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AN INSIGHT INTO CHALLENGES OF VOTERS'  
PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT OF  
SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

Democracy has been a political ideology which countries across the globe, Nigeria inclusive are operating due to its principle of popular participation and all inclusive government that promotes good governance. Failure of political class to provide electorates with dividends of democracy and the shortcoming of the electoral umpire (INEC) seem to encourage poor voters' participation at the same time threaten democracy. This paper attempt an insight into challenges being faced by electorates and effects of such on the sustainability of democracy and how they could be addressed. A descriptive research design was adopted. 300 respondents within Oyo federal constituency were purposively sampled. They were selected from among Lecturers, Teachers, Markets Men and Women and Okada riders. A self-design questionnaire of 20 items was used to collect data. Data collected were analysed with simple percentages Findings revealed that poor attitude of politicians towards electorates and inability to provide dividends

of democracy culminate in poor voters' participation also failure of INEC to display transparency, and avoid bias in its roles threaten the sustainability of democracy. It was recommended the National Assemblies should enact strict laws that would make political office holders to be accountable even after leaving office Capital punishment should be imposed on any INEC staff who collaborate with politicians to manipulate election results.

Keywords: Voters' participation; Democracy; Electorate; Election

### Introduction

One of the fundamental principles of democracy is popular participation in the political process of a country. Election is one major instrument that promotes democracy by paving way for citizens to be deeply involved in the process of putting in place the institution of government. It is the only legitimate means of gaining political power. Hence, every qualified citizens of a country are to enjoy their franchise of voting and be voted for during general elections. Voters' participation seems to improve over time as people troop out during registration exercise to register for voters' card which will enable them to exercise their civic duty during elections. Little wonder that the country could boast of conducting general elections to facilitate transition of government from one civilian government to another and by an incumbent government who organizers election but handed over power to an opposition party (Gidengil et al,2016). Thus, this could be a big credit in the political circle and for a sustainable democratic process.

Consequent upon the foregoing, one can begin to argue that democracy is no longer a myriad but a stable institution that has survived for two decades in the Nigerian political history. Nevertheless, the political institution could not be shielded from some constraints that tend to discourage electorates from actively participating with deep sense of patriotism in the political process. However, it becomes difficult to state that democracy in Nigeria has been fully institutionalised particularly when one considered the conceptualisation of political institution, by Decalo add cited

by Adeyinka & Emmanuel (2014) add posited that institutionalisation of politics is a process through which stable, complex political structure are put in place, develop and legitimised to create a degree of sub-system freedom in order to run peoples' oriented government. Complementing the foregoing, Frank Bealey (2015) also pointed out that democracy could not be said to be flourished or becomes stable when and where majority of the citizens do not enjoys basic freedom, or have a resounding voice in how they have been governed as well as understanding the workings of the government which they voted for. Also, a former Secretary General of the United Nation Security Council, Banki-Moon (2012) in his opinion submitted that people in each country move out to vote for a government who is to provide them with adequate food supply, good shelter, qualitative education and good healthcare with more economic opportunities, full respect for their human rights and adequate security for their lives and properties. It needs to be mentioned that a government that provides the aforementioned needs for her citizens would expect a robust participation with high sense of patriotism which could enhance and sustain the democratic process of such nation or country.

One can begin to ask that, can Nigeria government both current and previous ones boast of providing necessary needs and services for their citizens? The answer is no. Nigerian democracy is characterised by prominent socio-economic and political inequalities which widen. The gap between those who have access to power and public funds and those who do not. This was critically analysed by Adeyinka & Emmanuel (2015) who both asserted that Nigerian democracy has three (3) outstanding features that threaten its sustainability- (i) Nigeria government spend-drift in the sense that it spends so much to accomplish so little, (ii) it invests in the comfort of officials rather than in human and material resources of her citizens, it is characterised by hydra-headed monster of corruption that ensures that the impact of any seeming good policy is either extremely negligible or almost exactly nil. This paper attempt to cite few examples from the 2017 National budget to illustrate the aforementioned factors in the Nigerian democracy, the following are good examples: The sum of N176 million was

allocated for the extension of the gates of the Aso Rock villa. About 6 million was allocated for the extension of power supply to the State House Centre store. The sum of N52.4 million went into the provision of interruptible power supply to the presidential guest house (Adeyinka & Emmanuel, 2014).

