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Contents

Citizens' Participation in Elections in Nigeria: An Analysis of the 2011 General Elections in Benin City. <i>Remi E. Aiyede and Afeaye A. Igbafe</i>	1
Real Exchange Rate and Manufacturing Sector Performance in Nigeria <i>Hassan Ojor Ozekhome and Nuhu Mohammed</i>	17
Fiscal Deficit and Exchange Rate Movement: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria <i>Adedeji Daniel Gbadebo and Ahmed Adekunle</i>	32
Enhancing Rural Development in Nigeria Through Stock Market Awareness <i>Samson E. Edo and Josephine E. Isenmila</i>	49
Indirect Monetary Policy Instruments and Balance of Payments Performance in Nigeria <i>G.G.Goshit, R. Anga and O.B.Gomwalk</i>	65
Determinants of the Utilization of Primary Health Care in Benin City <i>Edorodion Oye Erimona and Monday Ohi Asikhia</i>	84
Foreign Direct Investment and Economic Growth: Evidence from Ghana and Nigeria <i>Peter I.Sede and Eseosa J. Sowemimo</i>	94
Capital Market Development and Economic Growth in Nigeria <i>Nosakhare L. Arodoye and Samson E. Edo</i>	111
Foreign Direct Investment and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria <i>Odusanya Ibrahim Abidemi</i>	140

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BENIN CITY

Remi E. Aiyede
Afeaye A. Igbafe

Abstract

Elections are ways by which citizens select their representatives into various elective positions in the state. There are series of activities which citizens take part in; particularly pre-elections activities that facilitate this process of selection. Utilizing the survey method of data gathering, the paper examined the participation of citizens in elections in Nigeria. Using Benin City as the study area, the research sampled the opinions of citizens regarding their involvement in the 2011 general elections. The study found that citizens' participation in the 2011 elections in Benin City was low. It revealed that political apathy exists among citizens in the political system as the citizens' level of participation in the elections, was restricted to voting alone. The paper also identified some factors that attract and repel citizens as it regards their roles in elections as well as the reasons for political apathy in the 2011 elections in Benin City. The study concludes that citizens' participation in the elections revolves largely around the spectator level.

Keywords: Elections, Voting, Citizens, Political Participation, Political Party.

Introduction

Citizens' participation in elections is an aspect of political behaviour that focuses on the ways in which individuals involve themselves in activities that impact on the electoral process. Electoral processes refer to the ways by which elections are conducted in a political system to choose those who will occupy leadership positions (Omolayo, 2007). The level of involvement of citizens in the electoral process is to an extent contingent on the level of confidence they have in the system. Therefore, the people must not lose confidence in the process if the system is to continue enjoying the support of the citizens. The opportunity for citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria came with the introduction of the elective principle in the Clifford Constitution of 1922. Ever since, Nigeria has had

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quite a number of elections; the major ones being the elections of 1959, 1964, 1983, 1991, 1992, 1999 and 2003 (Olaniyan, 2007). And lately, there have been the 2007 and 2011 general elections. It is assumed that citizens are increasingly becoming more aware of their roles in elections but the willingness to participate actively has been called to question.

Elections are the technical means of ensuring popular participation in government. It is a means of building support, choosing leaders and making policies. Indeed, elections are the specific fundamental method of realizing government of, by and for the people (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011). Citizens are supposed to be a part of the electoral process. Economic development has momentous political consequences on participation. The more economically strong citizens are, the higher the potential for mobilizing them for electoral participation (Powell, 1983; cited in Olaniyan, 2007). Questions have arisen as to what prompts citizens to participate in elections in Nigeria. Do they need to be politically inclined first before they can contribute to the electoral process? Or is participating in elections just a fulfillment of their civic responsibility?

