
PERCEIVED CAUSES OF POLITICAL APATHY AMONG YENAGOA RESIDENTS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

OWEDE Victory Collins

and

SOBEREKON Soinyo Woyengibarakemi

*Department of Social Science Education, Niger Delta University,
Amassoma, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

and

DANIEL Ayakeme Lucky

*Department of Curriculum & Instructional Technology,
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria*

Abstract

This paper examined the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research type was adopted for this study. The target population of this study comprised all civil servants and businessmen resident within Yenagoa metropolis in the Bayelsa State. A simple random sampling technique was used to sample 176 respondents comprising 98 civil servants and 78 businessmen. One research question was raised and answered while two research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher's designed questionnaire titled "Perceived Causes of Political Apathy Questionnaire (PCPAQ)". The face and content validity of the instrument was established by experts in test and measurement in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University. The questionnaire was trial-tested with

20civil servants and businessmen outside the research locale and the split-half method was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. The two set of scores were correlated using Crombach Alphaand a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. The data collected were analyzed using mean rating and t-test. The only research question raised was answered using mean at an acceptable decision level of 2.50, while t-test was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. From the major findings of the study, several factors were perceived to be the major causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents. Also, there was a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents, and between civil servants and businessmen on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in BayelsaState respectively. Thus, it was recommended, among others, that a robust programme of an informal civic education be implemented so as to reduce the high level of political apathy among residents in BayelsaState.

Keywords: Causes, Political Apathy, Civil Servants, Businessmen.

Introduction

All over the world, democracy has been projected to be the best form of government owing to the fact that it promotes all-inclusiveness in the way and manner government business is carried out. One of the underlying principles that have been observed to contribute to the sustenance of democracy is the maintenance of a political climate in which every citizen can exercise his/her political liberty on one hand, and actively participate in the political process of the state, on the other (Ndoh, 2003). This presupposes that citizens are expected to demonstrate their civic responsibilities in matters concerning leadership recruitment and leadership succession processes of the state, through registered political parties. In fact, by virtue of the tenets of liberal/representative democracy, citizens elect their representatives during elections so that decisions can be taken on their behalf, since it is practically impossible for everybody to partake directly in the governance process of their state or hold a political office (Ibaba, 2004; Nuka, Kia & Nwibor, 2015).

In Nigeria, for example, the conduct of elections (which is a key component of democracy) dates back to the colonial era, especially when the first elective principle was introduced in 1922, following the enactment of what was known as the Sir Clifford's Constitution. This constitution, no doubt, marked a watershed in the history of the quest of citizens to have opportunities to participate not only in governance but also in taking vital decisions that borders on their welfare through their elected representatives. In the same vein, post-independence Nigeria has also experienced an upsurge in political activities even though there was a military interregnum at some point, the non-interruption in democratic governance since 1999 ought to have increased in the citizenry the consciousness to actively participate in the entire political process, as can be seen in other developed democratic climes, including a developing country, like Ghana.

The point should be made here, and quickly, that a political system is said to attain a democratic status when those who would exercise powerful decisions on behalf of the collective interest of the majority are elected through a fair, transparent, honest and periodic elections in which every candidate freely competes for votes and an equal platform is provided for every eligible adult voter to exercise his/her franchise (Huntington, 1991). This is true because voting in an election at any level provides the citizens the easiest means for popular participation in democratic governance. It also provides the platform for citizens to effect the needed change of government especially when those occupying political leadership positions are not living up to expectation of providing the *dividends* of democracy to those who elect them.

However, the experience in Nigeria has shown that a majority of the citizens prefer not to be involved in the political activities before, during and after elections. This scenario is what social scientists refer to as political apathy, where a vast majority of people demonstrate a lack of interest in the political sphere of the country. Suffice to state here that, in Nigeria, political apathy is so deeply rooted and pervasive in the consciousness of people to the extent that many have already programmed their minds that actively participating in any political activity will not produce any political

relevance. In fact, it is this deep-rooted apathy that gave rise to a passive and parochial political culture. This is aptly captured by DeLuca (1995) when he argued that political apathy on the part of citizens can equally manifest in an indefinite suspension of the consciousness to form political intentions and act accordingly.

