

## Political Parties and Electoral Participation in Nigeria: An Empirical Study of the 2019 General Elections in Okigwe Political Zone of Imo State

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined political parties and electoral participation in Okigwe Political Zone of Imo State. The objectives being to determine the extent to which Political Parties discourage electoral participation; perpetrate fear of insecurity; practice internal democracy; and engage in civic education, using the 2019 general election as a study case. Survey research design was adopted for the study. A total sample size of four hundred (400) persons were randomly selected out of eight hundred and eighty one thousand, eight hundred and ninety (881,890) eligible registered voters in Okigwe political Zone. The research instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire for the registered voters titled, (RVSQ) and complemented with interviews. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies. The study was anchored on the structural functional theory. It was found that low electoral participation was due to the fact that political parties perpetrated fear of insecurity; did not engage in sufficient practice of internal democracy, as well as civic education. Based on the findings, it was recommended that political parties should desist from acts that perpetrate fear of insecurity during elections; they should practice internal democracy, and intensify civic education in schools, churches, mosques and the society at large, as an urgent remedial action to restore peoples' confidence in the political process.*

**Keywords:** Political Parties, Democracy, Remedial Action, Insecurity, Electoral Participation.

### **Introduction**

There is a widely held view that to achieve stability, national integration and sustainable development in any society, the people must be part of the democratic process through their participating in politics. The level of citizen's involvement in the democratic process also determines the level of democratic sustainability and growth of the system. This shows that the determining factor in any democratic society is the people. Political parties are important and critical feature of a democratic society. They provide the platform for electoral contest and participation in the political process. Furthermore, they mobilize and educate the masses on major political and national issues.

Apart from era of the Greek city States when participation was direct, today representation is the hallmark of modern democracy. This may be why Agena & Odoh (2005) see democracy as a government that runs through consensus by the elected representatives of the people through either direct or indirect elections. In addition, importance is placed on political rights such as the right to vote and be voted for, right to speech, movement, assembly, publication and association. These rights are integral to democracy because, it provides wide range of opportunities for political participation. According to Egwu (2008:58):

Electoral participation cuts across: the various aspects of a national political life, ranging from the daily service in government, attendance of political party rallies; meetings, voting and being voted for in party elections or nations political obligation and laws as well as the deliberate opposition of political activities such as campaign against a specific political issues, all constitute electoral participation.

The practice of democracy has played significant role in citizen involvement in government. It makes it possible for people to exercise their freedom of speech by criticizing the government, supporting the government and providing advice to the government. The degree to which democracy has been used to achieve the above benefits in Okigwe political zone becomes a thing of concern, hence the need for this study. Politically, Imo State has three zones. The Owerri Zone (Imo East), which has nine (9) L.G.As, the Orlu Zone (Imo North), which has twelve 12 L.G.A.s, and Okigwe Zone (Imo South), which has six(6) L.G.As. Since the inception of Okigwe Political Zone, there has been constant problems, and allegations against the party system and electoral participation which are attributed to the parties' stakeholders in the Zone.

### **The Problematique**

The success of any democratic setting to a reasonable extent depends on the degree to which the people get involved in political activities. Any democratically founded organization should no doubt have members who will usually exhibit willingness to contest and be elected to perform civic or political duties: getting registered for elections, offering themselves for elections, casting their votes at elections, moving with the political train and above all, refusing to be overcome by any seemingly unbecoming political pressure or manipulation.

The rate of electoral participation should be more than average and one imbued with high or appreciable level of voter turnout during elections. This, in itself, is also an indication of the volume of political enlightenment and the desire of the people to remain part of the governing process and the benefits thereto. A close observation of democratic practice in Okigwe political zone shows that the rate of electoral participation is dropping drastically. Studies such as Okorie (2016) and Opara (2017) have affirmed that 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections in the zone were characterized by significant drop in political participation, with some improvements in 2011 and 2015 elections.

In view of this, people make obtrusive agitations, protests or complaints that are self-defeating, resulting in political apathy, and low electoral participation. Writing on the same subject, Obialor (2011) and Duru (2012) aligned themselves with the fact of dwindling rates of involvement of the electorates in political activities in the zone, particularly judging from the analysis statistically made of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections. A similar observation was also made of the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. There is, therefore, need to find out factors responsibility for this trend in the political behaviour of voters in Okigwe political zone, hence this study. In other words, it is for this observed seemingly recurring dwindling rate of electoral participation in Okigwe Zone, that we decided to embark on this study to determine the causes of this electoral trend.

