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VOTING APATHY: CAUSES AND REMEDIES FROM THE  
ELECTORATES' PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract**

This study determined the level of voting apathy among the electorates. It examined the causes of voting apathy among the electorates. It further determined the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates and finally examined the influence of variables such as level of education, political party affiliations and socio-economic status on the level of voting apathy of the electorates. The study adopted the survey research design. The sample size consisted of 350 electorates drawn from seven faculties in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, using purposive sampling technique. An instrument titled: Voting Apathy Questionnaire (VAQ) was developed and validated before use. Three research questions were raised and answered and three hypotheses were tested and verified. The results among others showed that the level of voting apathy among the electorates was moderate at 50.3%. Also, there was a significant influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among the electorates ( $F^2 = 161.969^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study

recommended that voters' activeness is a veritable tool for Sustainable Democracy.

Keywords: Voter's Apathy, Electorates, Causes, Remedies.

### Introduction

The 2019 General Elections witnessed generally low voters' turnout in many parts of the Federation. Despite the importance of the Presidential election, the average turn-out of voters in 2019 Presidential Election had been put at 37.4%. According to Orjime (2019), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had said that between 2015 and 2019 General Elections, some 16.58million Nigerians had become eligible to vote for the first time. Yet the number of people in 2019 General Election was the lowest since 1999 when the Fourth Republic took off. In 1999 polls, 52.3 percent of the registered voters voted; the figures increased to 69.1 percent in 2003, it went down to 57.4 in 2011 and 43.6 in 2015 (Orjime, 2019). In 2019, it went down to 37.4percent (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Scholars and commentators have attributed this phenomenon to voters' apathy which was accentuated by unprecedented violence and security challenges in all parts of the federation (Orjime, 2019 & Sahara Reporters, 2019).

Conduct of and due participation in elections are key ingredients of a democratic society. Hence, Dalton (2007), cited in Uchenna, Okeke and Idike (2013) opined that the citizens' involvement in the political process is essential for viable democracy. According to them, voting is the most important and recognized form of citizens' involvement. It is therefore surprising that despite the obvious importance of voting during elections, electoral turnout keeps on decreasing in most democracies, including Nigeria (Blais, 2000; Agu, Sunday & Idike, 2013; Falade, 2014; Agaibe, 2019). In Nigeria, the trend has forced politicians who are eager to secure the support of the few voters to embark on vote-buying. Ojo (2018) commented that vote-buying compromised the outcome of elections in Nigeria. He gave the examples of Ondo and Ekiti States whose elections which were deeply marred by vote-buying. Moreover, voters' apathy has become a threat to the future of

democracy in Nigeria. This is so, because elections could be seen as a way to discipline the elected officials by threat of not being re-appointed (accountability effect), a way to ensure the selection of competent individuals for public office (legitimacy effect) and a way to reflect the performances of majority of the voters (representative effect). Accountability effect makes the elected officials focused on their duties to the people to ensure re-election (Agaibe, 2019). Hence, election is seen as a device which makes elected officials to be responsible to and for the people and work in their overall interest. According to Uchenna, et al (2013), voting is a vital condition that makes elected officials to be responsible and accountable to the electorates.

In his view, Wojtasik (2013) highlighted seven basic functions of elections. These are: delegation of political representation; selection of the political elites; legitimization of those in power; control over authorities; political accountability; creation of political programmes and recreation of public opinion image. It is thus evident that failure of citizens to vote is harmful to democratic governance as it indicates that they have abdicated their rights, duties and obligations to be part of the decision as to who is to govern the political entity for the few years to come. Therefore, in a situation in which a large portion of electorates do not vote, the elections would not create an incentive for politicians to formulate policies (Wojtasik, 2013; Agaibe, 2019) and defend the interest of the voters (Ballington, 2001; Chinisingha, 2003; Ezeani & English, 2005; Dalton, 2007).

Nweke and Nwachukwu (2014) examined the origin and cases of national insecurity issues and challenges in Nigeria. The paper highlighted the efforts of the government to combat the violence and recommended the strict implementation of the anti-terrorism law to punish culprits of such heinous crimes, capable of causing instability in the nation. Some of the security challenges confronting Nigeria are; Boko Haram in the north-east zone; herdsmen attacks in the NorthCentral; cattle rustling and armed banditry in the North-west. Coming to the Southern part of the country; there are: vestiges of militancy in the South-south, coupled with the menace of kidnapping. In the Southeast, the violence

orchestrated by IPOB scared many people away from voting. It could be argued that in the south-west, political thuggery and election rigging which revived the 'WildWest' saga of the 1960's prevailed in Ekiti and Osun States during the 2018 Gubernatorial elections and in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo States during the 2019 Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections in March, 2019.

