voting process.

Direct Election: This is a more democratic system that reflects popular choice because the electorates cast their votes directly to select the candidates of their choice through the ballot

box or the open ballot. The voters vote for the final representatives who will form the government. it is common in many states. It is sometimes used in legislative elections in Nigeria.

Advantages of Direct election

1. Direct election is democratic;
2. Direct election is not much affected by corruption and bribery;
3. It gives the opportunity to the citizens to have a direct say in the type of policies the government may pursue.
4. It ensures that those chosen to represent the people reflect the true wishes of the majority of the electorate.

Disadvantages of Direct election

1. Direct election is expensive.
2. Direct election is easily rigged.
3. It allows the election of incompetent representatives into government.
4. It lead to violence and thuggery.
5. It leads to victimization of voters.

Indirect election: This is a type of election whereby voting is done in stages. First of all, the electorate elects a body of people known as the electoral college, and members of the electoral college are given the mandate to choose the final representatives who will form the government on behalf of the people. In other words, indirect election takes place when the elected representatives vote for the final representatives on behalf of the electorate. Another name for indirect election is electoral-college system. Indirect election was used in Nigeria for the selection of members of the constituent assembly in 1977

Advantages of Indirect election

1. It is not too expensive to conduct;
2. It minimizes electoral malpractice. In other words, final representatives who are to form the government are often select without much electoral malpractice.
3. It ensures the selection of capable and competent people as the representatives.
4. It puts the selection of the national leaders in the hands of better-informed and enlightened persons (i.e. electoral-college.)

Disadvantages of Indirect election

1. It is easily affected by bribery and corruption.
2. It denies the citizens a direct and full participation in the selection of their leaders.
3. It often, does not reflect the true choice or wishes of the majority of the electorate when the final selection is completed.
4. It denies the citizens the opportunity to have a direct say in the type of policies the government will adopt.

Electoral College:

This is used in indirect elections in countries like USA for electing the President (and in Nigeria when a winner does not clearly emerge after the presidential election). In USA it implies that the masses will not vote directly for their president but instead will vote for some eminent men and women who will meet later and vote the president on their behalf.

By-election:

This is an election held to fill a vacant seat in the executive or legislative caused by death, resignation or disqualification of the incumbent.

Primary election: This is a mini-election within the political party to choose those they will present as their candidates for the general election.

Purpose of Elections:

1. It serves as a means of selecting or appointing political leaders or office holders.
2. It serves as a means of changing the government in a smooth way. To change
3. The government, ruling party is voted out.
4. It ensures the acceptance of political leaders by the led. It make government legitimate.
5. It encourages stability in the government and help to check abuses or excesses of the government.
6. It is a means by which the citizens participate actively in the government of their state (i.e. popular participation). It makes people politically awake and aware.
7. It educates the people on their rights. This is done during the electioneering campaign
8. It serves as a means of ensuring that political sovereignty is vest in the people.
9. It serves as a means of testing the popularity of the government or the political office-holders.

Functions of an Election:

1. Elections are primary a means of legitimizing the right of the ruler to rule.
2. It is a means of recruiting future political leaders,
3. It provides the electorate the only means of participating in government.
4. It is a form of political communication between the government and the citizens.
5. It is also a means which political decision makers become sensitive to the electorate's demands and in turn are in a position to educate the electorate on important political issues.

Theoretical Framework:

This paper adopted the rational choice theory, propounded by William Riker, and it is used to described where actors are actions their basic units, this theory necessarily concerns actors and so begins with axioms about their actions. Believing that actions and outcomes vary according to the range of institutions and the kinds of actions guided by them, political scientists have separated their theories roughly by this consideration. An economist thus concern mainly the processes and outcomes produced by voluntary exchange, where of cause all participant benefit politics, on the other hand mainly concerns processes and outcome produced by group decisions which are practically bonded on those who cannot resign from the group, hence in politics there are losers as well as winners and it is politics, not economics that is the decimal science Riker (2018, pp.23-24) applied this version of rational choice theory which they variously called rational choice, social choice, formal modeling or positive political theory used to explain almost everything, including voting, legislation, wars and bureaucracy. Rational choice theory then assumes that an individual has preferences among the available choice alternatives that allow them to state which option they prefer.

The rational agent is assumed to take account of available information, probabilities of events, and potential costs and benefits in determining preferences, and to act consistently in choosing the self-determined best choice of action.

