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**Interrogating the high voter turnout in recent elections in Nigeria through the induced factors: 2020 and beyond**

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**Abstract**

*This paper investigates the efficiency of induced factors in strengthening high voter turnout in recent elections in Nigeria. Over the years, elections have recorded and witnessed low voter turnout as a result of some issues associated with it that has brought democracy into question and in jeopardy. The paper posits to validate the factors which have added voters to show out to vote in large number based on some factors like transparency of the electoral process, vote buying, reduction in electoral violence among others. The paper made use secondary data for analysis and adopts theory of participatory democracy and value-added theory as theoretical framework to navigate the study.*

**Keywords:** Apathy, election, electoral process, democratisation, political participation

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**1. Introduction**

Electoral participation is one of the major factors of democratic process as people's involvement in the political activities is essential for democratic consolidation and sustainability. Voter turnout varies significantly overtime and across countries, system and societies (Agu, Sunday, & Adeline, 2013). Making participation more easy, productive and strong entails the thinking about how citizen acts of participation can have the best impact in any democratic country. This will bring meaningful chances for people to participate in their area and in the political process where they can strongly initiate, negotiate and participate to change policy (Frey, 2016). In its representative manner, democracy upholds the argument that voters have the right to participate in the election process. It is designed to elect the best, streamline the political system and ensure the coordination of interests (Kuna, 2005). The political culture of a country has to do

with the particular distribution of patterns of orientation or general attitudes towards political objects among the members of that state (Babawale, 1999). Elections are stages whereby people choose their representatives and indicate their preferred public policies of the government. It is central to the practice of democracy and forms the basis of democratic principles (Mmaduabuchi-Okeke, 1999).

Essentially, elections are organised to determine perfectly who governs governmental institutions for a period of time. Likewise, the percentage of voters who voted in electoral process is used as an indicator of the end of equal popular participation in an election as there is considerable fluctuation from one election to the other among those that participated actively in the voting process as much as candidates, issues and induced factors change overtime (Omilusi, 2017). Voter's active participation in elections is one of the key measures of electoral democracy. The people's lack of interests or apathy in

election tends to undervalue the electoral process which makes voter's turnout a crucial aspect of the electoral investigations (Adigun, 2020:11). Voting behaviour seems to be a result of societal development, the influence of mobilizing indicators which play decisive role in an election (Kersting, nd:130). Electoral democracy and political participation, political apathy represents lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic engagement and obligations, as well as abstention from political activities and the general lack of passion in the electoral process (Nweke & Etido-Inyang, 2018). Recently, two gubernatorial elections were held in Nigeria (Edo State and Ondo State). The table below indicates the level of voter turnout for 2016 and 2020 elections respectively.

**Table: 1**

S/N	Year	Edo (%) Voter turnout	Ondo (%) voter turnout
1	2016	32%	35%
2	2020	25%	32%

Source: INEC Data base: 2016 and 2020.

According to Solijonov (2016) that:

*Voter turnout is the extent to which eligible voters use their votes in election day. It is measured as the percentage of votes cast at an election including invalid votes. The term eligible voters can be defined in many ways international IDEA has adopted two measures: First, the number of registered voters as officially reported by the national bodies responsible for compiling voters' lists; and second, the voting age population (VAP)*

*which is an estimate of the proportion of a country's population that is of voting age (Solijonov, 2016)*

To Kersting (nd) noted that clientelism and networks are major factors in voter manner in all countries. Strong social networks and group identity motivate the casting of ballots and determine voting direction, while the major factor is voter registration and participation (Kersting, nd). The more motivation to vote or ability to vote, the more likely he or she is to turn out on a given election day. However, the difficult voting for the voter, the less likely the person is to vote. A voter turnout behaviour is likely to be a joint, multiplicative function of the three factors or classes of causes to vote or not to vote. The induced factors will propel voters to vote (Harder & Krosnick 2008).

#### **Significance of the Study**

The study is a critical appraisal of high voter turnout in recent elections in Nigeria. The study is expected to be beneficial to democracy, electioneering and good governance. It is to explore and validate the induced factors that have assisted voters to show up for voting as well as give more legitimacy to elections and the chosen elected persons.

#### **Gap in the Literature**

The research in this study builds on several strands of existing Literature. Green, McGrath & Aronow (2013) provide a recent review of factors that can potentially help bridge the gap between low voter turnout and high voter turnout. They investigate the effects of canvassing, commercial phone calls and direct mail indicated that the substantially increases in turnout of voters during any election. Equally, spatial and temporal spill overs effects and isolated voter mobilisation have supported high voter turnout (Green, McGrath, & Aronow, 2013).