The participatory level of citizens in electoral activities in Nigeria is an aspect of political behaviour which does not seem to have captured the attention of many political scientists and social commentators; and as such, research in this area has been quite limited. Although there have been several researches on election in Nigeria such as voter turnout, election observation and the likes, only a few scholars have pointed out the role citizens play in ensuring a robust election process. To spur the interest of scholars and non-scholars alike in this research area and to improve the knowledge in it, the paper sets out to examine the political roles played by citizens in elections in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2011 elections in Benin City by attempting to determine the level of participation of citizens through getting to know what political activities they engage in. And it also attempts to identify those factors that stir or discourage citizens' participation in elections.

Research Questions

This study seeks to find answers to the following questions which would serve as a guide to the attainment of the objectives of this work.

- Are citizens' participation in elections restricted to voting alone?
- Are citizens' participation in elections connected to their economic status?
- What are the factors that motivate citizens to contribute to elections in Nigeria?
- What level of political participation is common to the electorate?

The 2011 Election Environment

The year 2011 was a promising year for Nigeria as far as the democracy project was concerned. This was because in April Nigerians went to the polls to vote for

members of the National Assembly, President and Governors in the fourth nationwide elections since the transition to democratic governance in 1999 (Gberie, 2011). The political atmosphere was filled with expectations on the one hand and overwhelmed with tension on the other. Expectations because progressive changes were anticipated following the electoral reforms initiated with the setting up of an Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) headed by retired Justice Muhammed Uwais, which climaxed with the appointment of Prof. Attahiru Jega as INEC chairman, a widely acclaimed political scientist with a reputation for great integrity (Omotola & Aiyedogbon, 2012). This was in line with the resolve of the government of Nigeria to deliver a free and fair election following the discredited elections of 2007. The tension in the 2011 election environment was brought about by the undue politicization of the decision of President Jonathan to contest for the office of president which was viewed by some northern elites as a violation of the zoning principle which is operational in the PDP, the party to which the president belonged.

The enthusiasm of citizens towards the 2011 elections was low. The massively flawed elections of 2007 amongst other things accounted for the low enthusiasm. The average turnout in the 2007 election hovered around 50%. INEC on its part was beset with an uphill task of trying to re-gain public confidence as far as the conduct of the 2011 election was concerned. Omokri (2011) identified personality as a major factor responsible for the flawed elections of 2003 and 2007. According to him, "the personality of the man at the head of the body conducting the election and his relationship with the president who appointed him as well as the enabling law, impact on the electoral process." By implication, Omokri's emphasis was that the integrity of the head of the election management body plays a major role in the outcome of elections in Nigeria. With the emergence of Attahiru Jega as INEC chairman, the election environment of 2011 became very sensitive to activities and actions of political and non-political actors.

Parties commenced vigorous campaigns in an attempt to woo the electorates. The dominant political parties in the 2011 elections were the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and the newly formed Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) led by Muhammadu Buhari. Parties were notable for their elaborate and well-funded political campaigns and the level of mobilization was unprecedented (Omotola & Aiyedogbon, 2012).

The 2011 election environment was not devoid of ethno-religious tension. Groups like the Northern Political Leaders Forum (NPLF) openly promoted regional, sectional and/or religious interest above national interest (Omokri, 2011). While groups in the Niger Delta openly pushed for the support of Goodluck Jonathan for re-election and accused prominent traditional rulers in the north for sponsoring the insurgency so as to make the country ungovernable for president Goodluck

(Osumah, 2013 cited in Otoghile & Igbafe, 2014) and to create tension within the polity. The NPLF was formed in August 2010 for the sole purpose of pressurizing the PDP to cede power to the North in fulfillment of the 'zoning' principle within the party (Omokri, 2011). This was based on the fact that president Yar'Adua died before completing his first term in office.

The 2011 elections were also caught in the web of the security crisis in Nigeria. There were lots of communal and sectarian violence; and political thuggery was commonplace in the run-up to the election. For example, on March 3, unidentified persons lobbed bombs at the PDP campaign rally in Suleja, Niger State, killing 13 people and injuring scores more (Gberie, 2011). Due to the ethno-religious tension that was created in the election environment where divisive campaigns, ideologies and tendencies were promoted, violence broke out in a number of states in the north after the elections when it was clear that Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner had lost to incumbent, President Goodluck Jonathan. This forced INEC to postpone the date of the subsequent gubernatorial elections in certain states until security could be guaranteed (Aiyede, 2012).