Application of the theory:

The rational choice theory of voting has a long history, Down (2007, p.55) recognized that, where voting is costly, individuals will consider both how much they care about the outcome and likelihood that their vote will influence the outcome (be pivotal). In large elections, the likelihood that an individual's vote will be pivotal is so small as to make it unlikely that the expected benefit of voting will outweigh the costs. This of course, leads to the difficulty that if elections are large, no one will have the incentive to vote, but, if no one votes any one vote can determine the outcome so that the incentive to vote will be high. Without developing it fully, Down suggested a solution based on the idea that there important private and social benefits to the act of voting the might accrue to individuals and give them the incentives to vote

The rational choice theory, emphasize the effort to maximize political gains. For example, if voters feel their vote may not produce the desired outcome, they may opt not to vote. Here, the core determinants are the issues or party programmes which come closest to the democratic aspirations of the voter. Making an informed decision in such a situation requires that voters have access to adequate and appropriate information.

Riker and Ordeshook (2018, p.78) extend Downs ideas in a useful model of the decision to vote that starts with the rational assumption that individuals will vote if their expected utility from voting is higher than their expected utility from not voting. According to Campbell et al (1960) and Varba and Nie (1972) voting research is rich in empirical regularities yet a parsimonious theory of voter turnout has proven to be elusive. Early, attempts to explain why people vote were based on the so-called social-psychological studies, which started with the idea that people vote if they develop the appropriate mental inclinations, for example, if they have a sense of citizen duty.

Suffrage:

Suffrage is the right to vote and be voted for. It is the right to participate in an election as a voter and as a candidate. Another name for suffrage is franchise. Enfranchise means giving a citizen the right to vote and be voted for. Disenfranchisement means the deprivation of the right to vote and be voted for.

Types of Suffrage:

- ❖ **Universal Suffrage:** It is when every citizen is given the right to vote and be voted for. Universal suffrage does not exist in any state because no state gives franchise to children and mad people.
- ❖ **Universal male suffrage:** This allows only adult males to vote and be voted for. Females are not allowed to vote and be voted for. For example, it was obtainable in the Northern Nigeria before 1979.
- ❖ **Universal adult suffrage:** This allows only adult males and females “to vote and be voted for” during an election. Universal adult suffrage is obtainable in many states in the World. It allows for greater political participation.

- ❖ **Limited suffrage:** It is when franchise is restricted of limited. Under limited franchise, right to vote and be voted for depends on the fulfillment of special conditions or requirements expected of every eligible voter under the law of the state. Such conditions are age, sex, education, race, wealth and religion.
- ❖ **Tax-payers' suffrage:** Only those who pay taxes and produce receipt of payment are allowed to vote.
- ❖ **Property-owners suffrage:** In this kind of society only those who own properties like land, houses or earn a certain amount of income are allowed to vote. This suffrage was used in Nigeria in 1922 during the time of Clifford's constitution when only those who earn an annual income of 100 pounds and above were allowed to vote.
- ❖ **Colour suffrage:** Here only those who are of a particular race are allowed to vote. In South Africa before 1990 only the whites and colour people were allowed to vote. This kind of suffrage was employed to debar black from voting, but the situation has changed now.
- ❖ **Educated people's suffrage:** In this kind of society only those who are literate are extended the right to vote. In the early part of the 20th century the literacy and property qualifications were used in the USA to prevent blacks and new immigrants from voting.

Requirements of Universal Adult Suffrage:

Universal adult suffrage has been adopted by many states including Nigeria. These are the qualifications for voting and being voted for under universal adult suffrage:

1. **Citizenship:** Citizens have the right and duty to vote and be voted for foreigners or aliens have no right or duty to vote or be voted for.
2. **Age:** Many states have a minimum age required for voting and being voted for. In Nigeria, the voting age is 18 years and above.
3. **Registration:** Citizens who are qualified to vote are to register their names in the voters register. If a citizen's name is not in the voters register, he may not be allowed to vote.
4. **Residence:** A citizen who wants to vote should have lived in the constituency or ward where he wants to vote for a specified period of time. In Nigeria, it is between six months and one year.
5. **Sanity:** Only citizens who are mentally sound are allowed to vote and be voted for. Mad persons are not allowed to vote.
6. **Non-criminal record:** Criminals in prison are not allowed to vote and be voted for. In Nigeria, any citizens convicted of felony cannot contest for an election until ten years after serving his prison sentence.
7. **Solvency:** A citizens who is not able to pay all his just debts will not be allowed to stand for election. Anyone declared bankrupt is not allowed to be voted for.