## 2. Literature Review

### Reasons for Voter Apathy

Notwithstanding the induced factors that have been injected into the voters' mentality for positive and progressive turnout, there is the need for the study to review the reasons or causes, forms, effects and consequences of voter apathy in order to juxtapose a balance and objective analysis.

#### Reasons/causes

- It includes apathy to vote due to:
  - Lack of information;
  - Lack of interest (Olawale, 2018)
  - Violence associated with election matters (Amaniye, Bariledum & Lucky, 2015; Ojumu, 2016:)
  - The perception that votes don't count, dislike of politicians, lack of variety in candidates, lack of trust in Government and the hyper-critical negative media to electioneering.
  - Rigging of elections, chaos in the political system, weak security measures during elections (Yakubu, 2012).
  - Lack of political accountability. Bad governance.
  - Poverty as politically, the voters become more subjective to the evil machinations of the elites, giving ascendancy to ethnic, religious and other primordial interests (Steve, 2002)
  - The quality of information affects the voter's certainty to cast votes (Vergne, 2009; Akinyemi, 2019).
  - Weak democratic culture and weak and non-neutral state institutions (Onapajo & Babalola, 2020)
  - INEC incompetence, Poverty and imposition of candidates. (Umana, 2018)

#### Forms of voter Apathy

These include:

- No interest in registration of voters;

- Ignoring electoral activities;
- Ignoring elections
- Showing no interest in protecting the electoral process; and
- Showing no political position (Tersoo, 2018:1)

#### Effects/consequences of voter Apathy

- Deceit and unfulfilled promises by politicians /political leader discouraged a large number of voters from participating in elections.
- Undesired and incompetent emerged as a result of voter's apathy where unpopular winner wins the race (Falade, 2014)
- The most immediate effect of political apathy on a country is a decline in political involvement of the electorates (Idike, 2014)
- Some negative feelings about politics serve to heighten rather than dampen young voters' intent to participate in the electoral process (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995)
- Election left in the hands of artisans by the political elites may not reflect the will of the people at large, (Oluwagbohunmi, 2020).

#### Theoretical framework

The study adopted theories of participatory democracy and value added as its theoretical frameworks to midwife the work. The theory of participatory democracy is a process of collective decision making that combines elements from both direct and representative. Voters have the power to decide on policy proposals as decision makers assume the race of policy implementation through periodical elections. It implies that ultimate authority of governance rests with the people (voters) as it repudiates the model of democracy with regards to people's political participation as the basic principle of democracy (Sanchez-pages &



Aragones, 2009; Gauba, 2003; Pateman, 2012).

Proponents, theorist and writers on the theory of participatory democracy include: Rober (1991), Macpherson (1973), Rousseau (1778), John (1790), James (1838), Dicey (1835), Lowe (1856) Thomas (1588), Carole and (1750), Edmund (1726), and James (1751). They all agreed that sovereignty not only originates from the people, it is also retained by the people (voters).

The linkage of the theory to the study lies on the participation (turnout) of voters on who governs them in periodical elections as they have the exclusive, absolute mandate and rights to vote for their leaders either low or high turnout. However, the defect of the theory hangs on the basis that it does not suggest any alternative system for its implementation, it is too pessimistic, undisciplined and uncontrollable for the crowd it generated (Gauba, 2003).

The value-added theory holds the analytical views that theory consists of four components of social behaviours and six determinants of collective action. It is a process where certain social conditions happen in a process build on each other in a manner that increases the chances of a collective action. It views a social system as is structurally conducive to collective action and a group of people acknowledge a structural strain, a generalized belief emerges which the social control forces are unable to counter the prior determinants which brought a collective action (Saffer, 2018). It involves structural conduciveness, structural strain, growth and spread of a generalized belief, precipitating factors, mobilization of participants for action and the operation of social control (OESD, nd). The theory was first developed by Neil (1962), which integrated functional theory into an analysis of collective behaviour. Other theorists, proponents and writers on value

– added theory include: Regerson, Kee, Burachell, Rodney, Key and Bell (2013) among others.

The utility of the theory lies on the facts that voting is rational even in large elections as individuals have preferences and are concerned about social welfare. The expected value of the social benefit does not decline or approach a zero level as the number of voters grows large. It is significantly independent of the size of the electorate, suggesting that rational voter turnouts can be high even in large elections, less important elections are known to have lower turnout but a feedback mechanism keeps turnout at a reasonable level under a wide range of conditions (Edun, Gelma & Kaplan, 2007). The linkage of the theory to the study hangs on the fact that such induced factors added more value to the voters' turnout to choose their leaders and it makes the electoral process more enduring and encouraging due to the value added by the induced factors. However, the defect of the theory is on the incapacity on the part of voter, crisis, instability, disruptions of electronic system, voter anonymity, election cybersecurity, unforeseen situation on election day and natural disasters occurring.