Questions that are thrown up by the above problematique which this work provided answers to include; to what extent has political parties perpetrated fear of insecurity in electoral process,

practiced internal democracy, and encouraged civic education in Okigwe political zone. Based on the above questions the following hypothesis were postulated:

- a. Low electoral participation is due to fear of insecurity perpetrated by the political parties.
- b. Low electoral participation is due to non practice of internal democracy by political parties.
- c. Low electoral participation is due to non engagement in civic education by political parties.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Issues**

A political party is an institution made up of people who share the same political belief, value or ideology. According to Oyediran (2002), in nineteenth century Europe, citizenship was gradually extended to the mass of the people, quickly followed by the emergence of representative institutions, the need for elections, and a subsequent expansion in the number. He points out that political parties became necessary to create organs, which could channel the electoral needs of the people and also provide the base for representative institutions.

Obialor (2011) on his own part informs us that a political party is an organized group of people who have similar political opinion and ideology, and work together to gain the control of government, so as to be able to implement their party programme based on their ideology. For him, low electoral participation is as a result of non practice of internal democracy by political parties. Appadorai (1982) seems to have agreed with Obialor (2011) on this, when he posits that non-engagement in civic education by the political parties is one of the reasons for low electoral participation in Africa.

It is important to point out that parties provide political leadership in a country. According to the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria, ASCON (1992), the term leadership has several meanings. First, it is designed as an art of influencing the behaviour of a group of people in order to achieve specific objectives and goals. Igwe (2017) reminds us of the important of leadership in every society, pointing out that it is only with the aid of effective leadership that a society or group of individuals can succeed in attaining their political, economic and social objectives.

It is the contention of Umeh (2013), that without Political Parties, a democratic system would not be possible. He asserts that the existence of political parties in a political system provides the enabling environment for a suitable relationship within the polity. According Ajayi (2006), the notion of a political party has come to be accepted as a formal and significant structure of government in spite of the western origin. He maintains that the form and structure, which political parties assume in most developing countries, are located in their history. For Dike (2009), those roles and manifest functions of political parties in Nigeria are as follows: practice of internal democracy; membership drive and mobilization; the appointment of governmental leaders; interest articulation; control of ordered groups; control of public affairs; moderation of political powers; "Welfarism", etc. He contended that, "in Nigeria the democratic experiment and the adopted party system seem to be re-instituting authoritarian rule in the guise of civilian democracy". He thus added that the role of elections in a democracy as means of articulating popular will for the purpose of peaceful regime change and the popular acceptance of democratic regimes are being questioned.

Succession to power has always raised issues, particularly in Africa. That is why Arinze (2008) and Okereke (2005) pointed out that a key problem in every political order is that of succession. For them, a second closely related problem is, in what

manner and by whom a present ruler may be replaced. They submitted that, “to the Nigerian political class, power is the ultimate no matter the mean by which it comes”, and as a result, in Nigeria, Okigwe Zone inclusive, “nobody accepts loosing election”. According to them, politics is not played according to the rule. Political power is used to promote sectional interest than national interest. This maybe why Dike (2009) posits that every approaching election in Nigeria increases fear of insecurity and electoral manipulation, which results to the polarization of political interest along sectional groupings as we witnessed in the 2019 election in Okigwe political zone.

The next concept that needs clarification is that of Democracy. The word democracy is derived from the Greek words "Demos" which means "people" and "Cratus" meaning rule. This is ordinarily considered as peoples’ rule. According to Onyenwigwe (2007: 57), modern democracy is:

A system which gives individuals maximum freedom and periodical opportunities to choose their leaders and programmes. To him, democracy suggests an arrangement in which different individuals and political parties compete in free and fair elections and the citizens use their franchise to determine who shall be their rulers for the period. At the end of the period, there will be another election.

