

THEORETICAL REVIEW OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS OF VOTER-TURNOUTS

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria's 2019 general elections have been adjudged to have sharply declined in the voter turnouts. The scenario was characterized by several socio-economic variables such as poverty, unemployment, voter apathy across the six geo-political zone. Theoretical review of the works of reputable scholars and analysis of the elections were empirically employed as the methodology, in addition to the use of behavioral theory in gauging the voter turnouts in the analysis of the 2019 presidential elections. The paper concludes as it recommends that credibility, capacity of a candidate should be employed in the choice of a president as against sectional or tribal correlation. This is in addition to voter education. Least of these variable suggested elections and the voter turnouts in Nigeria would remain an albatross or serious comatose than the 2019 general polls.

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Voter Turnouts, Presidential Elections, Nigeria

Article History:

Received: 11 Sep 2022

Accepted: 17 Nov 2022

Available Online: 22 Nov 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the collapsed of the defunct soviet in the 1990's marked the wake of democratization notably in most African states. This development importantly increases the number of countries that hold direct elections. It is in this sense that Diamond (2015) cited in Olalekan, (2020) viewed the phenomenon as "democratic recession" appears to be voter turnout decreasing significantly in national elections in several countries. He further argues that continuous decreasing voter turnouts is one of the "signs of democratic ill-health". In this direction, it is point to note that issues of voter participation should be handled with serious concern by election stakeholders before it would go out of hand. Scholars of repute at different discourse, maintained that electoral democracy is concern with full citizen's participation in the electoral process. This justifies that voter turnout is seen as the most critical indices of citizen's participation. In agreement of the above, behavioral scholar's asserts that higher voter turnout is an important signal of democratic development, vis a-vis, lower turnout is actually connected with voter apathy and mistrust of the electoral process (Soliponor, 2016:16) cited in Olalekan (2020:8). It is equally evident to note that global downward trend in voter turnout as manifested in political apathy, lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civil obligation from political activity (Olalekan, 2020).

Nigeria exhibits a clear example with obligation decline in voter turnout at general elections since 2003 due to high percentage of apathetic among the Nigerian citizens towards elections. Reports and reliable data from both the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) reveal that 52.3 percent of the registered voters voted in the 1999 elections. It rose to 69.1 percent in 2003 but has fallen since then. In similar vein, in 2007, it trickled or went down to 57.4 percent, 53.7 percent in 2011 and 43.6 percent in 2015, and 34.75 percent in 2019 presidential election. This paper seeks to review the precipitating variables that led/responsible to the sharp declining voter turnouts in the 2019 general election in the Nigerian state. IDEA as a democratic institute also revealed in its database, that Nigeria has the lowest voter turnouts in West Africa in the recent presidential elections, but a little bit better in parliamentary elections with about 34.75 percent turnouts, which is higher than the voting age turnout. The figure further shows a sharp decline in the 2003 presidential elections, while that of the National Assembly elections appears to be on the increase since 2011 rising from 28.66 percent to 43.65 percent in 2015 with presidential election turnouts decreasing during the same period by 10 percent. It was also noted that, both elections

held on the same day in 2015 and 2019. The central question to be asked is that, what is responsible for the persistent decline in voter turnouts for presidential elections compared to preceding elections?