The elections of 2007 were fraught with irregularities to the extent that there were 1,250 petitions and 6,180 electoral litigations in the courts (Gberie, 2011). This was because according to Gberie (2011), there was unprecedented rigging, ballot stuffing, falsification of results, intimidation of voters and direct assault of the people. The electorates have observed that their votes do not determine the outcome of elections. This placed a burden on INEC; which had to institute a process of restoring public trust in the commission's ability of delivering credible elections, which would in turn entrench an electoral process that attracts high citizens' participation. The process of restoring public confidence was all encompassing. In other words, the responsibility of restoring public trust was not that of INEC alone; civil society organizations, political parties and other stakeholders had a role to play. This led to the popular slogan 'one man one vote' in the political campaign in the 2011 elections as a precursor to attracting high voter turnout and popular participation. The campaign called for the right of electorates to decide who leads them through transparent, free and fair elections (Ekhareafu & Ngonso, 2013). The 2011 elections held in April and the outcome of the process was regarded as a remarkable improvement when compared with the 2003 and 2007 elections.

Literature Review

Elections constitute the central institution of a democratic representative government. This assertion hinges on the fact that, in a democracy, the authority of government is derived solely from the consent of the governed (Omolayo, 2007). The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of a free and fair election. Elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and, subsequently, helping to secure the legitimacy of the political system (Independent National Electoral

Commission & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2011). Elections are part of a process that brings to light the strengths and weaknesses of a political institution in society as a whole. It also shows the level of political consciousness and participation of the citizenry (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011). The citizens' participation impacts upon the electoral process, and this participation is what makes election quite momentous. This is because citizens' participation in elections is one of the ways by which they take part in the decision making processes of the country. That is, they decide on those who will act on their behalf in various sectors of the political system. It must be noted that citizens' participation in elections does not constitute voting at general elections alone but a host of other pre-election and often times post-elections activities such as participating in the registration exercise, taking part in campaign rallies, attending political symposia, campaigning for candidates etc.

Voting is the legal, political and social mechanism through which the citizens are able to show their participation in elections as well as exercise their interests and express their needs. For citizens to participate actively in elections, citizenship education is *sine qua non*. There are two different types of citizenship education. The first is meant to prepare non-citizens to become legally and socially accepted as citizens. The second type of citizenship education is the one taught in schools as an academic subject just like sociology or history. The aim is to ensure that individuals acquire certain fundamental and basic knowledge to qualify as a citizen. In Nigeria, citizenship education is a recent development and is taught in all tertiary institutions with a variety of names such as Nigerian Peoples and Culture (NPC) amongst others (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011).