- 8. Regular tax payment:** This is a requirement for being voted for (i.e. contesting an election). To qualify as a candidate, the citizen must show an evidence of having paid his tax as and when due for three consecutive years prior to the year he will contest an election.

Disenfranchisement:

This refers to the deprivation of a citizen right to vote. Disenfranchisement can take place due to any of the following reasons:

1. Conviction for a criminal offence- this however excludes political prisoners;
2. Conviction for electoral malpractice in a preceding election;
3. Proof of insanity of bankruptcy;
4. Loss of citizenship where one is an immigrant.

Qualification for election and voting in Nigeria:

1. To qualify as a voter, a person must have reached the age of 18 year or above and must have been registered as a voter in Nigeria before the general elections.
2. A voter must be a citizen of Nigeria. Aliens are not permitted by the constitution to register as voters in Nigeria.
3. According to section 65 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, a person shall be qualified for a election if:
4. He has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent; and
5. He is a member of a political party and is sponsored by that party.
6. To qualify for membership of the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly, he must be the citizen of Nigeria and attained the age of thirty years and above.
7. The Senate, if he is citizen of Nigeria and has attained the age of thirty five years.

Section 131 of the 1999 constitution states that a person shall be qualified for election to the office of the president if, he is a citizen of Nigeria by birth; and he has attained the age of forty years; he is a member of a political party and sponsored by that political party; and he has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent.

8. Section 177 of the 1999 constitution states that a person shall be qualified for election to the office of the president if, he is a citizens of Nigeria by birth; and he has attained the age of thirty-five years; he is a member of political party and sponsored by that political party; and he has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent.

Electorate Participation in presidential election in Nigeria from 2002-2023:

From 2002 to 2023 sex elections took place. However, in the context of this paper, the presidential election from 2002-2023 will be reviewed. The 1999 election year was a period of renewal that witnessed the transition from military rule to civil rule. The 1999 election was between former president Olusagun Obasanjo of PDP and Olu-Falea of AD all Yorubas and also Christians. The Northern elite supported Obasanjo and his president in order to appease the Yoruba ethnic group of the wound of annulment of June 12th 1992 election. Former president Obasanjo was the anointed candidate and won with majority of the votes albeit, a low turnout of voters in the North and East. The West voted for Olu-Falae instead of Obasanjo

but Obasanjo enjoyed the support of power brokers from the North and the East emerged victorious.

A probable explanation of the high turnout for the 2003 presidential election was the fact that it was contested by twenty of the thirty registered political parties. One reason given for the comparatively high turnout is that the electorate had confidence in the electoral body that conducted the election and that many voters wanted to associate with the ruling party Olaniyi (2018, p.77).

In 2003, Obasanjo contested under the platform of PDP with the power of incumbency against Muhammadu Buhari of APP, where Obasanjo won in a landslide victory amidst outcries of massive rigging and electoral malpractice. Obasanjo attempted a third term tenure against the legal provision of the constitution but it was resisted in the build up to 2007 presidential elections. As a result, he anointed sick incapacitated Yaradua to context in 2011 in which he eventually won against Buhari of ANPP in a highly controversial election full of rigging and malpractices. One vital issue that one should consider in the presidential in the fourth and fifth republic in Nigeria is the fact that, the elite from all sections of the country united and were rigging the outcome of the elections as against the will of the electorate. But, still there is escalation of the use of politics of ethnicity and religion even more pronounced that before.

The result of the 2011 presidential election, which the two major contenders were between the then former president Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari. The dominant political parties, among them were the Peoples Democratic, (PDP) the Action Congress of Nigeria, (ACN), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) waged elaborate and well-funded political campaigns.

The Nigerian democratic process is that of political behaviour and voting system where electorates vote for political leaders on the ground of patrimonial and primordial attachment instead of those candidates that can improve their living condition and develop the country through good governance.

Table 1: Summary of presidential election result from 2002-2023:

	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Population	129,934,091	131,859,073	162,471,000	197,565,448	203,545,978	223,500,978
Voters registered.	60,823,022	61,567,036	73,528,040	67,422,005	64, 056,430	68, 056,430
Votes cast	42,018,735	35,387,517	39,409,520	29,432,083	45,600,760	55,600,760

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission records.