It is disheartening that the same outrageous budgetary and extra-budgetary allocations were also made for state governors and their wives, ministers, advisers and personal aids, members of legislatures, commissioners and local government chairmen among others. It is touching, bitter and very unfortunate that the tax payers whose money are used to make comfort for political office holders struggle heart and might to provide for themselves. Only few Nigerians who have means do generate their own power, arranged for personal security, patronized privately-owned schools and hospitals while the less privileged, rural-dwellers who are in the majority of the country's population live in palpable darkness, drink all sorts of contaminated water and battle with water-borne diseases. The spate of insecurity across the nation is another concern for a country with democracy for decades (Bryce, 2012). However, the big question is: how on earth one could expect the electorate to be active and fully participate in electoral process, when inability of some past and extant leaders in Nigeria to consolidate and improve on the gains and dividends of democracy in line with sustainable development are not forthcoming?. One can then hypothesized that poor voters' participation in election could be as a result of abysmal treatment the political class gives to the citizen and this could lead to a serious threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Having a look at election as a major instrument that advance democratic process, most Nigerians are not enthusiastic in fully participating in electoral process and politics generally. Conforming this, INEC statistics after the 2019 general election read as follows:

Table 1: Statistics of voter's participation in the political process during 2019 election

SN	Voters Index	Total
1	Total number of registered voters	84,004,084
2	Total number of registered voters (as collated)	82,344,107
3	Total number of accredited voters (as collated)	29,364,209
4	Total number of valid votes (as collated)	27,324,583
5	Total number of rejected votes (as collated)	1,289,607
6	Total number of votes cast (as collated)	28,614,190
7	Percentage turn out (as collated)	35.66

### INEC Website 2019

It is crystal clear from table 1 that 82, 34, 107 registered for voters card while the total number of accredited voters was 29,364,209, the total number of valid votes was 27,324,583, the total number of rejected votes was 1,289,607 while the total number of vote cast was 28,614,190 which shows that turn out percentage was 35.66%. This is not an encouraging figure to sustain democracy in any country. Attempt to look into why voters' turn-out was poor can be found in several reasons-poor INEC preparation, election violence and election rigging in the past etc. Elections are recognized by all and sundry as a means of electing representatives and leaders into the positions of authority to promote good governance, but it may be inconsequential if it becomes difficult to vote or if eventually they observed that their vote may not determine who wins and election results fail to promote growth and development in the country (Nkolika, 2007). The case of voting is determined by factors such as how complex the ballot paper is, how easy it is for the voter to get to a polling units, how up-to-date the electoral register is, and how secure the pulling unit is (Gerber & Green,2015).

An interview conducted by News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) ahead of the March 9 Governorship and state house of assembly election, a voter decried the failure of the card reader that malfunctioned and prevented many electorate to exercise their civic duty having being delayed on the queue, some card readers rejected finger prints. Another electorate Mohammed lamented

that voting did not begin until 11:10. Another voter at the last election commented that he came out by 7:30 am to do accreditation but the card reader malfunction until 11:55. This kind of experience may lead to low voters participation or political apathy. Another factor experienced during the last 2019 general election is the case of violent snatching of ballot box, burning of electoral materials and poor preparation of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It is on this note that one could conclude that voters' participation could be poor if the aforementioned events are not controlled and this could serve as a threat to sustainable democracy. To inject sanity into the process, political party, security agents, National Orientation Agency (NOA), mass media, and education would have to play significant roles in order to energize voters in exercising their civic duty during elections.

### Purpose of the Study

The study attempted to investigate the challenges that promote or discourage voters' participation during general election and at the same time have an insight into those factors that threaten sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. The study was specifically interested in highlighting areas where political office holders, INEC and its officials and politicians need to retrace their steps to preserve and sustain democracy in Nigeria.

### Research Questions

1. How does the failure of political class to keep electoral promises affect voters' participation in election?
2. To what extent do poor INEC preparation for election affect voters' participation?
3. What is the relationship between electoral violence and voters' active participation?
4. To what extent does falsification of election results by INEC create political apathy and poor governance?