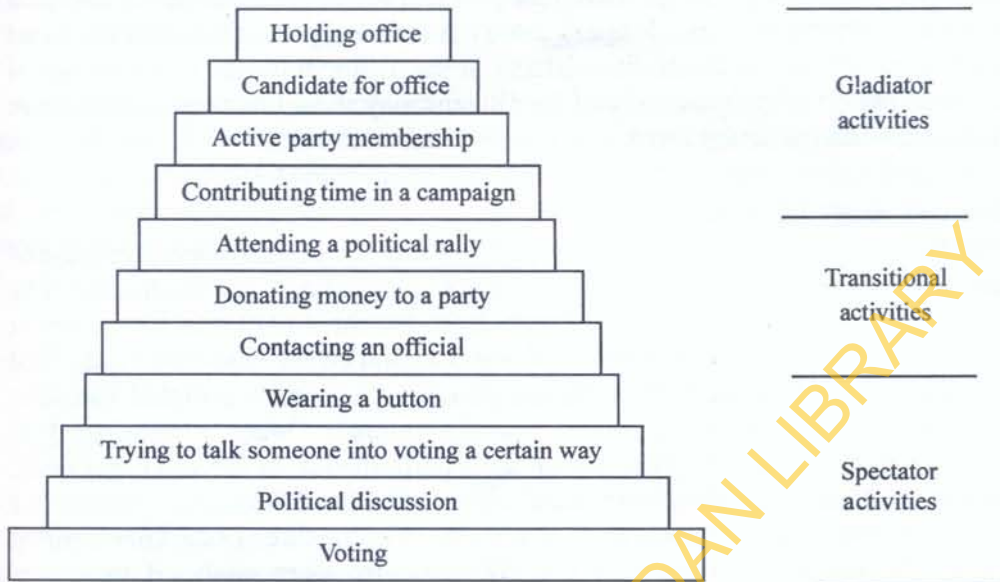
In theory, elections enable citizens to choose and guide their government (Roskin, 2006). Democracy provides the platform for people to participate in choosing their leaders. In order for election to successfully accomplish this purpose, citizen participation is very critical. Citizens' participation is essentially nation-building through the thoughts, words and actions of a critical mass of the people. This is a process where citizens take responsibility for the current state and future outcome in the country and then with courage, step out to participate in activities that will lead to its development (Udoh, 2012). One of the ways citizens could achieve this aim is to participate actively in elections. Citizens' participation in election could take various forms such as, citizens working for a political party of their choice, working for a candidate running for an elective position, running for political office, attending party meetings, attending political rallies and symposia, campaigning for a candidate, campaigning for a political party, registering to vote, and casting their votes on election days. Participating in election activities helps to deepen democracy; since an increased participation of citizens in elections places pressure on elected officials to live up to campaign promises.

There is the assumption that when citizens participate in elections, it makes the elections more credible and less likely to be hijacked by political miscreants. Elections are supposed to be free and fair. Mackenzie (1967), cited in Okoosi-Simbine (2012), identified four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair

election. These are: an independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws, an independent, competent and non-partisan Electoral Management Body (EMB) to manage the elections, a developed system of political parties and a general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game. Also, there are three vital requirements for delivering free and fair elections in Africa and they include: an independent judiciary, an independent, competent and non-partisan EMB and a developed system of political parties (Igbuzor and Edigheji, 2003; Okoosi-Simbine, 2012). Citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria with reference to Benin City is contingent on these key requirements particularly an independent, competent and non-partisan electoral management body in which case is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC should be able to build the confidence the citizens have in it to deliver credible elections. Okoosi-Simbine (2012), asserted that, "good elections are generally considered to be those in which there is effective participation of all, women and men alike as organizers, voters and candidates."

Political participation has been a substantive area of interest for both sociologists and political scientists, mainly because it pertains to the quintessential act of democratic citizenship and it is one of the oldest concepts in the comparative study of politics (Lamprianou, 2013; Omotola and Aiyedogbon, 2012). Yet it remains an essentially contested concept, with a variety of definitions on parade, each of which is either too general or too narrow (Omotola and Aiyedogbon, 2012). Nelson (1979) cited in Omotola and Aiyedogbon, (2012), defines political participation as an 'action of private citizens intended to influence the actions or composition of national or local government. Diemer (2012) cited in Lamprianou (2013), referred to political participation as an "engagement with traditional mechanisms in the . . . political system, such as voting in elections and joining political organizations". Political participation has to do with the nature and extent of citizens' individual involvement in the political process of the society (Dokpesi, 2006). And elections are part of the political process of society. Citizens' participation in elections could involve a wide range of political activities that take place in the build-up to election. The decision and willingness of individual citizen to take part in elections can be explained under the levels of political participation. According to Milbrath (1965), cited in Ruedin (2007), political participation is conceptualized in a hierarchical manner; persons who engage in the topmost behaviour are likely to perform those lower in ranks also. Participation is conceptualized in terms of different levels as shown in the pyramid (hierarchy) below;

Figure 1: Hierarchical level of Political Participation



Source: Ruedin, D. (2007). "Testing Milbrath's 1965 Framework of Political Participation: Institution and Social Capital". *Contemporary Issues and Ideas in Social Science*, Vol.3 (3). pp 1-46.