### **3. Methodology**

The study used exploratory method and uses secondary source in exploring the information relevant to the topic under discussion. Thus, the use of textbooks, journals, and internet materials related to the study were consulted. The justification for chosen this method is the inability to interviewed voters on why they decided to vote perhaps in large numbers.

### **The induced factors that have brought about the narratives to high voter turnout in Election in Nigeria and Beyond**

Across all democratic institutions in the world including Nigeria, there have been



issues/factors associated with voter turnout to boost the strength of voting pattern during elections. The following have been identified as induced factors that have given more clarity and momentum to voter turnout:

(i) Transparency of the electoral process: At a relative dimension, electorates have begun to see more openness, transparency and clear-cut policies on the electoral process which have motivated them to vote and rely on their votes. Electorates have put their trust on the transparency of the electoral process as their votes must count and be upheld.

(ii) Vote buying: electorates are being induced to vote in return for money on the day of elections as inducement. Since the primary indicator of poverty already prevalent in the political landscape this has compelled voters to trooped out in huge number to vote even against their will.

According to Ojo (2008) that:

*Candidates buy and citizens/electorates sell votes as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates who offer particularistic material benefits to voters may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange (Ojo, 2018)*

By implication, money as vote buying instrument has become the determining factor of voter turnout. The more vote buying, the more voter turnout increases, which is an inducement for voting strength for a party than others to win.

(iii) Impacts of social media on elections coverage: media in general is a solid and growing set of institution in contemporary Nigerian society that have come to play

vital and critical roles during elections (Howard, 2009:279) Sadeez (2006) noted that “The mass media have even got greater role to play in their match towards establishing a lasting democracy” (Sadeeq 2006:252). They monitor elections proceedings live and relay results almost immediately as declared by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to the public. They give the people hope of events with respect to the outcome and consequences of post-election crisis. Since its inception, the media has played crucial even overlapping roles in the conflictual and cooperation relationship among social, economic and political forces in Nigeria (Adebayo & Agbaje, 2010:93)

According to Egbon (2002) that:

*The media possesses the power to work within a political system or work against it. The media system can oil and ease the economic wheels of a country or bring them to a grinding halt as it can be used to maintain social equilibrium, facilitate change or seek radical alternatives. Nigerians today are even more conscious than ever before of what their democratic right are. They are now so deeply imbedded in the democratic process, as principal actors rather than mere spectators, all due to the activities of the mass media. The newspapers, radio and television networks are there always telling it to the society the way it is and how it looks. (Egbon, 2002).*

(iv) Reduction in physical electoral violence during election days: The just concluded Edo and Ondo States gubernatorial elections significantly recorded little or no election violence during the elections. That has given voters



the urge to come and vote without fear or intimidation in large turnout.

(v) Absence of ballot box snatching: it is an old rhetoric now to snatch ballot box during elections. Studies have revealed that voters are no longer interested to engage in illegal ballot box snatching due to live average of the events and the sophistication of voters themselves. Smart phones can easily capture any person trying to steal or snatching ballots box as the person's identity can easily be identified and prosecuted. This has allayed the fears of voters in voting during elections.

(vi) Involvement of international observers and civil societies organisation: they are critical stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral process as the scope and quality of participation has extended and expanded significantly. They are useful and relevant in the struggle to promote transparency and accountability in the electoral process (Adetula, 2008). They are organized network groups based on the advocacy for free and fair elections, transition monitoring groups, agenda for credible elections and suitable electoral reform as they are independent and objectives observers during elections. (Alauigba, 2012; Mohammed, 2020) As such, their findings during elections monitoring are reliable and genuine. With their inputs and intervention in electioneering, voters have developed more interest to vote in large turnout.

(vii) Peaceful conduct of elections on the part of political parties: political parties on their own have introduced some elements of maturity, morality and decency to their campaign's arrangement against violence and thuggery. These days, there have been televised debates live courage between and among contestants likewise peace paths being signed as witness by eminent personalities in the society in order to forestall hitch free election. This as well has induced voters to vote in large turnout

as they can vote in a peaceful atmosphere without violence during and after elections.