## Methodology

A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of civil servants, Okada riders, market men and women in Oyo federal constituency. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting respondents from the four local governments that constitute Oyo federal constituency, the two Colleges of Education within the constituency and a market from each of the local government. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 staff from each of the four local government secretariat ( $15 \times 4 = 60$ ). 15 academic and 15 non-academic staff (30) from each of the two Colleges of Education with the federal constituency ( $30 + 30 = 60$ ). 15 teachers from secondary school of the four local government  $15 \times 4 = 60$ , while 15 Okada riders from each of the four local governments.  $4 \times 15 = 60$  and 15 market women and men in a market in each of the local government ( $15 \times 4 = 60$ ). In totality, 300 respondents were sampled to participate in the study. The instrument used was a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire comprises of two sections, A and B. while section A ask for the demographical information of the respondents, Section B contains question items related to factors responsible for voters' participation in election. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by social studies experts and it was validated two weeks before the administration while the reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained through test-retest method. The data collected were analysed using simple percentages.

## Data Analysis

Research Question 1. How does the failure of political class to keep electoral promises affect voters' participation?

Table 2: How the failure of political class to keep electoral promises affect voters' participation

S/N	Items	SA	A	Total	%	D	SD	Total	%
1.	Poor attitude of political office holders do not encourage me to participate in electoral exercise.	180	54	234	78	40	26	66	22
2.	We have not benefitted from dividends of democracy in my country, hence election is not my priority	210	62	272	90.7	19	0	28	9.3
3.	I always come out to vote because those who represent my constituency do live up to their electoral promises.	174	49	223	74.3	50	27	77	25.7
4.	I don't take election as priority because politicians had lied to me at different election periods.	160	53	213	71	50	37	87	29
5.	Though politicians in my area do not keep to their promises, but I do exercise my civic duty during election.	60	80	140	47	60	100	160	53

Table 2 shows that 234 respondents representing 78% agreed that poor attitude of political office holders do not encourage them to participate in electoral exercise while 66 respondents representing 22% disagreed with the statement. Also 272 respondents representing (90.7%) agreed that electorates have not been benefitting from dividends of democracy hence election is not their priority while 28 respondents representing (9.3%) disagreed with the statement. Another 223 respondents representing (74.3%) agreed that they always come out to vote because those who



represent their constituency do live up to their electoral promises while 77 respondents representing (25.7%) disagreed with the statement. 213 respondents representing (71%) agreed that they do not take election as priority because political office holders had lied to them at different election periods while 87 respondents representing (29%) disagreed with the statement. Finally, 140 respondents representing (47%) agreed that despite the fact that politicians in their area do not keep to their promises, they still exercise their civic duty during elections, while 160 respondents representing (53%) disagreed with the statement.

Research Question 2. To what extent does INEC poor preparation for election affects voters participation?

Table 3: Extent to which INEC poor preparation for election affects voters participation

Items	SA	A	Total	%	D	SD	Total	%
Late arrival of electoral materials had prevented most electorate from casting their vote during elections.	96	65	161	54	69	70	139	46
Voting in the recent time is frustrating due to malfunctioning of INEC card reader.	130	80	210	70	35	55	90	30
Despite the fact that INEC preparation is poor, people in my area do exercise patient and voted before living polling units.	44	74	118	39	120	62	182	61
INEC poor preparation in the last election encourage large turn out of votes	11	30	41	14	196	53	259	86
The electronic voting system is good and encourage many electorates to vote	52	96	148	49	130	22	152	51

Table 3 reveals that 161 respondents representing 54% agreed that late arrival of electoral materials by INEC had prevented most electorates from casting their vote during election while 139 respondents representing 46% disagreed with the statement. Also 210 respondents representing 70% agreed that it was highly frustrating going out to vote due to malfunctioning of INEC voters card readers while 90 respondents representing 30% disagreed with the statement. Another 182 respondents representing 61% disagreed with the idea that poor INEC preparation for election did not encourage electorate to be patient enough to vote before living the polling boot, while only 118 respondents representing 39% agreed that people did not exercise patient to vote before living the polling boot. 259 respondents representing 86% disagreed with the idea that INEC poor preparation in the last election had encouraged large voters' turnout while 41 respondents representing 14% agreed with the idea. Finally 152 respondents representing 51% did not agree that electronic voting system is good by encouraging many electorates to participate in election while 148 respondents representing 49% agreed with the idea.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between electoral violence and voters' active participation

Table 4: Relationship between electoral violence and voters' active participation