Consequently, several factors have been identified to be responsible for the high level of political apathy among citizens. For instance, DeLuca (1995) blamed the educational institutions, political parties and voluntary (civil societies) organizations for not doing enough to encourage popular participation. Specifically, DeLuca (1995) averred that rather than preparing learners for citizenship and active participation in the governance process, educational institutions are fast becoming busy centers for job preparation. Van Deth and Ellf (2000) opined that socio-demographic characteristics of individuals (in terms of age, gender and education) still account for manifestations and differences in political involvement and political apathy among the eligible voting population, especially in Europe.

Here in Nigeria, the fear that electorates' votes will not count, political violence that is usually associated with elections in Nigeria, biased electoral umpires, bad governance and several other reasons have been identified to contribute to the deep-rooted political apathy among Nigerians (INEC, 2011; Yakubu, 2012; Agaigbe, 2015; Fagunwa, 2015). Gilbert and Barigbon (2015) are of the view that the high level of political apathy among Nigerians is nothing but a creation of the political class who only see politics as a means of accumulating wealth rather than service. More recently, the introduction of Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), though a very good innovation, has also tended to encourage political apathy as more potential voters would refuse to get registered due to the cumbersome and rigorous process associated with registration and collection of the PVCs. In most cases, the voter's card would not be relevant, especially when such a voter has moved to another location outside of the voting point he/she registered.

Clearly, the impact of political apathy in Nigeria is greatly felt by the declining rate of voter turnout during elections from 1979 to

2015 general elections. For example, Ibrahim, Liman and Mato (2015) and the Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (2015) provided a graphic picture of this impact by stating that the 2015 general (presidential) election had the least voter turnout of 29,432,083 (43.65%) out of the total 67,422,005 registered voters; when compared to about 30,280,052 (52.26%) votes cast in 1999. Similarly, in Bayelsa state for example, the December 5th, 2015 governorship election with the subsequent re-run in January 9th, 2016 recorded a total votes cast of 232,167 (35.47%) out of a total registered voters of 654,493 (Ibekwe, 2016).

The point should be made here that political apathy goes beyond voter apathy, to include lack of interest on the part of citizens to actively engage in political discourse or debates to, attend political rallies and campaigns and in providing constructive criticism about government's policies and programmes. Put in another perspective, docile and passive electorates not only promote bad and autocratic leadership but a culture of impunity on the part of elected representatives who would not take the interest of the people into account in public policy formulation and implementation.

Bearing this in mind, the federal government started the implementation of the Civic Education curriculum in the primary and secondary schools as a pragmatic way of addressing the issue of political apathy and other socio-political and economic challenges bedevilling the nation. Thus, among the major themes to be taught as stated in the curriculum are dangers of political apathy and achieving popular participation in politics (NERDC, 2007). Thus, it becomes absolutely necessary to sample the opinions of Yenagoa residents on the perceived causes of political apathy among them.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of any democratic governance is to a large extent premised on popular participation in the political process and activities surrounding political decisions. On the contrary, the experience in Nigeria shows that most registered and eligible voters do not see the issue of actively participating in all political activities before, during and after elections as important. As a result, many researchers have at various times in the past, conducted both