2. ISSUES ON VOTER TURNOUTS

On the issue of voter turnouts, scholars of repute particularly the likes of (Stockemer, 2017, Solijonor, 2016, Burden and Neiheisel, 2013) maintained that institutional, psychological, among others are central determinants of turnouts. In this sense, focus have been more decisive to voter intimidations, vote-buying, ballot fraud and candidates' popularity on voter turnouts, mostly in sub-African elections. Theoretical analysis as posits by Stella (2004) has it that voter turnouts are veritable measures of political legitimacy and are contrasted with the measures of trust in politician and satisfaction with performance of current government. In the hypothesis posed by Stella (2004) emphasised that degree of political legitimacy affects the voter turnout, whereas citizens' trust in political actors and satisfaction with the government may influence voters' choice but it may not have straight forward connection with turnout during elections. Deducing from Stella's view, one can understand that the crisis of legitimacy of most political leaders, as well as the electorates confidence in the politicians may have serious consequences on the voter turnouts. In the word of Stockemer, (2017), there is possibility of higher voter turnouts in countries that have subscribed to compulsory voting where elections are considered vital more especially when the countries are small in sizes and population. Similarly, other scholars believe that socio-economic variables, institutional factors and election-specific variables on voter turnouts. In the same vein, (Conway, 1999 and Caldeira, 1983) contend that campaign spending has a direct relationship to voter turnout. Even though, this position has become a serious controversy and debate among scholars on the issue of money politics typically in African elections. In a similar view, Cancela and Geys (2016) emphasized that campaign expenditure, election closeness and registration requirements have more explanatory power in National elections, this is in addition to population size and composition, concurrent elections, and electoral systems play a more vital role for explaining turnout in sub-national elections.

Robinson and Torvik (2019) in their part opined that there was voter intimidation and coercion during the Zimbabwean 2008 presidential election. They maintained that the role of weak institutional and legal environments that most politicians took advantage from over their opponents especially among the swing voters are cases in point. The studies of Tracey (2016), Burden and Wichowskey, (2014), and Stockemer, (2013) revealed that socio-economic challenges, such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, corruption in the electoral process are responsible for voter turnouts. They further argued that citizens may not be willing to or distance themselves from the electoral process because they may feel incapacitated to elect trustworthy representatives that will serve their interest when elected. It is also a point to note that while conventional assumptions/hypothesis may argue that high unemployment rates could induce low voter turnouts, Burden and Wichowsky (2014:897) cited in Olalekan (2020:13) argue the "withdraw hypothesis" may not hold water because "unemployment, bring out more voters" since the potential voters is "more likely to select candidates based on economic performance" rather than their current state. Nevertheless, unemployment may be a serious variable in voter turnout, some scholars argue that it is not always true that unemployed prospective voters are apathetic, it is the political institutions that have failed to engage them to participate effectively in the electoral process by including issues seeking to address unemployment on political agenda (Tracy, 2016:3). Citing US, election as a reference, Rosert, (2009:41) states that heavy or rather burdensome voter registration procedures, electoral system, demographic group, the social mobility campaign funding or social capital, weak capital parties, bureaucratic, long queues, legal barriers and other restrictions in voter registrations mean potential voters are made to pay "Additional cost" are some of the biggest factors inducing low voter turnouts. Devenport (2010) supplied other variables that influence voter turnouts. These include face-to-face canvassing voter mobilization among others. He is also in agreement of Bekoe and Burchrad, (2017) assertion that candidate's popularity is not a strong variable in voter turnouts in elections in Africa. This also justifies why we seek to affirm view of these analysis to discuss the information from the 2019 presidential elections with particular attention to voter turnouts.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper hopes to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To review the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the levels of voter turnouts in the Nigeria's general elections, 2019.
- iii. To determine the factors and actors which influence the voter turnouts in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fundamentally, theories act as a foundation of analysis especially if the analysis is humanities and social science oriented. Theoretical framework provides a focal glide within which to test our preposition, verify our variable relevant to

the study area. For this purpose, this work adopts or rather employed BEHAVIORAL THEORY in guiding the analysis of this paper/work.

5. BEHAVIORAL THEORY

In analyzing the voting pattern and behavior of group in the society with particular reference to election. The behavioral approach or theory is employed primarily as a product of the American Attitude to Society which had gain recognition of late in 1950 at the Chicago University. The proponent of the behavioral theory includes Robert Dahl, (1950), Ponton and Gil (1993), David Easton, (1956) David Trumaan (1961) among others. The theory was further developed swiftly and spread remarkably in the post 1945. That is, after the second world war because there was a wide spread dissatisfaction with the “state of the discipline. Particularly the unhappiness with the basically descriptive nature of the discipline. Behavioral approach also represents a shift from the traditional approaches to the scientific or behavioral science.