Representative democracy according to Claudius (1962), is the system which Aristotle called polity, which Madison in the federalist called democracy, pointing out that such government involve three processes: (a) the process for selecting policy making officers must be in the hands of the masses rather than confined to the will of a few (b) the selection process must be free, in the sense that those who vote must have the opportunity to do so without coercion and fear of reprisal and (c) those elected must submit themselves to the people that elected them in order to be re-elected in their second term. For Akamere (2006), democracy is a culture that is people oriented in nature. He seems to be in the same page with Claudius (1962), when he insists that the level of peoples' participation in democratic process and the nature of that participation will go a long way in determining the success or failure of the political system.

The usual assumption is that democracy produce good governance. That is why Nwosu (2001) avers that, good governance is the same thing as the principles of democracy, which refers to a system of government based on good leadership, respect for the rule of law and due process, the accountability of the political leadership to the electorates as well as transparency in the operations of government. He further argues that political participation is the mechanism through which the citizens of a given political system communicate or express their interests, demands, supports, desires or opposition to the authoritative decision or structure within the political system. He therefore maintains that it may take different forms and gradations depending of course, on the nature of the political system in question.

Political participation, on the other hand, is the involvement of people in politics either individually or collectively (Onyema, 1990). Robert Dahl (1976) presents four categories in which people can be involved in politics, namely:

- i. The Apolitical Stratum: People in this class do not bother themselves with even voting. Their participation in politics is done sometimes through violent

protests, etc.

- ii. The Political Stratum/Class: These are people who take part in basic political activities like discussing political issues, registering for and actually voting during elections.
- iii. The Power Seeker: This category includes those participants who seek power and influence by running for elective office.
- iv. The Powerful: These participants occupy the top political positions; control the greatest amount of political resources and skills. For instance, the presidents, party leaders, governors, etc.

Ake (1981) points out; however, that while everyone participates in politics, though at varying degrees, what is fundamental in political participation is the extent to which citizens exert influence on the policy direction of the government. Citizens' participation in politics is a common feature of developed societies. This may be why Okezie (2000) reminds us that participant citizenship is the products of a set of interrelated social and psychological variables usually found in the developed countries of Western democratic societies. He observes that, participation is greater among people who are educated than among those who are not, emphasizing that, the better educated people, (i.e. those who have acquired higher education), enjoy correspondingly higher incomes or better occupations, relatively high status and social prestige in the society. Subscribing to this, Nwosu (2001) submits that these elites participate more in political activities than those in the lower social category who do not possess these advantages.

Speaking on related issue but focusing on factors that could enhance participation, Adewale (2006:37), posits that, "one of the important factors which contribute to citizen participation has to do with the individual's feelings or relation with the political system". He points out that a feeling of proximity to the political system coupled with a general satisfaction about system political performance and distributive output generate in turn feeling of personal political efficacy of competence, civic responsibility and allegiance towards the political system as well as the development of feelings of trust in the political system.

Drawing from the forgoing, Ezeanya (2012) concluded that before widespread political participation can become a reality in any democratic system, there must be certain socio-psychological, economic and political developmental prerequisites, which are assumed to be the basic characteristics of a developed political system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is situated within the structural functional theory. The theory was developed by Gabriel Almond in 1954 and popularized by David Easton in the study of political science. The appropriateness of this theory to this study is based on two significant issues: structures and functions. First, the structure here stands for political parties, which must perform their functions to ensure the survival of the political system. Secondly, if such structures instituted perform their functions well the issue of electoral participation will be enhanced.

The political parties as structures are required to perform their functions effectively by assuming the role of gatekeepers who distil and allow only legitimate demands to enter the political system, to enhance electoral participation. In doing this, the political parties also assume the role of appointment of visionary leaders who have the ability to practice internal democracy, engage in membership drive and mobilization, articulate public interest, control and ordered group, control public affairs, moderate political powers, discourage perpetrating fear of insecurity before or during elections, etc. This is because the existence of well-organized political parties in a political system provides the enabling environment for suitable interaction within the polity for electoral participation to thrive.

The degree of participation of the electorates will depend on the extent to which political parties as structures have performed their functions. This will encourage the electorates to take active part in electoral process, having in mind that their votes will always count. In brief, the efficient and fundamental activities of the parties as political structures coupled with the cooperative support of the electorates through the rule of law and due processes will determine the degree of electoral participation in Okigwe zone.