theoretical and empirical studies on the possible causal factors responsible for the deep rooted and pervasive political apathy demonstrated by the majority of Nigerians. For example, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2011) reported that the actions of politicians are a major causative factor of political apathy among the voting population in Nigeria. Agu, Okeke and Idike (2013) in their study on voter apathy revealed that political apathy can be correlated with the age, occupation and gender of the voters. Also, Idike (2014) blamed political parties and its key players (politicians) in Nigeria as the major cause of political apathy among the voting populace. However, Nuka, Kia and Nwibor (2015) argued that politically-induced violence is a major challenge inhibiting citizens' popular participation in politics. While it can be acknowledged that some empirical studies have been carried out in this area of research interest, there seem to be some research gaps arising from these previous studies, especially in terms of research locale, respondents and the instruments for data collection. In filling part of this research gap therefore, this study examines the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to examine the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.
2. Determine whether male and female residents in Yenagoa differ in their perception of the causes of political apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
3. Determine whether civil servants and businessmen resident in Yenagoa differ in their perception of the causes of political apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Research Question: One research questions was raised to guide the study.

1. What are the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis: Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study.

H_{0_1} : There is no significant difference in perception of male and female residents in Yenagoa on the causes of Political Apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

H_{0_2} : There is no significant difference in the perception of civil servants and businessmen who are Yenagoa residents on the causes of Political Apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Method

In collecting data for the study, the descriptive survey research type was adopted for this study. The target population of this study comprised all civil servants and businessmen resident within Yenagoa metropolis, in the Bayelsa state capital. A simple random sampling technique was used to sample 105 males and 71 female adult residents in Yenagoa (out of which 98 are civil servants while 78 are businessmen by occupation) thereby bringing the total sample to 176. One research question was raised and answered while two research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. The instrument for data collection was a 20-item researcher's designed questionnaire titled "Perceived Causes of Political Apathy Questionnaire (PCPAQ)". The PCPAQ contained two sections. Section A – seeks to collect demographic information of the respondents while Section B – collects data on perceived causes of political apathy arranged based on the modified Four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The face and content validity of the instrument was established by experts in test and measurement in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University. The questionnaire was trial-tested with 20 respondents who are civil servants and businessmen by occupation but outside of the research locale and the split-half method was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. The two sets of scores were

correlated using Crombach Alpha and a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. The data collected was analyzed using mean rating and t-test. The only research question raised was answered using mean at an acceptable decision level of 2.50, while t-test was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What are the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa, Nigeria?

Table 1:
Mean rating of responses on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoaresidents in Bayelsa State.

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Rank	Decision
1.	Politically induced violence before and during elections.	3.32	1 st	Accept
2.	Lack of political education/awareness.	2.85	9 th	Accept
3.	Failure of political leaders to fulfil electioneering promises.	2.63	13 th	Accept
4.	Lack of confidence in the electoral process.	2.83	10 th	Accept
5.	Because politics in Nigeria is a dirty game.	2.55	14 th	Accept
6.	Bad governance.	2.46	15 th	Reject
7.	Politics in Nigeria is money-based out of the reach of the poor.	3.00	5 th	Accept
8.	INEC is not completely independent in performing its functions.	3.11	4 th	Accept
9.	Sense of insecurity surrounding conduct of elections in Nigeria.	3.24	2 nd	Accept
10.	Political campaigns and rallies are not issue-based.	2.97	6 th	Accept
11.	My spouse does not usually allow me to be involved in political activities.	2.86	8 th	Accept
12.	Lack of confidence in political leaders.	2.97	6 th	Accept
13.	Lack of internal democracy in political parties in Nigeria.	2.65	12 th	Accept
14.	Political parties in Nigeria lacked clear-cut ideologies.	2.79	11 th	Accept
15.	The voter registration process is too rigorous.	2.63	13 th	Accept
16.	The procedures during elections are rigorous.	1.79	18 th	Reject
17.	Intimidation of electorates by security agents of government.	2.14	17 th	Reject
18.	Peoples' vote in Nigeria does not count in Nigeria.	3.23	3 rd	Accept
19.	The emphasis on possession of permanent voter's card is discouraging.	2.28	16 th	Reject
20.	There are unequal opportunities for the youth and women in the electoral process in Nigeria.	2.88	7 th	Accept

Table 1 shows the mean rating of responses from the respondents on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents. Out of the 20 items on the questionnaire, 16 items had a mean above the decision threshold of 2.50. Therefore, items 1 - 5, 7 - 15,

18 and 20 were accepted to be the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state while items 6, 16, 17 and 19 were rejected in the sense that they had a mean score less than 2.50. In terms of ranking, politically-induced violence, sense of insecurity surrounding conduct of elections and the notion that people's vote do not usually count in Nigeria are the first three major perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state, Nigeria; and accordingly, they were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively.

