

The Role of Election Administration in The Prevalence of Voter Apathy In Nigeria: The Case of 2019 General Elections in The Southeast

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of election administration in the ensuing voter apathy during in Southeast Nigeria the 2019 general elections. Secondary and survey methods of data collection were adopted in search of answers to three questions earlier formulated. In the survey of the five states of Southeast, structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from 1000 respondents randomly selected from their state capitals while percentage formula and SPSS version 20.0 software were used to analyse the data therefrom. The results of analysis reveal that residents of Southeast Nigeria are fully aware of the importance of elections in democracies and were willingly to participate in the 2019 general elections. Further, the results reveal that Southeast experienced the highest voter apathy (76.7% & 78.8%) in Nigerian political history during the 2019 presidential and gubernatorial elections. According to results of the analysis, complicity, corruption, lawlessness, and partisanship that characterised Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) activities, INEC's militarisation of the process and none declaration of election results as generated from the polling units necessitated the apathy. Therefore, the paper recommends among others the management of INEC by the National Assembly instead of the Presidency that has been manipulating the electoral administrator; introduction of rewards for lawful and deviant staff of INEC, and 10 years jail term for any convicted electoral offender particularly INEC staff.

Key words: election administration, voter, apathy, Southeast Nigeria,

1.0 Introduction

Participating in the electoral process is a civic responsibility through which every citizen expresses his opinion, enforces his/her electoral choices, and participates in decision making and governance. It is one of the indices of democracy that forces politicians to deliver good democracy dividends (Verge, 2009; Marin, 1997), legitimises electoral outcomes, and makes elections meaningful (Dalton, 1988). It is an instrument that forces political office holders to formulate pro-people's policies, and to account for such policies and their implementation (Dalton, 2007; Chinisinger, 2004; Ezeani & English, 2005). Thus, elections are instituted to ensure the prevalence of popular will (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002), and therefrom secure the legitimacy of the political system and regime in power, and lay the foundation for stability and development (Diamond, 2010; Lindberg 2006).

However, in spite of the importance of people's participation in elections both to the state and the individuals, an increasing number of citizens with adult suffrage do not participate in the processes. There is a dominant opinion in the literature that people's participation during elections or electoral turnout is declining in most democracies across the world due to increasing passivity and indifference for political affairs (Gray & Caul, 2000). In the contemporary order, it is a fundamental problem among advanced and emerging democracies; peaceful and volatile societies like Britain, the United States, Syria, Iraq etc; advanced and under-developing economies; mainstream dominant interests, and among youth, women and other marginalized groups (International IDEA, 2002).

According to Maunden (2005), voters' turnout has been consistently low in many African countries with Botswana consistently experiencing below 50% of the total eligible voters, Kenya (68% voter turnout), and Malawi (61% voter turnout). The Nigeria's experience since its return to the nascent democracy in 1999 raises serious concern. During 1999 general elections, 59,938,945 people registered to participate in the elections while only 30,280,052 people participated. In 2003, 60,823,022 registered to vote but 42,018,735 participated in the election. This implies 27.9% increase in voters' turnout. But during 2007 general elections, out of 70,795,254 registered voters, only 35,397,627 people out of the registered voters participated (Afrobarometer, 2007). This represents 15.8% decline in voters' turnout when compared with the 2003 statistics. In the 2011 general elections, out of the 73.5 million registered voters, 39.4 million voters only participated. In 2015 general elections, out of the 67.4 million registered voters, 29.4 million votes only participated. This represents 25.4% decline in voters' turnout and symbolises the highest voter apathy in Nigerian political history before the 2019 general election.

This voter apathy in Nigeria has been attributed to the collapse of the democratic structure and system (Adejumobi, 2000). Political leaders failed to properly discharge their responsibilities, and do all they can to hold onto power thereby bastardizing the democratic processes through manipulation of the electoral body, violence, election rigging and non-adherence to the rule of law (The Economist, 2007). They organise elections in a manner that limits the democratic space (Ake, 2000) and eliminate the centrality of people's vote to liberal democratic politics thereby rendering and stigmatising election administrators as imperial and partisan umpires (Jinadu, 1997).