Items	SA	A	Total	%	D	SD	Total	%
Snatching of boxes and fighting at the polling unit do increase voters participation	12	38	50	17	190	60	250	83
Destruction of ballot boxes and papers by political thugs do prevent large number of voters to cast their votes.	13	22	35	12	210	55	265	88
Many parents do not allow their children to come out to vote because of violence during election	120	70	190	63	50	60	110	37
Electoral turn out is always higher in a troubled areas.	90	43	133	44	137	30	167	56
Violence do not in any way reduce the level of political participation.	60	70	130	43	110	60	170	57

Table 4 shows that 250 respondents representing (83%) disagreed with the idea that snatching of boxes and fighting at the polling unit do increase voters' participation while 50 respondents representing (17%) agreed with the idea. Another 265 respondents representing (88%) disagreed with the idea that destruction of ballot boxes and papers by political thugs do prevent large voters' turnout and vote cast while, 35 respondents representing (12%) agreed with the statement. Also 190 respondents representing (63%) agreed with the idea that many parents do not allow their children to come out to vote because of violence in their area while 110 respondents representing (37%) disagreed. 167 respondents representing (56%) disagreed with the statement that electoral turn out is always higher in troubled areas while 133 respondents representing (44%) agreed with the statement. Finally, 170 respondents representing (57%) disagreed with the idea that violence do not in any way reduce the level of political participation while 130 respondents representing (43%) agreed with the statements.

Research Question 4. To what extent do falsification of election result by INEC created political apathy and poor governance

Table 5: Falsification of election result by INEC created political apathy and poor governance

Items	SA	A	Total	%	SD	D	Total	%
I do not disturb myself to participate in election because INEC do not always announced candidate that people prefer through election	40	90	130	43	90	80	170	57
Lack of confidence in the integrity of INEC do not encourage most people to take election serious.	144	37	181	60	59	60	119	40
Manipulation of election result by INEC officials make electorate to be more vigilant and stand by election till result are announced	180	20	200	67	40	60	100	33
Result manipulation leads to poor governance which eventually discourage active voter's participation.	220	10	230	77	16	54	70	23
Votes turn out will increase if INEC allows people's vote to count and announced.	215	45	260	87	06	34	40	13

Table 5 shows that 170 respondents representing (57%) disagreed with the idea that they do not bother themselves to participate in election because INEC do not always reflect and announce peoples' choice through votes, while 130 respondents representing (43%) agreed with the idea. 181 respondents representing (60%) agreed to the statement that lack of confidence in the integrity of INEC do not encourage most electorates to take election matter serious while 119 respondents representing (40%) disagreed with the statement. Also, 200 respondents representing (67%) agreed to the idea that manipulation of election results by INEC officials make

electorates to be more vigilant and stand by election till results are announced while 100 respondents representing (33%) disagreed with the statement. Another 230 respondents representing (77%) agreed that result manipulation leads to poor governance which eventually leads to poor voters' registration while 70 respondents representing (23%) disagreed with the statement. Finally, 260 respondents representing (87%) agreed that voters turn out will increase if INEC allow peoples vote to count while 40 respondents representing (13%) disagreed with the statement.

### Discussion

The results revealed that poor attitude of politicians such as lying to electorates before and after election is one of the factors that is responsible for lack of dividends of democracy that electorates ought to enjoy, hence people tends to be discouraged and form political apathy when they are most needed to discharge their civic duties. It was also revealed that electorates enjoy coming out to vote in a situation where politicians are keeping up to their promises. Nevertheless, few of the electorates believe that whether politicians perform or not, they must discharge their obligation as good citizens by coming out to vote. These set of people are not many and this perhaps could be responsible for voting statistics as issued by INEC after the 2019 general election where total number of registered voters was 82,344,107 while total number of votes cast was 28,610,190 which is just 35.66% of registered voters during the 2019 general election. This kind of experience is not healthy to sustain democracy and good governance.