The spectator level of citizens' participation in the political process is through political discussions especially with like minds, and more importantly exercising their voting rights. An individual who carries a party sticker on his or her car is also involved at this level. The number of citizens participating at this level is higher than the number of citizens participating at other levels put together. At the transitional level, citizens are more involved in the political process. Here citizens attend meetings, make financial contributions to the maintenance and electoral success of their political parties and participate by assisting political candidates to win elections. Citizens involved at the gladiator level are at the highest level of participation in politics. At this level, individuals seek elective positions which compel them to canvass for votes from the electorates. Citizens that participate at this level are also likely to perform the activities of lower levels. They are gladiators in the sense that they are involved in the most competitive aspect of political activities (Dokpesi, 2006). Moving from one level to the next in the hierarchy is dependent on the individual characteristics. For example, an extremely passive citizen is unlikely to become involved in politics (elections) in the first place or someone comfortable with overt political acts is unlikely to put a sticker of the chosen political party on his or her car (Ruedin, 2007).

It is instructive to mention that in Milbrath's hierarchy of political participation; at the bottom of the hierarchy are the apathetic citizens. The politically apathetic

citizens are those who seem not to know or are not interested in the series of political events in the community to which they belong. A citizen's feeling of indifference to the happenings within the political world around him/her may be a function of several factors (Dokpesi, 2006). A citizen's participation in elections means an involvement in activities of any of the different levels. But a survey of the participation of the generality of the citizens may show that their participation hovers around a particular level.

Methodology of Study

This study was conducted in Benin City. The study utilized the survey method of data collection which involved the use of a structured questionnaire. The participants for this research were drawn from the three (3) Local Government Areas in Benin City namely; Egor, Ikpoba-Okha and Oredo using the cluster and convenient sampling methods. Citizens of voting age were sampled and four hundred and fifty (450) copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents to provide information on their participation in the 2011 elections. The questionnaire was administered and collected by hand through the services of research assistants and this was done at ward level of the three Local Government Areas. The completed copies of the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16. Simple frequency and percentage were used to show the strengths and weaknesses of variables.

Analysis of Results

From the survey, it was discovered that majority of the respondents were male (63.3%) while the female respondents had 36.7%. Majority of the respondents (40%) fell within the age bracket of 25-34 years, followed by 35-44 years (23%). This shows that majority of the respondents were in their youthful ages where active participation is expected to be high. This is again followed by respondents below the ages of 25 years (16.7%). And respondents within the age bracket of 45-54 years (13.3%). While respondents under the ages of 55 and above constituted the lowest with only 7%.

The study revealed that citizens' participation in the 2011 general elections in Benin City was poor and limited to registration and voting alone. Specifically, Table 1 shows that majority of the citizens did not work for any political party during the build-up to the elections with 90% of the respondents affirming this. The same result goes for citizens that never worked for any candidate (political office aspirant). The study also shows that attendance at political party meetings and rallies was poor. 80% of the respondents did not attend any political party meeting while only 13.3% of the respondents attended political rallies. In campaigning for political parties or candidates, citizens' participation showed a slight difference from that of attendance at political rallies as only 16.7% of the respondents were involved in one form of campaign activity or the other for the

candidates of their choice. Investigation also revealed that 90% of citizens did not carry party sticker neither on their cars nor did they have them (stickers) pasted on the door of their offices or at homes. While a minute 3.3% of the respondents received money to campaign for party candidates. In the area of registration and voting in the 2011 elections, the field survey revealed that 93.3% of the respondents registered to vote while 83.3% came out to cast their votes on elections days. This shows that some citizens who participated in the registration exercise in 2011 did not come out to cast their votes. They appear to be apathetic to election matters. They feel that their participation in elections begins and ends with taking part in the voters' registration exercise. And this is attributable to some factors