Election administration as used here refers to "the organization and conduct of elections to elective (political) public office by an electoral body" (Jinadu, 1997, p.21). This implies that it consists of the structure and processes involved in the electoral process. Structure here refers to the bureaucracy established by law to organize and conduct elections i.e. an electoral body like INEC. This consists of the legal framework and Constitutional /legal basis of the administrator; rules and regulation that establish and guide its operations; method of composition of electoral commissioners; elections management; electoral commissions appointment and independence including terms of tenure, commission/administration relationship, method of allocation of resources, constituency and polling district demarcation; human and material resources; infrastructure; and administrative structure and security.

On the other part, the process consists of the rules, stages, and actions taken towards identifying a winner in the political contest. Electoral processes include the establishment of electoral administrator, trainings, constituency delimitation, voter education and mobilisation, registration of voters and political parties, observer missions and supervision, party primaries, voting, counting of votes, and declaration of results (Ajayi, 2007; Jinadu, 1997). In a more or less similar classifications, others such Kurfi (2005) identified nine key processes in an electoral administration as delimitation or the carving out of electoral districts; compilation of voters register; establishment and equipment of polling stations and polling booths; recruitment, training and deployment of electoral officials; the procurement, distribution and retrieval of a host of electoral materials and equipment; canvassing for votes; registration of nominations and appointment of polling agents; casting the ballot; and counting of votes and declaration of election results

These processes in election administration and the activities of election administrators have generated rising and unending controversy over the independence or partisan activities of the electoral administrator in Nigeria. Although reforms and emergence of new election administrator have characterised Nigeria electoral system beginning with the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) headed by Sir Kofo Abayomi that organised the 1959 general elections, Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) with Chief E.E. Esua as the chair, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) with Chief Michael Ani as chair, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) with Justice Ovie-Whiskey as the first chair, to the National Electoral Commission (NEC), and presently the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with Justice Ephraim Akpata as the first chair, the controversy remains (see Luqman, 2009; Okoye, 2007).

This controversy has being a consequence of the pattern of funding and provision of logistics, activities of the ruling party via the state, tenure of office and autonomy of the election administrator, corruption and manipulation of the system and election results etc (Norberg & Obi, 2007; Mozaffat & Schedler, 2002). It is engendered by electoral malpractices ignored/permitted, or carried out by the electoral body in service of the ruling party or as a result of financial/material inducement (Ajayi, 2007; Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). The Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) set up by President Umar Musa Yar' Adua in 2007/2008 affirms this in the following words, "A review of the history of elections in Nigeria shows that a strong relationship exists between EMB's, security agencies and legal provisions that guide the conduct of elections. These institutional arrangements have over the years become the focal points at which elections are compromised".

In the early days of Nigeria independence i.e. 1960s and 1970s, voters react against this controversy, malpractices or flawed electoral system with violence and arson, but later particularly since 1999, they choose to stay away from the system and its processes – voter apathy. Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigeria office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) commissioned a research project on voter apathy in March 2011 to address the lingering challenge of voter apathy. The findings and recommendations made by the project led to series of INEC's voter education, sensitisation, and mobilisation programmes, which sought to convince Nigerians that their votes shall count in the 2019 general elections. The said elections are now history with records of highest level of poor voters' turnout particularly during the governorship and house of assembly elections.

This paper, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of electoral administration/administrator in the observed voter apathy with a focus on Southeast - Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to aid the inquiry and these are: Do majority of South-Easterners know the relevance of elections and their civic responsibility in an electoral process?; Did Southeast Nigeria experience a significant level of voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections?; Is there any significant positive relationship between election administration and voter apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria?

1.1 Research Hypotheses

- i. Majority of South-Easterners do not have the knowledge of the relevance of elections and their civic responsibility in an electoral process.
- ii. Southeast Nigeria did not experience a significant level of voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections.
- iii. There is no significant positive relationship between election administration and voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lay in its quest to assess the effectiveness of INEC campaign against voter apathy in Southeast Nigeria, which is now a primary force working against Nigerian democracy.