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in perception of male and female Yenagoa residents on the causes of Political Apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 2:
t-test analysis of the perception of male and female on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig.	Decision
Male	105	0.60	2.37	174	0.10*	0.00	Reject Null Hypothesis
Female	71	0.40	1.60				

*P<0.05

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of males and females on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents. The calculated p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in perception of civil servants and businessmen who are Yenagoa residents on the causes of political apathy in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 3:
t-test analysis of the perception of civil servants and businessmen on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents

Occupation	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig.	Decision
Civil Servants	98	59.1	29.8	174	0.46*	0.00	Reject Null Hypothesis
Businessmen	78	53.3	41.4				

*P<0.05

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of civil servants and businessmen on the perceived causes of political apathy among Yenagoa residents. The calculated p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion

The results presented in Table 1 show that several factors can be attributed to reasons why there is deep-rooted and pervasive political apathy among Yenagoa residents in Bayelsa state. Among the causes identified by respondents are politically-induced violence before, during and after elections and as well as insecurity surrounding the conduct of elections in Bayelsa state. This is consistent with the opinion of Nuka and Barigbon (2015), that voter apathy is a product of political violence which goes a long way to negatively impact on not only the electoral process but also the outcome of such elections. Of course, this is true especially against the background of the violent attacks on political opponents, destruction of properties and sporadic shootings by political thugs in several communities during the December 5th 2015 and January 9th 2016 governorship elections in Bayelsa state.

Little wonder, so many eligible voters would prefer to stay indoors rather than go out to perform their civic responsibilities, for fear of being molested or even killed by overzealous political thugs who are always ready to do the bidding of their paymasters. In fact, the inconclusive nature of the 2015 governorship election in Bayelsa state was as a result of violence and security threats to the peace of the state.

Secondly, the findings of this study further revealed that lack of confidence in political leaders because of their failure to fulfill electioneering promises, lack of internal democracy and a situation where political campaigns are not issue-based all contribute to the high level of political apathy in Bayelsa state. The findings of this study also corroborates the argument of Yakubu (2012) that a people is said to be apolitical when instead of reaping the benefits of democracy, underdevelopment and bad governance is what they get in return from their political leaders they have collectively elected

into different offices. It also confirms the position of Fagunwa (2015), who posited that the undemocratic nature of the political parties in terms of leadership recruitment and candidates' selection process caused a reasonable number of members to feel that they are not part of the process that produces those who will represent the party in general elections.

Similarly, the lack of a clear-cut political ideology, unequal political opportunities for women and youth and as well as what seems to be the feeling that electorates' votes do not usually count in Nigeria also accounted for the high level of political apathy on the part of those residing within the Yenagoa metropolis as shown from the results of the study. In fact, this is in line with the findings of Agaigbe (2015), who revealed that the popular notion of many voters in Benue state, especially with regards to the 2015 general election, was that most election results were already predetermined before even the election is conducted and that no matter the level of voter turnout during elections their votes will not count. In reality, this is the feeling among eligible electorate in Bayelsa state, judging by the findings arising from this study.