Table 1: Citizens' participatory level in election activities

Questions	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
WORKED FOR A POLITICAL PARTY	Yes	45	10
	No	405	90
	Total	450	100
WORKED FOR ANY CANDIDATE	Yes	45	10
	No	405	90
	Total	450	100
ATTENDED ANY POLITICAL MEETINGS	Yes	90	20
	No	360	80
	Total	450	100
ATTENDED POLITICAL RALLIES	Yes	60	13.3
	No	390	86.7
	Total	450	100
CAMPAIGNED FOR A PARTY OR CANDIDATE	Yes	75	16.7
	No	375	83.3
	Total	450	100
GOT MONEY TO CAMPAIGN FOR A CANDIDATE	Yes	15	3.3
	No	435	96.7
	Total	450	100
CARRIED STICKERS OF PARTIES ON CARS, OFFICES ETC.	Yes	45	10
	No	405	90
	Total	450	100
REGISTERED TO VOTE IN THE 2011 ELECTIONS	Yes	420	93.3
	No	30	6.7
	Total	450	100
VOTED IN THE 2011 ELECTIONS	Yes	375	83.3
	No	75	16.7
	Total	450	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Arising from the findings that some citizens registered but did not vote during the elections required some investigations as to the causes of such behaviour. Table 2 shows that majority of the citizens believe that good governance is a major factor that would attract them to participate in elections. Eighteen point six percent (18.6%) of the respondents identified good governance as the highest motivating factor. This means that citizen could be motivated to participate in elections if they are experiencing good governance. That is, if the citizens feel the positive impact of government in the society. This can be linked to the assertion of Mackenzie

(1967), Igbuzor and Edigheji (2003) cited in Okoosi-Simbine (2012), on the key requirements for delivering a free and fair election. The presence of an independent judiciary, independent, competent, non-partisan EMB, developed system of political parties and general acceptance of the rule of the game by the political community are indicators of good governance. A system where the rule of law takes precedence and is over and above every citizen regardless of social, economic and political status in the society. Another factor which followed closely is voters' education with 13.3%. Proper voters' education improves citizens' participation in elections in the country; it creates awareness and enlightens the citizenry on how they can actively participate in election matters in the society. National duty and integrity of candidate were the least motivating factors with 6.7% respectively.

Table 2: Factors that attract citizens' participation in elections.

Factors	Frequency	Percent
	30	6.7
Political contribution	45	10
Good governance	84	18.6
Ethnicity	46	10.2
Security	45	10
Voters' education	60	13.3
Honesty	30	6.7
Antecedents of candidate	40	8.9
Selfless service	40	8.9
National pride and duty	30	6.7
Total	450	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013

The economic status of citizens appears to be a factor that affects participation in elections as indicated in table 3. This is because from the survey conducted about two-third of the respondents affirmed this claim. It is often said that those who participate in elections are not usually the down trodden but the elites in the society. This explains why some people do not take part in political activities. There is also the perception amongst citizens that participation in politics is somewhat the exclusive right of the rich alone. This shows that the economic status of citizens affects their participation. And this finding can be linked to the work of Powell, (1983) cited in Olaniyan, 2007. According to Powell, "the more economically strong citizens are, the higher the potential for mobilizing them for electoral participation." The security of the ballot box is of utmost importance if citizens are to participate actively in elections. This is because vote according to Nwolise (2012b), is the link between the electorates, the candidate and the post

itself. Therefore, the votes of the citizens must be protected to avoid rigging during election. Table 4 below shows the factors that discourage citizens from participating in elections.

Rigging on the other hand appears to be the major factor that discourages citizens from participating in elections as 30% of the respondents affirmed this position in table 4. The problem of rigging has impacted negatively on the participation of citizens such that people see ballot boxes being snatched and taken away by political thugs thereby discrediting the outcome. The implication of this is that their votes do not count in the long run given the time, resources and commitment they put in. According to Nwolise, (2012b), the vote is the most critical element of an election. Therefore, the security of the vote is of utmost importance. To prevent rigging, INEC chairman Attahiru Jega urged citizens to vote and stay at a safe distance from the polling station to protect their votes until after the count and declaration of results (Nwolise, 2012b). There have been incidences of intimidation of innocent citizen by gun totting boys on election days that shoot sporadically into the air to scare the electorates for the purpose of snatching ballot boxes. This has made a lot of citizens to stay away from polling centres for fear of becoming victims of circumstance.