Secondly, the study shall enable stakeholders in Nigerian electoral process particularly INEC to re-assess the use of none staff as ad-hoc workers and university Professors as Returning Officers during elections; and the need to use a system of reward to drive accountability and people's participation in the political process. The study shall be useful to them because it exposes the impact of temporal human resource recruitment practice in the election administration body.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

Avalanche of literature exist on elections and voter apathy, and on the causes and consequences of apathy for a genuine democratic order. Conceptually, apathy refers to "an individual's impassivity or indifference and a form of collective political behaviour" (Mason, Nelson & Szlarski (1991, p. 205). Therefore, political apathy should be seen as emotional detachment from civic obligations i.e. voting during elections, and abstention from political activity.

The literature identified many factors responsible for or that cause voter apathy as collective memory of historical and contemporary issues of common interests, patterns of trust, and feelings of inefficacy, pattern of political engagement and disengagement, and geographic politics (Thomas, 2004; Margurn, 2003; Mason, Nelson & Szklarski, 1991). Other factors include the nature of campaigns and level of interactive communications (Panagopoulos, 2009; Brady & Johnston, 2006; Gerber & Green, 2005), space, distance and convenience of voting (Dyck and Gimpel, 2005); the nature of competition prevailing in the electoral system (Bowler and Donovan, 2011); lack of skills in the case of e-voting, the conduct or activities of election administrators or poll workers (Hall, Monson & Patterson, 2009), electoral policy and people's economic conditions (Koch, 2007; Gray & Caul 2000; Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1993; Muller, 1992).

With specific reference to Nigeria, the literature identified ethnicity, the changing nature of Nigeria's federal system, memory of political events and issues, increase in the number of constituent units over the years, the character of Nigeria political party and electoral systems, offices being contested for, candidates for the elections, the effect of military rule, class, corruption and maladministration of elections by electoral and judicial bodies, triumph of culture of impurity, erosion of culture of restraint, low-quality political leadership, institutional weaknesses and structural inadequacies, election violence and ideological sterility among the political parties determine the level of voter turnout or apathy in Nigerian elections (Suberu, 2010; Bratton, 2010; Ibeanu, 2007; Oyediran, 1981). Agu, Okeke & Idike (2013) observed that voters' age, occupation and gender affects their participation during general elections.

The scenario is summarised as follows; "[T]he voters do not attach great promissory content or psychological value to their votes. The vote is grossly devalued and the mandates claimed by politicians are effectively dubious" (Ibeanu, 2007, p. 54). The electoral management body i.e. INEC is the culprit. Thus, considering voters' turnout during the 2007 general elections, Adejumbi (2010, p.110) observed, "74.6% of the respondents showed very keen interest in voting at the elections, not necessarily because of confidence in INEC but because of their determination to use their vote to make a difference. While there was public

enthusiasm and optimism toward the elections, the conduct and outcome of these elections confounded such hope”.

The literature is defective in exploring the impact of this on people’s participation and how to ameliorate the negative impact for the purposes of reducing or eliminating apathy. Most of the studies on election administration in Nigeria focused on the strength and weaknesses inherent in the establishment of Nigeria’s electoral body, required reforms and recommendations on how to make it strong and independent. For instance, Ibrahim and Garuba (2010) observed that deficient capacity and organizational governance limit the ability of INEC to function positively. Some other scholars examined the relationship between the 1999 Constitution and INEC’s performance and observed that the 1999 Constitution is grossly defective and did not safeguard the independence of INEC. Others like Dudley (1968); Whitaker (1970); Sklar (1963); Olurode (2010); Lewis & Alemika (2005); Suberu (2010); Amuwo (2009); Maja-Pearce (2011); and Williams (2011) to mention but a few focused on elections, electoral violence and fraud, political parties, democratization, and irregularities associated with them. Specifically, there has been a paucity of specific empirical research on the relationship between election administration and voter apathy in Nigeria. This paper is an attempt to fill the gap.