Additionally, Tables 2 and 3 which sought to test the two hypotheses formulated in the study also agrees with the reports of Agu, Okeke and Idike (2013), and Fagunwa (2015) that gender and occupation can be correlated with the level of activism or otherwise that usually characterized the political process in Nigeria. By this, it can be extrapolated that what makes the male citizens to demonstrate political apathy also influences their female counterparts to also not want to participate in politics. The same can also be said of civil servants and businessmen who may rather chose to focus on their works for livelihood than get involved in political activities that may not bring tangible reward after all.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from the results of the study in addition to evidence in the literature that a deep-rooted political apathy exists among the adult citizens in Bayelsa state especially in Yenagoa metropolis. Thus, the paper reveals, among several other factors, that politically-induced violence before, during and after elections, insecurity, and

the notion that peoples votes do not count have contributed in no small measure to the present high level of political apathy among residents in Bayelsa state. To stem this ugly tide, therefore, the following suggestions and recommendations are made:

1. Without further delay, there is an urgent need to vigorously implement a robust programme of an informal civic education for both the educated and uneducated. This can be done in collaboration with the electoral management bodies (national and state INEC) and civil society organizations.
2. The Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN) should organise town hall meetings in both urban and rural centres, where citizens would be sensitized on the need and importance to effectively participate in the political process. This can be effective when the various states and institutions' chapters see to it as a task that must be done through what can be described as community service or social responsibility of members.
3. The state offices of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should also redouble their efforts in this regard, instead of waiting till the election period. This can be complimented by the political parties one of whose core functions is to provide political education and awareness to the electorate.
4. Political stakeholders should see politics as a means to serve and as such, there should be healthy competition among them so that overzealous political thugs would not take advantage of an unhealthy rivalry to cause violence before, during and after elections.
5. Finally, there should be a component within the formal school civic education programme where the teacher would take the learners out for civic learning outreaches within the communities where the schools are located. This way, both the teachers and learners will see themselves as partners in entrenching active political culture.

References

- Agaigbe, F. M. (2015). *Voter apathy and voter turnout in 2015 general elections: The Benue state experience*. Abuja: The Electoral Institute.

- Agu, S.U., Okeke, V. O. S., & Idike, A. N. (2013). Voters apathy and renewal of genuine political participation in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 439 – 448.
- Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (2015). 2015 presidential elections: Analysis and implications. Retrieved from <https://www.cpparesearch.org>.
- DeLuca, T. (1995). *The two faces of political apathy*. Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press.
- Fagunwa, T. C. (2015). Voter apathy and Nigeria's electioneering process: A synopsis of the 2015 general elections. Retrieved from <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp>.
- Gilbert, L. D., & Barigbon, C. B. (2015). The politics of poverty and democratic participation: Nigeria in perspective. *Developing Country Studies*, 5(18), 114-124.
- Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave of democracy*. Retrieved from <https://www.princeton.edu/wwac/files>
- Ibaba, S. I. (2004). *Foundations of political science*. Port Harcourt: Amethyst and Colleagues.
- Ibekwe, N. (2016). Seriake Dickson wins re-election as Bayelsa state governor. Retrieved from <https://www.premiuntimesng.com>
- Ibrahim, S. G., Liman, A. N., & Mato, K. (2015). The 2015 general elections: A review of major determinants of paradigm shift in voting behaviour and political participation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 2(9), 8 – 16.
- Idike, A. N. (2014). Political parties, political apathy and democracy in Nigeria: Contending issues and the way forward. *Kuwait Chapter of the Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 4(3), 2-10.
- INEC (2011). Voter apathy and the 2011 elections in Nigeria. *A research report commissioned by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Friedrich Ebert St Fung (FES)*. Abuja: INEC.

- Ndoh, C. A. (2003). *An introduction to political science*. Owerri: Concave Publications.
- Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2007). *Senior secondary school curriculum civic education*. Abuja: NERDC Press.
- Nuka, A. S., Kia, B., & Nwibor, B. L. (2015). Electoral violence and political apathy in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. *British journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 13(1), 155-173.
- Van-Deth, J., & Ellf, M. (2000). *Political movements and apathy in Europe (1973-1998)*. Mannheim: Arbeitspaperie.
- Yakubu, Y. A. (2012). Democracy and political apathy in Nigeria (1999-2011). *European Scientific Journal*, 8(20), 38-48.