5.1 Major Focus of the Behavioral Theory

- i. That the prediction of a political situation and explanation should be done through empirical laws that postulates political and social regularities.
- ii. That a focus should be geared towards social and psychological determinants of political behavior.
- iii. That all statements in political science must be in principle verifiable that is, to behaviorists, every phenomenon must be verified for judgement.
- iv. That the use of empirical method of data collection and evaluation, more especially the attitude scale or complex statistical techniques.
- v. That the behavior of individual at various groups and levels as well as the actors must be analyzed (Varma, 1975).

The central strengths of the behavioral theory in analyzing the political phenomena focus on two issues; technique of research and the theory building. In the technique of research, the theory makes us to understanding the causes of events between individual state and non-state actors in the quest for power struggle in the political system. It also helped in development areas of content analysis, case analysis, interviewing and process of observation and statistics. These helped in gaining a tremendous knowledge and information concerning certain political behaviors. While in the field of theory building the methodology in behavioral theory brought about a radical change particularly in such legacies like-system theory, decision making theory, communication theory, structural functionalism theory and the host of others.

Similarly, the strength of the behavioral theory call for its weaknesses as follows; the behavioral theory is not amenable to experimental inquiry. In the same vein, the theory is characterized with too many variables and historical contingencies to permit other than the most general statements of regularities. Finally, on this note, the use of hypotheses adherence is too rigid and stifle, rather than advance research. In justifying the above theory in analyzing our work, it is significant to note that the 2019 general elections voter turnouts generally revealed that there was sharp decrease compared to 2003. This shows that there are behavioral changes among most Nigerians across the geo-political zones. This basically connected with the issue of voter intimidations, vote-buying, ballot fraud among other things. The theory has also justified out objective of the study stated in the earlier section and rhyme with the Verma’s view that the behavior of individuals at various groups and actors must be analyzed in determining the voters’ turnouts. Therefore, the behavior of the Nigerians completely changed and led to the drastic fall or decrease in the voter turnouts in 2019 presidential elections.

6. METHODOLOGY

This work employed a qualitative method of data collection. Qualitative method is concern with providing detailed narratives and for relating to issues over a long time (Garba & Nnabugron, 2004). Using this method, however, we deduce the works of reputable scholars as our source of data. thus the study also utilized data from literature sources such as journals, the internet, and other published materials on behavioral politics and 2019 Nigerian general elections, from different sources particularly several databases and reports.

6.1 Geo-political Analysis and the Voter Turnouts

The report of INEC, (2019) revealed that the trends of voter turnouts in the 2019 elections base on the geo-political analysis provide some interesting highlights which indicate the turnouts in the 36 states of the federation with Jigawa and Katsina sates (both in the North-West) constitutes the highest turnouts rates of 54.62 percent and 48.67 percent respectively. Lagos state (in the south-west) has the lowest turnout with 21.22 percent. Accordingly, in the word of Olalekan (2019:18) cited in INEC, (2019), the North-West and North-East geo-political zones had the highest voter turnout of 44.00 percent and 41.71 percent respectively. While the South-South and South-East have the lowest turnout of 28.91 percent and 26.16 percent respectively. In the election, several polls projected that the North-West and North-East geo-political zone were strong holds of the incumbent president and All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, while south and South-West were projected to be former Vice President and People Democratic Party (PDP)

candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. It was also noted that the swing region and battle-grounds were states of North-Central and South-West which had 35.75 percent and 36.27 percent respectively. It was however argued that the major variable for the relatively high turnouts in the North-West and North-East geo-political zones is that the two leading candidates hail from the respective zones. Similarly, there was no convincing reason to explain for the poor turnout in the South-East and Lagos, with highest number of registered voters in the country despite the fact that PDP presidential candidate and former Governor of Anambra (in the South-East) Chief Peter Obi and APC Vice President at candidate and current Vice President, Professor Yemi Osibanjo voted in the two places Olalekan (2019:20).