3.0 Methodology

Considering the wealth of literature and criticism available and accessible on elections and their administration in Nigeria, this paper adopts both the secondary and primary methods of data collection as its source of information. The secondary method uses library documents where published materials such as books, journals, conference/seminar papers, workshop and lecture papers, magazines and newspapers are preserved. The internet also provides a reliable source of access to relevant and appropriate works used in this paper. The method here is to source for these relevant publications, digest their contents and sift their findings as data. Such data have stood the test of time due to criticism by professionals, researchers, human rights organisations and even government agencies. On this lay their validity. In analysing the data, content analysis is adopted. The method sifts the findings in the works, check their consistency and evaluate such opinions with other existing findings in the field. Therefrom, inferences were made.

In the primary method, a cross-sectional survey of the capitals of the five states of the Southeast, namely: Abakiliki in Ebonyi, Awka in Anambra, Enugu in Enugu state, Owerri in Imp state, and Umuahia in Abia state, was adopted. 1000 respondents were adopted as study sample, although after the administration of questionnaire, which formed the primary instrument of data collection, the entire questionnaires were returned and accurately filled. Three lecturers in the Department of Public Administration, University of Nigeria Nsukka validated the research instrument – questionnaire while Test re-test method was used to test its reliability, which with the aid of the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) gave a reliability coefficient of 0.89, which was also good. The data generated with the questionnaire was analysed using percentage formula and SPSS version 20.0 software in search of central tendencies and deviations for purposes of inference.

4.0 Results/Findings

4.1 Respondents’ Demographic information

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

S/N	Capital	Population	Marital status			Sex		Age				Educational level		
			m	s	d/w	mal	fem	18 - 27	28 - 37	38 - 47	48 & above	n/p	sec	ps
1	Abakiliki	200	123	57	20	86	114	34	47	62	57	0	65	135
2	Awka	200	134	55	11	101	99	41	55	52	52	0	23	177
3	Enugu	200	121	62	17	91	109	38	61	43	58	0	15	185
4	Owerri	200	129	47	24	95	105	32	68	56	44	0	37	163
5	Umuahia	200	125	53	22	103	97	30	55	67	48	0	40	160
	Total	1000	491	274	235	476	524	175	286	280	259	0	180	820

Source: Field Work, 2019

Notes: sn = Serial No.; m = Married; s = Single; d/w = Divorced/Widow; mal = Male; fem = Female; n/p = None/Primary; Secondary; ps = Post - Secondary

Table 1 above reveals that 491 respondents i.e. 49.1% are married, 274 i.e. 27.4% are single while 235 i.e. 23.5% are widows or divorced; 476 male respondents (47.6%), 524 females (52.4%); age bracket of 18-27(17.5%), 28-37(28.6%), 38-47(28.0%), and 48 & above (25.9%); while the levels of respondents certificate possession shows n/p (00.0%), sec (18.0%), and ps (82.0%). From these statistics, the respondents are both literate and matured to participate in elections, and to respond to the research questions objectively and reasonably too. The data generated therefrom can be relied upon.

4.2 Data Analysis

Research questions 1: Does majority of the people of Southeast know the relevance of elections and their civic responsibility in an electoral process?

Table 2: Results of SPSS Analyses of responses to research question 1's subsidiary questions

S/N	Research questions	Grand Mean	Stand. Deviat.	Standard Error	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	Sig.	Pairwise Comparisons
Research Hypothesis 1: Majority of South-Easterners do not have the knowledge of the relevance of elections and their civic responsibility in an electoral process							
1	You are aware that election is an opportunity to elect credible leaders and good managers of public affairs	4.42	.721	.022	519.111	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
2	You are aware that the election of good leaders will lead to peaceful society and better development	4.14	.897	.027	804.231	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
3	You are aware that elections provide the opportunity to remove bad leaders and to reward good ones	4.21	.109	.106	102.003	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
4	You are aware that it is your civic right to vote during elections as provided by the Constitution	4.01	.144	.226	128.013	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments

Source: SPSS analysis of responses to research questions

Results of analysis of data in table 2 shows that majority of the respondents agreed (considering their responses grand mean of 4.42, 4.14, 4.21, and 4.01 with a sig. differences of .000 wherein the difference is significant at .005 while the pairwise comparison of these results reveals no modification) that they are aware that election is an opportunity to elect credible leaders and good managers of public affairs; that the election of good leaders will lead to peaceful society and better development; that elections provide the opportunity to remove bad leaders and to reward good ones; and that it is their civic right to vote during elections as provided by the Constitution. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that "Majority of South-Easterners do not have the knowledge of the relevance of elections and their civic responsibility in an electoral process", is rejected. The implication is that they are literate and informed about the importance of elections.

Research Question 2: Did Southeast Nigeria experience a significant level of voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections?

Table 3: Results of SPSS Analyses of responses to research question 2's subsidiary questions

S/N	Research questions	Grand Mean	Stand. Deviat.	Standard Error	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	Sig.	Pairwise Comparisons
Research Hypothesis 11: Southeast Nigeria did not experience a significant level of voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections							
1	You registered and participated in the actual voting	2.64	.118	.356	164.520	.004	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
2	You voted during the presidential and National Assemblies elections	4.18	1.352	.082	491.467	.002	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments

3	You voted during the governorship and State Assembly elections	2.75	.516	.171	445.011	.002	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
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Source: SPSS analysis of responses to research questions

According to results of analysis in table 3, majority of the respondents with a grand mean of grand mean of 2.64 with a non-sig. differences of .004 because the difference is significant at .005 disagreed that they registered for elections and participated in the actual voting. The implication of this is that some of them registered for the elections but did not participate. However, the table reveals also that majority of the respondents with a grand mean of 4.18 with a non-sig. differences of .004 because the difference is significant at .005 agreed that they participated both in the registration and voted during the presidential and National Assemblies elections. The table equally reveals that majority of them represented by a grand mean of 2.75 with a non-sig. differences of .004 because the difference is significant at .005 disagreed that they voted during the Governorship and State Assembly elections. It therefore suffice to say that many people did not participate in the electoral process at all, while many who participated during the Presidential and National Assemblies elections did not participate in the subsequent Governorship and State Assembly elections. Thus, the 2019 general elections witnessed voters' apathy at different levels. This manifested in INEC's records as exhibited in table 4 below.

Table 4: Voter registration and electoral participation in 2019 General elections in Southeast Nigeria

S/N	State	Voters' registration	Presidential and National Assemblies		Governorship elections		Remarks
			Accredited	Voted	Accredited	Voted	
1	Abia	1,932,892	361,561	344,471	429,863	425,067	1,588,421 did not vote during presidential, while 1,507,825 did not vote during governorship
2	Anambra	2,447,996	675,273	625,035	Nil	Nil	1,822,961 did not vote during presidential, while there was no governorship election
3	Ebonyi	1,459,933	391,747	379,394	521,132	493,002	1,080,539 did not vote during presidential, while 966,931 did not vote during governorship
4	Enugu	1,944,016	452,765	451,063	532,667	478,241	1,492,953 did not vote during presidential, while 1,465,775 did not vote during governorship
5	Imo	2,272,293	585,741	542,777	823,743	739,485	1,588,421 did not vote during presidential, while 1,507,825 did not vote during governorship
	Total	10,057,130	2,466,814	2,343,010	2,307,405	2,135,795	7,714,120 did not vote during presidential, while 7,921,335 did not vote during governorship

Source: INEC, 2019

As revealed by table 4, out of 10,057,130 registered voters in Southeast Nigeria, only 2,343,010 voters participated during the presidential and national assembly elections. This represents 76.7% (i.e. 7,714,120) voters' apathy. This is the highest rate of poor voters' turnout in Nigeria's electoral history. Similar but higher experience was recorded during the governorship and state house of assembly elections that came up later. Out of the 10,057,130 registered voters, only about 2,135,795 voters participated in the governorship elections. This represents 78.8% (i.e. 7,921,335) voters' apathy.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that "Southeast Nigeria did not experience a significant level of voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections", is rejected. The implication is that majority of eligible and registered voters in Southeast Nigeria did not participate in the 2019 general elections.