Based on the above analysis, this paper would determine the level of voting behavior among the electorates; determine the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates and examine the influence of variables such as level of education, political party affiliations and socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates. Electorates' participation in voting should be a thing of concern for a nation clamoring for the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as voter's activeness is a veritable tool for Sustainable Democracy. The situation is not the same in Nigeria's politics as many of the electorates through interaction and discussion demonstrate voting apathy in Politics. There is therefore the need to empirically investigate the electorates' attitude towards voting and how it enhances sustainable democracy, hence, this study.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this Study are to:

- i determine the level of voting apathy among the electorates;
- ii examine the causes of voting apathy among the electorates;
- iii determine the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates; and
- iv examine the influence of variables such as level of education, political party affiliations and socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide the study:

- i What is the level of voting apathy among the electorates?
- ii What are the identified causes of voting apathy among the electorates?

- iii What are the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates?

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

- Ho1: There is no significant influence of educational qualifications on level of voting apathy among the electorates.
- Ho2: There is no significant influence of political party affiliations on level of voting apathy among the electorates.
- Ho3: There is no significant influence of socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates.

### Methodology

The study employed survey research design. The population consisted of staff (both academic and non-academic staff), as well as undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria. The sample size was 350 people, drawn from the university using simple random sampling technique. From the seven selected faculties, 50 people were purposively selected bearing in mind that they have acquired some level of educational qualifications with minimum of NCE holders and must have been actively participating in voting and politics in Nigeria.

The seven faculties include that of Administration; Agriculture; Arts; Education; Science; Social Science and Technology. An instrument titled: Voting Apathy Questionnaire (VAQ) was developed by the investigators. It has three sections, Section A was on the socio-demographic variables of the respondents which include: Variables such as Educational Qualifications, Political Parties affiliations, and socioeconomic status of the respondents. Section B consisted of 15 items of four options on the causes of Voting Apathy in which the respondents are expected to rate from Strongly Agreed to Strongly Disagreed. The maximum score is 60 points while the lowest score is 15 points. Section C consisted of 10 items of four options on remedies to Voting Apathy ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The maximum point is 40 points while the lowest point is 10 points.

The instrument was trial-tested and validated using a sample of 50 people comprising of Academic staff, Non-academic staff and undergraduate students from another Federal University in another state who were purposively selected because of their interest in voting and political party affiliations. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to establish construct validity and internal consistency of the instrument which was found to be 0.84. Three research assistants were trained to assist in the administration of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, simple percentages, Bar chart, and Chi-square statistics.

### Results

Research Question One: What is the level of voting apathy among the electorates?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on the voting apathy among the electorates were subjected to descriptive analysis and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the level of voting apathy among the electorates

S/N	Level of voting apathy behaviour	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Low	101	28.8
2.	Moderate	176	50.3
3.	High	73	20.9
	Total	350	100.0

Result in Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the level of voting apathy among the electorates in the study area. As perceived by the respondents and observable from the table the level of voting apathy among the electorates is moderate at 176 (50.3%).

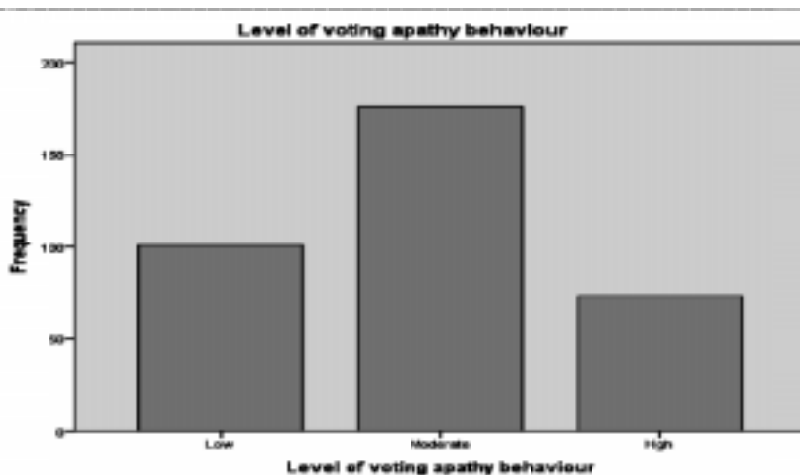


Fig 1: Bar chart showing the level of voting apathy among the electorates

Research Question Two: What are the identified causes of voting apathy among the electorates?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on causes of voting apathy among the electorates were subjected to descriptive analysis and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the causes of voting apathy among the electorates