Findings also revealed that poor INEC preparation ahead of election do lead to late arrival of electoral materials to polling units which kept people waiting endlessly while the poor functioning of card readers lead to frustration on the part of electorates which culminate in poor turnout and poor participation of the electorates in the electoral process. However, it was revealed that though electronic voting system is good but INEC preparation do not allow people to appreciate it, as only few patriotic electorates insisted that no matter how poor is the INEC preparation they will play their civic role to vote for their preferred candidates. As people

would have loved to discharge their civic duty to the maximum level, INEC is standing as a blockage that discouraged most electorates from trooping-out to vote. This perhaps could be responsible for the reason why voters urge INEC to improve on card reader's effectiveness after the presidential election of 2019 (Kaigama, 2019). Some electorates' complaints through phone calls in interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN, 2019) against the backdrop of several card readers malfunctioning in polling stations across the country. Many voters decried the failure of the gadgets across the country while another voter said "he witnessed many cases that posed set back during the election where the card reader had rejected finger prints, and consequently delayed the entire process' (NAN, 2019).

The result further showed that one major factor that threatens large turnout of electorates is violence. Voters' participation turnout was poor and negative in areas where political thugs turn polling units to battle fields, snatched ballot boxes with guns and cutlasses and destroy election materials. In such situations, parents and family members had to prevent their siblings from going out to vote especially in troubled areas (Chinedu, 2016). Many INEC results reflected this, when certain percentage of election results were cancelled due to violence, destruction and manipulation of election documents. This is evidenced in the election statistics in table 1 where 1,289,607 votes were rejected during the 2019 general election. It is not a gain saying that if adequate security personnel is not put in place to checkmate the act of violence, thuggery and snatching of ballot boxes, electorates will never be encouraged to be active in electoral process. So political participation is only active where there is adequate security on ground while voters' participation turn-out low when there is electoral violence for democracy to be sustained. Electoral violence, snatching of ballot boxes and papers, destruction of electoral materials is a complete threat to sustainable democracy. To have a better comprehension of effects of electoral violence on sustenance of democracy, instances of the 1964 general election crises, 'Eweti' saga in the Southwestern Nigeria in 1964, the kind of protest and violence that erupted after the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election

scuttled democracy in Nigeria. Thus electoral violence is a big threat to sustainable democracy in any given country.

Finally, the findings revealed that credibility of any election hinges on INEC's integrity; good preparation, trusted officials and transparent services. Lack of confidence in INEC and its officials has been adjudged as a strong factor that discourage millions of electorates from actively participating in electoral process. Electorates developed political apathy due to INEC antecedents of manipulating electoral process where a popular candidates or peoples' choice will be announced as been defeated. Records had shown situations where popular candidates will lose an election and later regain his/her mandate through election tribunal panel few days to the expiration of tenure. INEC officials have severally being accused of collecting bribes from politicians to up turn election results as against the will of the masses. This is as a result of bad governance, lack of democratic dividends, insecurity, embezzlement etc, all of which culminate in political apathy which threaten sustainable democracy. Democracy can only be deepened and sustainable when the will of people is allowed to prevail through a credible electoral process when there is good governance which can be achieved when election result is allowed to be counted (Victor, 2002).

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is crystal clear that Nigerian democracy is being threatened by stakeholders due to their unpatriotic selfish interest. Inability of political parties and their representatives in government to keep to their electoral promises of providing good governance, inadequate security, unviable economic policies that could yield good standard of living has resorted in poor and low political participation of most Nigerians. Poor preparation of electoral process by INEC and the corrupt act of INEC officials have reduced the confidence of people in the credibility of election to bring in good leaders who can stand as role models to impact positive change in the life of common man. The use of political thugs to cause violence also discourage electorates from active participation in election.

For democracy to be preserved and sustained, INEC should be totally independent and unbiased by allowing peoples' vote to count, in order to promote good governance. Elected officers should also keep to their promises so that the electorate will develop a strong zeal to be actively involved in the process of appointing good leaders. Also government should be able to provide for adequate security during and after elections so that people will have confidence and boldness to actively engage in any governmental assignment and process. Achieving this will go a long way to sustain our hard-earned democracy in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

1. The national assembly needs to enact laws that will serve as a measure to put office holders on their toes in fulfilling their electioneering promises and be made accountable after leaving office.
2. INEC should be empowered to be practically independent of executive interference before, during and after election.
3. A drastic or capital punishment should be imposed on any INEC staff be it substantive or ad-hoc staff who collude to manipulate electoral process and election result.
4. Government should ensure provision of adequate security during election to prevent any act of violence, snatching of ballot boxes or paper by political thugs.
5. Government should be made to provide basic needs of life for citizens such that they will appreciate democracy and adequately exercise their franchise.



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