(viii) Issues based on elections campaigns and broad-based manifestoes: Another induced factors that have motivated voters' turnout are that campaigns and parties manifestoes are issued and broad based on social infrastructures, roads electrification energy and power, unemployment, insecurity, corruption, food insecurity, health matters which have direct benefits to the citizens. Personality, ego and party are no longer alone for winning an election, but issues of national importance are significantly as well. So, voters have the independent minds to vote for the choice he makes as a result of issues-based policy.

(ix) Reduction in the use of Federal might by the Federal Government for the suppression of opposition parties and their supporters votes during elections: The Edo and Ondo states gubernatorial elections were evidences of the Federal government political neutrality. Except the deployment of security and armed forces to forestall peace and security among voters during the elections, no report of the use of "federal might" against any voter not to vote for their choice. This is a significant paradigm shift from the old method where the "might is right". As voters, they exhibited the right to choose whom they want without any intimidation, suppression or threat.

(x) The elites' consensus to have free and fair elections: elites across the political spectrum have developed the mindset to propagate free and fair elections as their own political lives are now at stake in any electoral violence, rigging, manipulations and intimidation. Since the rapid reduction in ballot box snatching and other illicit or illegal ways to winning elections perpetrators are easily identified and exposed some them have identified with fair and free elections slogans to produce

real leaders and bring about legitimacy and broad-based support within and outside the political system. Observers of elections across are ready to discredit any fraudulent or manipulated election without fear or favour. It is moreover realizable that violent and fraudulent elections breed bad governance, corrupt and politically fragile tenure with the dialectics of contradictions and challenges to national unity and cohesion for the country.

(xi) Spontaneous releases of election results or live coverage from the situation rooms: voters are equally induced to vote in high turnout as they are aware that their results are being released after sorting and counting of votes right from the polling booths as certified by the electoral body supervising the conduct of the elections. This attitude of constant release of election results has added the trust and courage by voters to vote as their votes will certainly count.

(xii) Grass-root votes mobilization strategy on the eve of election days. Political parties approach voters some days to the election time in aggressive manners to get their votes mostly at the grass-root levels. This act has added more value to the high turnout of voters in election. The implication of this is that voters are being recognized as the sole determinants of the election and as such directs the way to the winning team.

According to Solijonov (2016), the conventional factors that affect voter turnout across democratic countries include the following:

- Population size - The impact of each vote is greater and more people (electorates) turnout to vote in an election based on the size of the country.
- Population and political stability – The level of political stability tends to breed high level of voters’ participation in elections.

- Economic Development – This means voters are ready to vote in high turnout sequel to good economic growth and development of their system.
- Closeness of election – The decision to vote influenced by the probability that an individual vote will have high impact on the election result.
- Perception of the political issues at stake could be a pull and push motivator for voter turnout.
- Campaign expenditures which is another determinant of election’s voter turnover.
- Political fragmentation – The number of political parties that are contesting an election can affect voters’ turnout.
- Electoral system – Voter turnout is higher in election that uses systems of Proportional representation than those in plurality/majority system.
- Compulsory voting – This is when voters are mandated and legally obliged to vote which in turn will increase the turnout.
- Concurrent elections – When several elections take place on the same day, voters turnout is usually higher as it increases more participation.
- Registration requirement – If the registration exercise and its requirement are not too difficult for voters to register their credentials. It will in turn manifest higher votes during elections.
- Voting arrangement – The design of various types of voting patterns can have impact on voter turnout.
- Age, Political interest and Civic duty – These are determinants to high voter turnout

**Table: 2**

1	Likelihood of voting	Motivation to vote	Ability to vote	Difficulty of voting
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*Source: Researchers’ compilation, 2020*



The table symbolizes the dynamics and dimension of voter equilibrium to the strength of choices with or without any hindrances.

#### 4. Conclusion/Recommendation

The researchers' findings have direct correspondence effect on high voter turnout as the induced factors strengthen their readiness to vote in large way, while it supports the theoretical assumption. It makes the induced factors work significantly as they have been texted when it motivated greatly.

There has been a rise in other forms of voter activism like mass protests, occupy movements and increased use of social media as new platform of political engagement and participation. Such shift or narratives in the process of political involvement from voting for traditional bodies of representation to new forms of democratic participation and representation put serious pressure on government. This has help with the use of technologies and social media platforms effectively and other innovative strategies to regain voters' participation through other induced factors which have facilitated deeper and higher voter turnout in recent elections without any molestation, fear and threats. Making political participation more possible, probable and powerful entails thinking and working about how voters' acts of participation can have the most impactful basis in voting pattern and behaviour.

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