S/N	Causes of voting apathy	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Unfulfilled political promises	230	65.7
2.	Thuggery and political intimidation.	310	88.6
3.	Bad governance.	285	81.4
4.	Illiteracy and ignorance.	230	65.7
5.	Rigging.	310	88.6
6.	Unfair governmental policies.	285	81.4
7.	Marginalization.	255	72.9
8.	Victimization of political opponents.	230	65.7
9.	Unfair distribution of resources	255	72.9
10.	Lack of accountability	310	88.6
11.	Delay and denial of justices	255	72.9
12.	Poverty	285	81.4
13.	Corruption	310	88.6
14.	Religious constraints.	230	65.7
15.	Insincerity of the electoral commission.	285	81.4

Results in Table 2 showed the descriptive analysis of the causes of voting apathy among the electorates in the study area. It can be observed from the table that 230(65.7%) submitted that unfulfilled political promises, victimization of political opponents, religious constraint, illiteracy and ignorance are causes of voting apathy among electorates in the study area. Also, 310(88.6%) said that rigging, lack of accountability, corruption, thuggery and political intimidation are other factors causing voting apathy even as 285(81.4%) underlined the fact that bad governance, unfair governmental policies, poverty and insincerity of the electoral commission are other factors bringing about voting apathy. In the same light, 255(72.9%) pointed out that marginalization, unfair distribution of resources, delay and denial of justices are factors causing voting apathy among electorates in the study area.

Research Question Three: What are the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates

S/N	Remedies to voting apathy	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Need of re-orientation programme	280	80.0
2.	Law enforcement agencies should guarantee safety.	320	91.4
3.	Regular mass mobilization.	280	80.0
4.	Good governance must be put in place.	310	88.6
5.	There must be free and fair elections.	320	91.4
6.	Every opinion, interest, tribe and group should be adequately represented.	275	78.6
7.	Need for independence and indisputable Judiciary	310	88.6
8.	Peaceful environment must be made available.	275	78.6
9.	Adequate security of life and property must be put into consideration.	280	80.0
10.	Creating trust in the government.	320	91.4



Results in Table 3 showed the descriptive analysis of the remedies to voting apathy from the perspectives of the electorates in the study area. 280(80.0%) of the respondents said that need for re-orientation programme, regular mass mobilization and adequate security of life and properties must be put into consideration. Also, 320(91.4%) submitted that law enforcement agencies should guarantee safety, creating trust in the government and there must be free and fair elections even as 310(88.6%) said that good governance must be put in place and that there is need for independence and indisputable judiciary. Moreover, 275(78.6%) agreed that peaceful environment must be made available, every opinion, interest, tribe and group should be adequately represented.

### Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among the electorates.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis of the influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among electorates

Qualifications	Level of voting apathy			$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
	Low f(%)	Moderate f(%)	High f(%)			
NCE	5(1.4)	35(10.0)	8(2.3)	161.969 <sup>a</sup>	8	.000
BSc/BSc. Ed.	28(8.0)	71(20.3)	65(18.6)			
MSc.	23(6.6)	63(18.0)	0(0.0)			
MPhil.	31(8.9)	7(2.0)	0(0.0)			
PhD.	14(4.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)			

( $\chi^2 = 161.969^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

Results in Table 4 showed that there is a significant influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among the electorates ( $\chi^2 = 161.969^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among the electorates is hereby rejected. The results implied that educational qualifications

have influence on the level of voting apathy among electorates in the study area.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence of political party affiliations on level of voting apathy among the electorates.

Table 5: Chi-square analysis of the influence of political party affiliations on level of voting apathy among electorates

Political parties	Level of voting apathy			$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
	Low f(%)	Moderate f(%)	High f(%)			
APC	39(11.1)	64(18.3)	44(12.6)	28.149 <sup>a</sup>	6	.000
PDP	35(10.0)	62(17.7)	29(8.3)			
SDP	15(4.3)	28(8.0)	0(0.0)			
ADC.	12(3.4)	22(6.3)	0(0.0)			

( $\chi^2 = 28.149^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

Results in Table 5 shows that there is a significant influence of political party affiliation on level of voting apathy among the electorates ( $\chi^2 = 28.149^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant influence of political party affiliation on level of voting apathy among the electorates is hereby rejected. The results implied that political party affiliation have influence on the level of voting apathy among electorates in the study area.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant influence of socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates.