According to INEC reports (2019), the voter turnout for states of the South-South-Edo, Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, and Bayelsa from 2011 to 2019 shows as follows; the turnouts for Akwa Ibom state 75% in 2011, 62% 2015, and 28.5% in 2019. The turnouts for Bayelwa state to be 85.5% in 2011, 61.4% in 2015, and 36% in 2019. The turnouts for Cross River state were 62.8% in 2011, 40.7% in 2015 and 29.5% in 2019. For Delta was 68.5% in 2011, 62.8% in 2015 and 32.4% in 2019. In Edo, the turnouts were 74.1% in 2011, 31.7% in 2015, and 27.9% in 2019. The turnouts in Rivers State were 76.1% in 2011, 68.2% in 2015, and 20.7% in 2019. This shows that there is significant decline in voter turnouts in all the state in question for the period under review (Ibid).

Similarly, in the South-East states such as Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, and Abia states. The report indicated that the voter turnout for Abia state were 77.8% in 2011, 29.7% in 2015, and 19.2% in 2019. For Anambra, the turnouts were 57.4% in 2011, 35.8% in 2015, and 26.2% in 2019. For Ebonyi, the turnout was 47.3% in 2011, 36.7% in 2015 and 27.2% in 2019. For Enugu, the turnouts show 62.1% in 2011, 42.4% for 2015 and 23.3% in 2019. While that for Imo state was 83.3% in 2011, 41.9% in 2015, and 26.6% in 2019. The voter turnout equally shows a consistent decline between 2011 to 2019 just the states of the South-South, with Abia and Imo being the sharpest decline in the period.

In the same vein, the voter turnouts in the North-West states from 2011 to 2019 shows that Jigawa state has 50% in 2011, 59% in 2015 and 54.6% in 2019. Turnouts for Kaduna was 65.4% in 2011, 49.1% in 2015 and 44.3% in 2019. The turnouts for Kano state were 52.4% in 2011, 49.9% in 2015, and 36.4% in 2019. For Katsina state were 51.5% in 2011, 52.1% in 2015 and 50.4% in 2019. Kebbi state turnout was 54.9% in 2011, 49.1% in 2015 and 44.6% in 2019. In Sokoto state, the turnouts were 38.6% in 2011, 52.5% in 2015 and 34.8% in 2019. Of the 7 states, four states Jigawa, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara recorded higher voter turnouts in 2015 than 2011 and lower turnouts in 2019. The other three Kaduna, Kano and Kebbi show evidence of declining voter turnouts in the period under review.

The voter turnouts in the North-East states data revealed that Adamawa state had turnouts of 49.9% in 2011, 43.6% in 2015 and 43.9% in 2019. For Bauchi, there were turnouts of 63.4% in 2011, 50.6% in 2015 and 43.9% in 2019. For Borno state, there was 48.8% in 2011, 28.6% in 2015, and 41.2% in 2019. For Gombe state, there was 57.6% turnouts in 2011, 42.6% in 2015, 41.9% in 2019. In Taraba state, there was 54.5% turnouts in 2011, 41.9% in 2015 and 41.7% in 2019. For Yobe state, there was 44% turnouts in 2011, 45.6% in 2015 and 42.9% in 2019. It is a point to note that, in the geo-political zone, both Adamawa and Borno states recorded higher turnouts in 2019 despite the challenges of insurgency been faced. Moreover, the turnouts of votes in South-West geo-political zones from 2011 to 2019 shows that Ekiti has 33.5% in 2011, 42.6% in 2015 and 43.7% in 2019. Lagos state has 31.2% in 2011, 25.5% in 2015, and 18.3% in 2019. Ogun has 27.3% in 2011, 32.7% in 2015, and 25.9% in 2019. Ondo has 29.7% in 2011, 38.8% in 2015 and 32.4% in 2019. Osun has 38.5% in 2011, 48.1% in 2015 and 43.7% in 2019. Oyo has 32.5% in 2011, 39.6% in 2015 and 31.9% in 2019. Of all the states, only Lagos had a consistently decline in turnout in period under review, despite its highest number of registered voters.