**Methodology**

The survey design was used in this study with the questionnaire and interviews as instruments of data collection. This was complemented with secondary data. The data was analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages.

**Study Population and Sample Size**

The population of study consists of registered voters numbering eight hundred and eighty one thousand, eight hundred and ninety (881,890) registered voters as at 2019 general elections. See table one below

**TABLE 1: Population of the Registered Voters and Sample Size**

S/N	Local Government Areas Sampled	Registered Voters	Sample Size	No. Questionnaires Returned	Percentage Returned
1.	Okigwe Local Government Area	153,241	67	64	95.5
2.	Onuimo Local Government Area	150,203	67	65	97.0
3.	Isiala-Mbano Local Government Area	146,101	67	63	94.0
4.	Ehime –Mbano Local Government Area	134,122	66	61	92.4
5.	Ihitte Uboma Local Government Area	147,211	66	64	97.0
6.	Obowu Local Government Area	151,012	67	63	64.0
Total	Six (5) Local Government Areas	881,890	400	380	95.0

Source: INEC Office Okigwe and the Researchers Desk, 2019.



We had contended in our first hypothesis that low electoral participation is due to fear of insecurity perpetrated by political parties.

To test hypothesis one, questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire are relevant.

Q1: Do you think political parties do not enhance electoral participation in Okigwe zone?

**Table 2: Response on Political Parties and Electoral Participation.**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages %
Yes	100	26.3
No	280	73.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data 2019.

The table above shows that 100 persons representing 26.3% of the respondents agreed that political parties enhance electoral participation while, 280 persons representing 73.7 percentage of the respondents did not agree that political parties enhance electoral participation in the zone. This implies that the people believe that political parties did not enhance electoral participation in Okigwe political zone.

Q2: Does fear of insecurity negatively affect electoral participation?

**Table 3: Response on Fear of Insecurity and Electoral Participation.**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages %
Yes	279	73.4
No	101	26.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data 2019.

As could be seen above, 279 persons representing 73.4% of the respondents agreed that fear of insecurity perpetrated by political parties had negatively affected electoral participation while, 101 persons representing 26.6% of the respondents did not agree to this. The implication is that majority of the people are under the impression that fear of insecurity was responsible for the observed voter apathy in Okigwe political zone. Political parties contended it in the second hypothesis that low electoral participation is due to non-practice of internal democracy. To test hypothesis two, questions 4 and 5 in the questionnaire are relevant.

Q 4: Do you think Party leaders in Nigeria emerge through the democratic process of elections?

**Table 4: Response on Party Leaders and Democratic Process of Election**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages %
Yes	170	44.7
No	210	55.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data 2019.

From the above table, 170 persons representing 44.7%, of the respondents agreed that party leaders in Nigeria emerged through the democratic process of elections while, 210 persons representing 55.3% of the respondents were of the view that party leaders in Nigeria did not emerge through the democratic process of elections. The implication is that majority of the people believe that party leaders did not emerge through the democratic process of election in Okigwe political zone.

Q 5: Does non-practice of internal democracy lead to low electoral participation?

**Table 5: Response on Internal Democracy and Electoral Participation**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages %
Yes	200	52.6
No	180	47.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data 2019.

Table 5 above shows that 200 persons representing 52.6% of the respondents agreed that non practice of internal democracy had led to low electoral participation while, 180 persons representing 47.4% of the respondents disagreed that non practice of internal democracy had led to low electoral participation. This implies that people believe that non-practice of internal democracy had led to low electoral participation in Okigwe political zone. Political parties also contended it in the third hypothesis that low electoral participation is due to non-engagement in civic education. To test hypothesis three, questions 7 and 8 in the questionnaire are relevant.

Q7: Does poor civic education lead to political apathy?

**Table 6: Response on Civic Education and Political Apathy**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentages %
Yes	209	55
No	171	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data 2019.



Evidently, from the above table, 209 persons representing 55% of the respondents affirmed that poor civic education had led to political apathy while, 171 persons representing 45% of the respondents were in a contrary view that poor civic education had led to political apathy. The implication is that majority of the people were under the impression that poor political enlightenment had led to political apathy in Okigwe political zone.