Table 6: Chi-square analysis of the influence of socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among electorates

Status	Level of voting apathy			$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
	Low f(%)	Moderate f(%)	High f(%)			
Lower class	31(8.9)	59(16.9)	20(5.7)	23.026 <sup>a</sup>	6	.001
Working class	36(10.3)	70(20.0)	39(11.1)			
Middle class	18(5.1)	39(11.1)	14(4.0)			
Upper class	16(4.6)	8(2.3)	0(0.0)			

( $\chi^2 = 23.026^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

Results in Table 6 shows that there is a significant influence of socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates ( $\chi^2 = 23.026^a$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant influence of socio-economic status on level of voting apathy among the electorates is hereby rejected. The results implied that socio-economic status is a determinant of voting apathy among the electorates in the study area.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicated that the level of voting apathy was moderate as shown by the electorates. It also revealed that those factors such as thuggery and political intimidation; rigging; lack of accountability and corruption topped (88.6%) the list in predicting voters' apathy in Nigeria. However, other factors such as bad governance; poverty; unfair governmental policies; insincerity of the electoral constitution; marginalization; delay and denied of justices and unfair distribution of resources ranked very high. These findings were in line with the findings of the Wojtasik, (2013) and Okeke, (2014) who were of the views that failure of voters to exercise their franchise threatens the legitimacy; the accountability and the representative effect of election. However, where the three effects could be guaranteed through voting, attitude of electorates to voting would be quite indifferent. This appears to be the situation in Nigeria with the decreasing participation in

elections since 1999 to date. However, it was found that by improving the perspectives of the electorates, a more positive attitude to election could be negotiated. Predisposing factors to improve political participation include: a re-orientation programme for the electorates; guarantee of voters' safety to and from the polling booths; regular mass mobilization; putting in place good governance; free and fair elections; allaying the fears of political marginalization; need for independence and indisputable judiciary and creating trust in government. This finding is in line with the opinion of scholars (Nweke & Nwachukwu, 2014; Dalton, 2007 & Orjime, 2019).

The hypotheses results revealed that there was a significant influence of educational qualifications on the level of voting apathy among the electorates. This finding confirmed the outcome of the study of Lijphart (1997) which found that voter's turn-out was biased in favour of more privileged and better educated persons against less advantaged citizens. This finding suggested that persons with better education tended to value political participation and voting than the less educated and illiterate persons. It was equally discovered that political parties' affiliation influenced the level of voting apathy among the electorates. This finding is supported by Wojtasik (2013) and Okeke (2014), which emphasized the functions of the election based on political parties in power. This could be because of the actions of persons with political affiliations which tend to either highly support or bitterly oppose government actions. The third hypothesis found that socio-economic status had influence on voting apathy. Voters' financial buoyancy or poverty is critical in his/her voting behavior. This finding therefore supports Wojtasik (2013) which gave different typologies of voting.

## Conclusion

The study found that the level of voting apathy was moderate and increasing poverty level made electorates to allow their choice to be influenced by inducements. The study also revealed that level of attachment to a political party determines his/her level of political apathy especially between the ruling party and the oppositions. Furthermore, it was apparent that despite the importance of

election, voting apathy among the electorates would have major effect on the development of the nation.

### Recommendations

- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be restructured in such a way as to ensure its independence.
- There is need to curb political violence through socialization of students through the teaching of practical Social Studies and democratic behaviour learning in Civics at Junior Secondary School levels.
- There is need for organizing workshops and seminars for teachers of Social Studies and Civics to improve their skills in teaching citizenship education, political participation and voters' education.
- Social Studies curriculum should be enhanced to emphasize topics in democracy, democratic governance, political participation, voter education, peaceful conflict resolution strategies to prepare the pupils for future civic duties and obligations.
- It is recommended that further studies should be conducted in various aspects of voters' apathy such as women participation in voting process; ethno-religious factors that may inhibit voters participation in election.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in school elections as preparation for higher democratic culture in future.
- National Orientation Agency and Civil Organisations should step-up advocacies to ginger citizens on the need for better democratic participation in future elections.

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