Table 3: Citizens' participation in connection to their economic status

Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Does the economic status of Nigerians affect their participation in elections?	Yes	270	60
	No	180	40
	Total	450	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013.

Table 4: Factors that discourage citizens from participating in elections

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Rigging	135	30
Corruption	49	10.8
Electoral violence	40	8.9
Lack of party ideology	31	6.9
Lack of performance	35	7.8
Poor integrity of candidate	35	7.8
Insecurity	53	11.8
Poor political culture	72	16
Total	450	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013

From this study, it appears that apathy on the part of citizens is largely due to lack of confidence in the electoral system. This is because the study revealed that more than two-third of the respondents lack confidence in the electoral system. Table 5 shows that rigging is the most cited reason for citizens' lack of confidence in the electoral system as 30.5% of the respondents said they do not have confidence in the nation's electoral system because of the massive rigging that takes place

during elections. Also, government influence/interference is another reason with 12.6% of the respondents affirming this position. Many citizens are of the opinion that government interferes in the operations of the electoral management body (Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC) and this discredits the elections. This has resulted in repeated calls for the chairman of INEC not to be a direct appointee of the head of the executive arm of government. Respondents also identified insecurity, corruption, and inability to conduct a free and fair election by INEC as reasons for their lack of confidence in the electoral system.

Table 5: Citizens' confidence in the Electoral System

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Do you have confidence in the electoral system which INEC is in charge of?	Yes	165	36.7
	No	285	63.3
	Total	450	100
Reasons for the lack of confidence in the electoral system	Lack of Free and Fair Election	30	10.5
	Rigging	87	30.5
	Government Influence/interference	36	12.6
	Bad Government	25	8.7
	Electoral Malpractice	33	11.6
	Corruption	15	5.3
	Insecurity	15	5.3
	Lack of Good Integrity	19	6.7
	Lack of Improvement	25	8.8
	Total	285	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013

From the findings in this study, it has been discovered that the general participation of citizens in the 2011 elections in Benin City was quite poor. And the poor participation of citizens in the 2011 elections is a function of institutional and socio-economic factors, i.e. the inability of INEC to build citizens/voters' confidence in the electoral processes and outcomes by conducting credible elections and the economic status (income) of citizens. The analyses revealed that the citizens' participation in elections in the 2011 elections in Benin City is restricted to registration and voting alone on elections days. The survey has shown that citizens' participation in elections is at the spectator level.

Reasons for Political Apathy in the 2011 Elections in Benin City

One reason that can be adduced for political apathy in Benin City during the 2011 elections is insecurity. In attempting to emphasize the importance of security in every sphere of human endeavor, Nwolise (2012a) writes: "security is not only a primary value for every person, group, nation, and the world; it is the most sacred value, the ultimate value and the value that determines every other value." This is because unless one is assured of his physical security and safety, everything else will be meaningless (Zabadi, 2001). Security threats stem from violence during

elections which emanate from attempts to manipulate the process by godfathers and their thugs and political elites, the assassination of political opponents and the creation by several politicians of private 'armies' (Nwolise, 2012b). These trends have made citizens apathetic towards the electoral process. Citizens are concerned about their safety while performing or attempting to perform their civic duties; and except they are assured of their physical security and safety during elections, the electoral process will be meaningless to them.

The security of ballot is another dimension associated with the problem insecurity during elections in Benin City. Many citizens are of the opinion that results of the elections do not reflect the actual voting pattern of the electorates. They often assert that election figures have been tampered with. Nwolise (2012b) while pointing out the significance of votes asserted that:

"One right citizens do not surrender is the right to participate in the democratic governance of the state, especially to elect its leaders, and the frustration of this right may engender violence and insecurity. Unscrupulous politicians, especially mercantile godfathers in pursuit of their undemocratic political plans and ambitions, may unleash mayhem on the people. The incumbent government may deploy the defence of security apparatus against the people in an attempt to ensure that its favoured candidate wins. Where such a move is suspected the people themselves may organize to protect their votes and to checkmate the state."