Q8: Does non-engagement in civic education by political parties have negative effect on electoral participation?

**Table 7: Response on Non Engagement in Civic Education and Electoral Participation.**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	199	52.4
No	181	47.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Survey Data 2019.**

It is evident that from the table above, 199 persons representing 52.4% of the respondents agreed that non engagement in civic education by political parties had negative effect on electoral Participation while, 181 representing 47.6% of the respondents did not agree to this rather, they were of the view that it was not responsible for the observed negative effect.

### Results and Discussion of Findings

The test of hypothesis one, revealed that low electoral participation was partly due to the fear of security perpetrated by political parties in Okigwe zone. Fear of insecurity refers to a situation where parties induce threat/ violence before or during elections to have their way. They do this by recruiting and arming thugs who shoot their way to snatch ballot boxes thereby exposing the voter to the risk of losing his or her life. Consequently, some of the electorates are afraid to come out and vote. Indeed, it may not be wrong to say that it is the most violent parties that win elections in Nigeria. This finding is in conformity with the finding of Dike (2009). Who posits that every approaching election in Nigeria increases fear of insecurity and electoral manipulation, which result to the polarization of political interest along sectional groupings.

The fear of insecurity gave rise to low electoral participation in the zone. Where the political parties are doing the right thing by discouraging political violence or electoral manipulation and possibly encouraging security agencies to remain professional in their dealings especially, during elections, there will likely be high voter turnout if the reverse is the case, the result will be the trend of low voter turnout, as could be seen in table 9 below. The negative trend reflected in table 9 below, indicated lost of interest by voters which has given rise to low electoral participation in the zone. As parties are no longer interested in voter mobilization but are rather, instigating and perpetrating electoral violence through shooting of guns, attacking one another, snatching of ballot boxes and other evil activities become the order of the day during election period, with the security agencies being at the centre of the electoral irregularities.

In this direction, electoral process in the zone has become a do or affairs - survival of the fittest, and a situation where the political parties, especially those in power engage in electoral violence or

manipulation to win elections, as against the popular will of the people. Corroborating the finding in the analysis of hypothesis one, during the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections in Okanachi Okigwe Registration Area, Umuowa-Ibu Market Square Polling Unit, Code No. 009, it was noted by the observers that APC thugs who were armed shot rapidly in the air in an attempt to snatch ballot boxes and papers, the electorates ran away, and that led to low votes within the environs (*Imo Trumpeter, Feb. 25, 2019*).

Also, the researchers as participant observers noticed that in pooling unit 008 in community secondary school I, security agencies collected money from People's Democratic Party agents and directly worked in their favour (*Weekend Announcer, March 15, 2019*). Furthermore, the United States of America stated that they were disappointed by high level of voter intimidation, by party agents in some locations during the 2019 elections in Nigeria, hence APC and PDP thugs contributed to low voter turnout in some places, which gave room for rigging of the elections (*Punch, April 22, 2019*).

The responses from the respondents in relation to questions testing hypothesis two revealed that low electoral participation was due to non practice of internal democracy by political parties. Practice of internal democracy by political parties refers to a situation where the party members freely elect the officials of political parties, and candidates for elections emerge through democratically conducted primaries, devoid of any imposition by godfathers or party stakeholders. The finding is in line with Obialor (2011) who posited that low electoral participation was as a result of poor or non practice of internal democracy by political parties in Nigeria. Where party members not duly and freely elect the respective party leaders, the practice of internal democracy of the party is questionable.

In such situation, one can be positive that such parties cannot uphold the sanctity of democracy should they form the government. Such ugly situation is capable of causing frustration in members who should have secured the party's mandate, if not for the imposition by the godfathers. This act leads to low electoral participation as reflected in table 9 below, which shows the trend of low voter turnout in elections. In support of hypothesis two, are the controversies that treaded the emergence of candidates of many of the parties for alleged imposition rather than free and fair elections that will represent the peoples' mandate, during elections for the 2019 general elections. These acts degenerated to resentment, lost of confidence by party members in the state and it yielded a negative result in 2019 general election in Okigwe political zone and Imo State at large (*Announcer Express, May 24, 2019*).