Research Question 3: Is there any significant positive relationship between election administration and voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria?

Table 5: Results of SPSS Analyses of responses to questions

S/N	Research questions	Grand Mean	Stand. Deviat.	Standard Error	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	Sig.	Pairwise Comparisons
Research Hypothesis 111: There is no significant positive relationship between election administration and voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria							
1	The 2019 elections were corrupt, not free and fair and because of this, your votes did not count	4.42	.721	.022	519.111	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
2	INEC was partisan, flouts electoral Acts, laws, and procedures, and did not announce authentic results generated in most of the polling units	4.14	.897	.027	804.231	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
3	The militarisation of the 2019 electoral process discouraged people from participating during the elections	4.14	.897	.027	804.231	.000	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
4	Long and rigorous voter registration and collection of voter's card, limited time for registration, and exclusion from voter's register prevented many people from participating in the elections	3.75	.107	.003	124.231	.003	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
5	Unfulfilled promise by the politicians and character of politicians made you not to participate in the elections	1.04	.214	.115	402.520	.001	at 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments

Source: SPSS analysis of responses to research questions

Results of analysis of data in table 5 shows that majority of the respondents agreed (considering their responses grand mean of 4.42, 4.14, and 4.14 with a sig. differences of .000 wherein the difference is significant at .005 while the pairwise comparism of these results reveals no modification) that the 2019 elections were corrupt, not free and fair and because of this, their votes did not count; that INEC was partisan, flouts electoral Acts, laws, and procedures, and did not announce authentic results generated in most of the polling units; and that the militarisation of the 2019 electoral process discouraged people from participating during the elections.

According to table 5, with the grand mean of 3.75 and a sig. differences of .003 whose difference is significant at .005, majority of the respondents failed to form an opinion on whether long and rigorous voter registration and collection of voter's card, limited time for registration, and exclusion from voter's register prevented many people from participating in the 2019 general elections. However, considering the grand mean of 1.04 with a sig difference of .001 whose difference is significant at .005, their responses, majority of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement that unfulfilled promise by the politicians and the character of politicians made people not to participate in the 2019 elections. The implication is that people are ready to participate in the elections and pay-back such bad leaders if other variables did not intervene.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that "There is no significant positive relationship between election administration and voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria", is rejected. The respondents attributed the none participation of majority of the people to corrupt and unfair electoral system, the electoral management body (INEC) display of partisanship and manifest disregard to electoral Acts, laws, and procedures governing the elections, and their militarisation of the electoral process. Thus, there is a significant positive relationship between election administration and voters' apathy during the 2019 general elections in the Southeast Nigeria.

5.0 Discussion

One of the major findings of this paper, which holds that residents and citizens of Southeast Nigeria are literate and informed about the importance of elections tend to explain their pivotal role in Nigerian politics dating back to 1922 era of colonial constitutional development. From the struggle for egalitarian and

developmental Nigeria, to struggle for freedom from alienation and marginalisation, which culminated to 'the Igbo question', the Southeast as a region have the full knowledge of the importance of elections as instrument for actualising their struggle. On this lay their clamour and struggle for fair and equal creation of states, local government area, and delineation of electoral constituencies and wards with other regions in Nigeria.

However, the ineffectiveness of this struggle and the manifest manipulation of the electoral process and results through such means like violence, fraud, rigorous but short period of voter registration, casting of vote, manipulation of voters' register and election results, corruption and fraud among electoral officials, and the partisan activities of election administrator led to high level indifference to electoral processes in the region in previous elections. This prompted INEC's campaign and sensitisation that people's vote will count in 2019 elections.