The aftermath of such revolt by citizens often result in security breaches that have led to the destruction of lives and property during elections. The problem of insecurity arises from institutional failure; either by INEC or security agencies in terms of logistic challenges, inadequate preparation or systemic breakdown.

Bad governance is another reason for political apathy. A government exists to initiate and execute policies for the general welfare of all citizens; the material progress of society; the protection of live and property of citizens, the maintenance of security, social order, law and public order; the maintenance of justice, equity, peace and stability and the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the state (Ikelegbe, 2013). When government fails in its duties to the state, the citizens tend not to identify with it. When the welfare of the citizens is not paramount rather attention is shifted to paying allegiance political godfathers, a crisis of governance results and citizens see the quest of politicians as a means to primitively accumulate wealth.

Lack of good integrity of candidates is yet another reason adduced for political apathy in Benin City. Political parties are known for presenting candidate with questionable character to stand for elections. Some of these candidates are people who have served in the state civil service and are known for their lack of

patriotism. Due to the fact that citizens have no control over who a party presents as its flag bearer, they become very disinterested to participate in elections. In the 2011 elections in Benin City, most candidates ran for a second term of office, many of whom failed to perform or make any significant change or impact on the general welfare of citizens in their first term in office.

Conclusion

In this study, attempt was made to bring to the fore the level citizens participated in elections in Benin City. Some questions were raised and answers provided. The study revealed that most of the citizens did not attend political meetings or take part in political rallies; neither did they campaign for any political party or candidate but merely registered and voted. This study identified various factors such as security, good governance candidate's integrity etc. that attract citizens to participate in elections as well as factors i.e. rigging, poor political culture, insecurity etc. that discourage or repel them from getting involved in election matters. Investigations showed that when citizens perceive that the government or an administration is good, they become interested in participating in elections. Also in this survey, rigging was identified as the major factor that repels citizens from getting involved in elections. There is the belief among the citizens that their votes would not count. A good number take part in the voter registration exercise and eventually get registered but this does not reflect on the voting pattern as many of those who registered do not turn up on elections days to cast their votes. Citizens are yet to show a significant level of interest in election matters in the state and there exist some form of political apathy among citizens within the political system. By and large, from this study, investigation revealed that citizens' participation in the 2011 elections revolved around the spectator level as the data got from the survey carried out reflected this position.

Recommendations

In order to increase citizens' involvement in election matters given the fact that there will be many more general elections in Nigeria, the following recommendations come in handy.

First, the problem of voters' apathy due to insecurity, rigging, electoral violence, lack of performance etc. should be aggressively tackled. This can be done through proper voters' education. Citizens should be sensitized on issues of elections and the need and importance of actively participating. The mass media and civil society have a major role to play in this.

Second, the curriculum for citizenship education should be renewed. Courses on citizenship should be introduced into the curriculum of universities in the country and student should be made to offer such courses to improve the knowledge of the youths on issues that pertain to their rights, duties and responsibilities as citizens. This would in turn spur the interest of youths to participate actively in elections. A

subject of similar nature but less technical to enhance easy understanding should also be introduced into the curriculum of post-primary institutions.

Third, to encourage voters to turn out on election days to exercise their franchise, adequate security must be provided. Electoral violence has become too rampant at polling units in Nigeria during elections and this has continued to scare electorates from active participation. Political thugs and gun totting boys shoot into the air to intimidate people and hijack the process. With heavy security presence, this trend could be stemmed. While doing this, government should be discreet as not to excessively deploy security personnel because the undue militarization of the environment could in turn scare voters from participation.

Fourth, while accepting the fact that it is quite difficult to completely eradicate the influence of government in elections in Nigeria due of the nature and character of the political system, government interference in elections should be reduced to the barest minimum. INEC should be independent and free from all forms of pressure either from the government and/or political elites in the society. Also, the appointment of officials for INEC should not be done by the executive arm of government alone but in conjunction with the three arms of government.

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