Furthermore, electoral observers supported this, when they reported in same paper that the practice of internal democracy would be possible if the various party leaders are duly elected to their respective positions in the most transparent manner and those elected are ready to be accountable to the party members who elected them. Corroborating the finding, Sir Nwankwo Osimiri, one of the APC Chairmen in Okigwe South, at a Political Campaign at Onuimo Local Government Area noted that the observed ineffective practice of internal democracy within the party might lead to low electoral participation in 2019 general election, if nothing was done to address the situation. According to him, it could lead to loss of interest by party members (*Weekend Announcer, Nov. 9, 2018*).

The responses from the respondents in relation to the questions testing hypothesis three revealed that low electoral participation was due to non-engagement in civic education by political parties. Here, civic education refers to the ability of the political parties to engage in

political enlightenment of the people. This has to be done by educating the people on the need to get involved in electoral process. In situations where the people are not well educated in terms of their political rights and duties, there are possibilities of low electoral participation. And when this happens, the godfathers or party stakeholders may seize the opportunity to impose candidates that may not be for the interest of the people. The product of this becomes lost of interest in political activities, giving rise to low electoral participation, as the people will believe that their votes do not count.

This finding supported the discovery of Appadorai (1982) that insufficient engagement in civic education by the political parties was one of the reasons for low electoral participation in Africa. Each of the findings was supported by the evidence of the electoral observers, who followed the trend of elections in 2019 general elections in Okigwe zone. Corroborating the finding, election observer groups observed that there was inadequate civic education or enlightenment campaign by political parties during the rallies and other political activities in Imo State (Okigwe Zone) inclusive, before the 2019 election, which led to the drastic drop or lack of peoples’ interest in both the degree of voters registration and actual vote cast in 2019 general election. From 1999 to 2019, there was no year vote cast was up to 50% of the registered voters. In other words, the percentage for each year has always been below 50%, indicating political apathy in each election year from 1999 to 2019.

The implication of the above analysis is that the people were not well sensitized or educated by the political parties to improve on their registration capacity instead, the voter registration before and during elections continue to decline, as a result of poor civic education, which gave rise to low voter turnout as could be seen in table 8 and 9 below.

**Table 8: Table showing Decline in Registered Voters in Okigwe Political Zone from 1999-2019.**

Year of Elections	Okigwe	Onuimo	Isiala Mbanda	Ehime Mbano	Ihitte Uboma	Obowu	Total No of Registered
1999	360,622	330,642	330,600	326,560	328,440	306,867	1,983,733
2003	340,851	332,104	325,311	319,405	320,101	294,489	1,932,261
2007	331,563	322,490	316,170	333,204	301,018	201,656	1,806,101
2011	311,437	303,571	296,182	221,402	308,119	283,489	1,724,200
2015	261,375	157,102	143,220	136,189	151,375	158,993	908,254
2019	153,241	150,203	146,101	134,122	147,211	151,012	881,890
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,759,083</b>	<b>1,596,112</b>	<b>1,557,587</b>	<b>1,470,882</b>	<b>1,556,264</b>	<b>1,396,506</b>	<b>9,236,439</b>

Source: INEC Office Okigwe 2019.

Table 8 shows the breakdown of the registered voters in Okigwe political zone from 1999 to 2019. It shows the various registered voters each year. The table reveals that from 1999 to 2019 there has been a decline in the eligible voters’ registration in the zone, indicating political apathy. For example, in 1999, a total number of 1,983,733 voters registered while in 2003, the registered voters reduced to 1,932,261. Furthermore, the decline continued to 2015, from 908,254 registered voters to 881,890 registered voters in 2019.

**Table 9: Table Showing the Trend of Low Voter Turnout From 1999 - 2019 Elections.**

Year of Elections	Okigwe	Onuimo	Isiala Mbano	Ehime Mbano	Ihitte Uboma	Obowu	Total No of Votes Cast	Total No. of Registered Voters	% of Actual Vote Cast/ No of Registered voters for each year
1999	139,549	130,687	130,345	124,608	137,102	119,989	782,280	1,983,733	39.4
2003	128401	124,892	122,462	113874	128,688	117,219	740,36	1,932,261	38.3
2007	127,374	117,481	124,562	120689	125,402	118,101	728,609	1,806,101	40.4
2011	12-5,681	119,593	125,232	121,434	126,201	118,148	734,290	1,724,200	42.6
2015	74,406	59,103	68,270	65,802	76,304	67,988	411,373	906,254	45.3
2019	59,201	48,311	51,215	43,508	49,122	53,103	304,460	881,890	34.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>652,612</b>	<b>600,06</b>	<b>622,086</b>	<b>594,915</b>	<b>642,819</b>	<b>594,548</b>	<b>370,204</b>	<b>9,236,439</b>	<b>240.5</b>