Nevertheless, this research also observes high rate of voters' apathy wherein 76.7% of registered voters did not participate in the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections and 78.8% during the governorship elections. Although this experience is collaborated by similar experiences among democratic nations across the world as observed by earlier scholars (see Lassen, 2005; Maunden, 2005), it would have abated considering the level of sensitisation and mobilisation programmes carried out by INEC – the electoral administrator. Such programmes led to the construction and building of trust on the electoral administrator. Contrary to earlier findings made by Adejumobi (2000); and *The Economist* (2007) that INEC's long and rigorous voter registration and collection of voter's card exercise, the limited time for registration and exclusion from voter's register, the unfulfilled promises made by politicians and the negative character of politicians lead to voter apathy, the people decided to ignore these factors and participate in the elections (as reveal by our findings in table 5).

However, the electoral processes exposed INEC's insincerity of purpose, which led to majority of registered voters' none participation in the 2019 elections. However, in conducting and/or administering the electoral process in many staggered governorship elections in 2019 prior to the general elections, INEC demonstrated high level insincerity of purpose and partisanship in favour of the ruling party – the All Progressive Congress (APC). During the Edo governorship elections in 2016, the ruling party at the federal level short-circuited INEC with a *fait accompli* that led to a shift in the elections. In that election, over 250 staff of INEC was indicted for various election malpractices.

The worst case scenarios were the Ekiti and Osun 2019 gubernatorial elections. A serving governor with Constitutional Immunity – Ayodele Fayose – was invaded by men of the Nigerian Police Force in government house few days to the elections, beaten and had his security attaches withdrawn. From pre-writing of election results, vote buying, late arrival of election materials in his strong holds, none supply of some sensitive election materials such as forms, declaration of contrived results to inconclusive election, which paved way for the opposition party in the state – APC – to re-strategize and rig elections in those areas with the support of federal might, INEC aided his defeat. Similar game played out in Osun – an experience that almost caused civil strife. These were few months to the general elections.

This research observes that the manifestation of this insincerity and partisanship led to the great electoral apathy experienced in 2019. INEC was seen by majority of Southeasterners as being partisan and indifference to electoral Acts, laws, and procedures, and fraudulent due to its announcement of contrived results instead of the authentic results generated from the polling units. The electoral administrator i.e. INEC perfected these activities by engaging the military in the electoral process. They used force to write election results, carry boxes, scare people away from the polling units in opposition strongholds, and protect members of the ruling party carrying huge sums of money around for vote buying and rigging elections.

These stripped the 2019 general elections of the core principles of democracy and the stability and legitimacy accruing to it as earlier observed by Diamond (2010). Thus, many people chose to stay away from the elections. Scholars argue that this scenario is inevitable because INEC reports to the Presidency instead of the National Assembly, and that the Constitution must be altered to reverse this before INEC can be truly independent. It is therefore imperative to state that democratisation and elections in Nigeria cannot and will never attract considerable number of voters or people's participation unless the election administrative body – INEC in this instance – is sanitised, reformed, and becomes objective and none partisan.

6.0 Conclusion

Although many factors that negatively influence people's participation in the electoral process are prevalent in Nigeria particularly Southeast, there were initial and strong resolve by people in the Southeast – Nigeria to participate in the 2019 general elections. In addition to many other factors, their knowledge of the role, importance and power of elections; INEC's sensitisation and promise of fair play, which holds that people's vote will count; and subsequent mobilisation by Community Associations, Faith Base Organisations, Civil Societies, political parties, and government were responsible for this decision to participate. However, the manifestation of bias, partisanship, announcement of false election results, corruption and fraud being allowed and perpetuated by INEC terminated the evolving trust and confidence, which the people have on INEC. Consequently, majority of the registered voters avoided the 2019 general elections.

Consequently, this paper recommends that the National Assembly instead of the Presidency should be responsible for the management and supervision of INEC in order to eliminate its use as instrument of power acquisition by the ruling party. INEC should be sanitized through seminars and workshops, and through the introduction of rewards for compliant and deviant staff. Electoral offenders particularly INEC staff should face dismissal from service and a minimum of 10 years jail term. These, if implemented, shall restore people's trust in the election administrator and therefrom begin to participate effectively during elections.

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