In Nigeria, the systemic electorate participation since 2007 is an indication that Nigerians have greatly become apathetic towards elections. Statistics from the (INEC) captured the trend in electorate participation in the country; 69.08% in 2003, 57.49% in 2007, 53.58% in 2011, 43.65% in 2015 and 41.45% in 2019 and 52.2% in 2023,. It is an undisputable fact that if the masses of a particular country refuse to fulfill their electoral obligation, then there is disconnect between the masses and the government, thus bringing to question the democratic right and acceptability of the government (Falade 2014).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is Nigeria's national electoral management institution established in 1999 by the constitution of Nigeria as amended, repealed by Electoral Act of (2010) as amended which empowered INEC as the

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electoral umpire in the country, to organize election into various political offices. The establishment of INEC precipitated the transition from military rule to civil rule; the sole responsibility was to conduct transparent and credible elections in Nigeria.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) became more determined to curb rigging of elections result and other electoral irregularities introduced electronic card reader which must be used during the election to screen the voters before they are eligible to vote. The rationale behind this according to INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega was to avoid inflation of result and rigging. The really played a vital role also in determining the outcome of the result (Babayo, 2017). Since the introduction of the card reader through electoral reforms, the spate of violence during elections has decreased, compared to previous times when there was no credible means to identify and verify eligible votes. These reforms in Nigeria electoral system has contributed to increased confidence on the electoral system thereby resulting to increase in electorate participation.

Table 2: Summary of Presidential election results from 2002-2023 at a glance:

Details	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Numbers of registered voters	60,823,022	61,567,036	73,528,040	67,422,005	64, 056,430	57,938,094
Total vote cast	42,018,735	35,387,517	39,409,520	29,432,083	45,600,760	30,280,052
% of voter's Turnout	69.08	50.75	53.68	43.65	40.45	41.14

Source: Extract from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Presidential results.

Table 3: Summary of Presidential election results from 2002-2023 at a glance:

Details	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Registered voters	60,823,022	61,567,036	73,528,040	67,422,005	64, 056,430	57,938,094
Rejected votes	2,538,246	NA	1,259,506	844,519	2,780,045	800,432
Valid vote cast	39,480,489	NA	38,209,98	28,587,564	43,879,777	29,479,620
Total vote cast	42,018,735	35,387,517	39,409,520	29,432,083	45,600,760	30,280,052
% of valid votes cast	64.91	56.07	51.97	42.40	40.05	50.88

Source: Extract from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Presidential results. (2002-2023), Abuja.

Table 4: Summary of Presidential election results from 2002-2023 at a glance:

Details	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
No of registered voters	60,823,022	61,567,036	73,528,040	67,422,005	64, 056,430	57,938,094
Total votes cast	42,018,735	35,387,517	39,409,520	29,432,083	45,600,760	30,280,052

Differences b/w no. of registered voters & votes cast	18,804,287	26,169,519	34,058,520	37,989,922	18,655,670	27,658,893
% Difference	30.92	42.51	46.32	56.35	47.75	47.74

Source: Extract from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Presidential results. (2002-2023), Abuja.

Conclusion:

- (1) The rate at which electorate participation in the presidential elections in Nigeria from 2002-2023 was not as encouraging as it ought to be in a democratic government where the will of the people (voters) count and speak loud through elections.
- (2) The paper also state that the percentage of valid votes in the presidential elections in Nigeria from 2002-2023 are generally poor and below expectation.
- (3) The low level of turnout of voters can be attributed non awareness of the electorate on the election guideline and voting process by the electoral umpire and political parties to the electorate and particularly the issue of illiteracy and ignorance mostly amongst the people at the rural areas.
- (4) The observed differences between the number of registered voters and the total number of votes cast in the presidential elections in Nigeria in recent times could be based on political apathy, lack of sincere issue of benefit on political parties manifestos and lack of trust on political representatives among others.

Recommendations:

1. During electioneering periods, INEC should do well to engage the leadership of local organizations and communities in educating their members on the electoral guidelines and process in order to reduce the rate of invalid or rejected votes during elections and to guarantee the choice of the people to be elected.
2. Political parties should see the need to focus on issue based manifestos that can motivate the voters to turn out and participate actively and fully in the general elections.
3. The government should endervour to enact stringent laws that can help to drastically reduce to its barest minimum the issue of voter's intimidation and ballot box snatching by the security operatives during elections.
4. Government should guarantee security for voters, and can engage the community vigilante groups for the security of the INEC staff and the election materials.
5. Voters should do well to have a change of attitude towards elections, they should no longer show apathy to general elections in the country for with their active participations, manipulation of the process may be difficult for those political tugs and their pay master.

6. There should be proper voters education by INEC and political parties, to adequately informed the electorate on the important of voting during elections.

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