The INEC report also revealed that the voter turnouts for the North-Central were represented as shown; Benue got 43.3% in 2011, 39.1% in 2015 and 34.7% in 2019. For Nasarawa, turnouts were 49.6% in 2011, 42.7% in 2015 and 39.7% in 2019. Niger has 45.7% in 2011, 42.3% in 2015 and 37.8% in 2019. Plateau state has 62.1% in 2011, 50.6% in 2015, and 43.9% in 2019 (INEC, 2019) cited in Olalekan (2019:22). The report also highlighted that, in all the geo-political zone, states wide except Kogi had a consistent decline in voter turnouts during the period under review. Despite its drastic decline, Plateau state recorded the highest turnouts in all the elections.

6.2 Socio-economic Factors and Voter Turnouts

The voter turnouts of the Nigeria's 2019 general election provide a factual correlation between socio-economic factors in which both leading candidates have the capacity to induce voters with money. In the word of Martins and Velga (2014) states that incumbent governments rose support despite the higher voter turnouts. About 10 national elections conducted in Portugal from 1979 to 2005, was a case in point. They observed that incumbents tend to lose popularity due to major domestic micro and macro-economic indices, arising from an economic recession, inflation, unemployment, and corruption which make voter cheer or boo the government at polls (Martins and Velga, 2014:284). However, the results or data from Nigeria's 2019 election revealed that the incumbent candidate Buhari lost his 2015 "good will" among swing voters. Similarly, a careful look at the result and turnouts for the 2019 presidential election very well, there is concrete evidence to suggest that socio-economic may be a variable in the turnouts.

It has been adjudged that urban and rural areas have 47% and 59.5% highest rate of poverty profile, reports of the Oxford Poverty and Development Initiative (2017) revealed that Nigeria has one of the highest incidents of Poverty in the world. The report further states that Nigeria has more people living in extreme poverty than any other country in the world. It becomes easy for leading parties to weaponized poverty where many people susceptible to selling their vote for immediate gratification. However, in the word of Kazeem (2018) both Sule Lamido and the presidential aspirant, Atiku Abubakar, accused the incumbent (Buhari's government) for hiding the data on unemployment and poverty rate. Poverty indices shows that the North-West and North-East have the highest turnout (42.9% combined) have 24.1% unemployment rate and 60.97% rate of poverty (which is higher than the nation as poverty rate). When compared to South-South and South-East had the lowest turnout (27.66% combined) with 27.72% unemployment rate and poverty rate of 42.83%.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper made a theoretical review of the 2019 elections with particular focus on the voter turnouts. Issues or variables such as violence, poverty, unemployment has been adjudged as a socio-economic factor that precipitated for the voter turnouts in Nigeria, using the geo-political analysis. However, disaggregation in views among scholars posits that popularity of candidates or rather candidate's tribe, running mate's tribe and support for the candidate's political party and voters' trust among other things provide stronger declining turnouts in 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the only leeway or a way forward to low voter turnouts is that, voters should concentrate on the candidate's credibility and capacity as well as patriotism to the country, as a variable for choosing a presidential candidate, in future (2023).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper made the following recommendations to avert the future recurrence of low voter turnouts in Nigeria's general elections:

- i. Enlightenment campaign should be massively encouraged to make voters understand the importance of election.
- ii. The issue of regional, tribal and religious sentiment should be discouraged for citizenship as the basis for the selection of a presidential candidate.
- iii. That anybody or group of persons that is been caught in election violence as prescribed by the law should be punished to serve as a deterrence to others.
- iv. In agreement with Okokwu *et al.*, (2019), government at all levels should deal with issue of mass poverty and unemployment. As long as prospective voters remain artificially poor and lack access to basic means of livelihood, they will remain susceptible to all kinds of manipulations by politician, including being used to ferment violence during and after elections which pose challenges to credible, free and fair elections, particularly on the voter turnouts as experience in the 2019 general elections.
- v. The issue of voter apathy which invariably led to the low voter turnouts in the 2019 presidential elections, should be discouraged in totality.

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