Source: INEC Office Okigwe

Table 9 shows the extent or trend of voter apathy in Okigwe Political Zone from 1999 to 2019 elections, showing votes cast each election year and the corresponding registered voters. The table reveals that from the 1999 elections to 2019 elections, the electorates demonstrated voter apathy. For example, in the 1999 elections, out of 1,983,733 eligible registered voters in Okigwe Political Zone only 39.4% of them voted. In 2003 election, 1,932,261 persons registered while only 38.3% voted, indicating a low turnout. In 2007 election, out of 1,806, 101 registered voters only 40.4% voted, which also indicated a low turnout. In 2011 election, out of 1,724,200 registered voters 42.6% voted, indicating same. In 2015 election, out of 908,254 registered voters only 45.3% voted. Similarly, in 2019 elections, out of 881,890 registered voters only 34.5% voted, which indicated a decrease in election turnout. The analysis in table 9 above reveals a high rate of electoral apathy as the percentages of registered voters and actual votes cast were decreasing each election year.

Indeed, Chief Daniel Nwafor, one of the Local Government Chairmen, at a political rally in Okigwe Local Government Area affirmed that it was the duty of the political parties to encourage electoral participation by ensuring that the right thing is done within and outside the party, in the respective political wards. According to him, this has not been possible because parties are no longer interested in voter mobilization and membership drive to enhance electoral participation in the zone (*Imo Trumpeter, Oct. 22, 2018*).

### Conclusion

This study has examined political parties and electoral participation in Okigwe political zone. The analysis suggests that for democracy to thrive in the zone, the democratic practice should be more than average for electoral participation to be rated high. It should be one imbued with high or appreciable level of voter turnout during elections, which by itself offers an explanation to acceptable volume of political enlightenment and practice of internal democracy, devoid of fear of insecurity. The aforementioned trends are not sufficiently seen in the zone. It has been proven that the strength of democracy is only as great as the will of the people to uphold it.

Indeed, political parties need to engage in sufficient practice of internal democracy, membership drive/voter mobilization and intensify civic education, devoid of threat of

insecurity to enhance electoral participation in the zone. The major problem of election irregularity in Nigeria is based on the ineffective or corrupt practice and insecurity perpetrated by the political parties. It is important to note that electoral violence is capable of marring the credibility of any election. Nigeria cannot have free, fair and transparent elections, if there is threat or fear of insecurity during election period.

### Recommendations

The following measures are suggested to enhance the process of enthronement of electoral participation in Okigwe zone:

1. Political parties should not perpetrate fear of insecurity before /during elections to enhance electoral participation.
2. Political parties should practice internal democracy so as to enhance electoral participation and the well-being of the citizens.
3. Civic education should be intensified within the party, schools, churches, mosques and the society as a whole. The citizenry should not see politics as a do or die affairs.

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**APPENDIX**

**SECTION A**

**Introduction**

Please tick  in the box provided, if it applies to you,

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

**No. of years in politics**

- 6. Between 1-10 years
- 7. Between 11-20 years
- 8. Between 21-30 years
- 9. 31 years and above

**Sex**

- 1. Male
- 2. Female

**Age:**

- 1. Between 18-27 years
- 2. Between 28-37 years
- 3. Between 38-47 years
- 4. Between 48-57
- 
-



5. 58 years and above

**Marital Status**

- 1. Single
- 2. Married
- 3. Widow/widower
- 4. Separated
- 5. Divorce

**Education Qualification**

- 3. FSLC
- 4. SSCE
- 5. OND/NCE
- 6. HND/B.Sc.
- 7. M.Sc. and above.

**SECTION B:**

1 Do you think political parties do not enhance electoral participation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. Does fear of insecurity perpetrated by political parties negatively affect the electoral participation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3. Does influence on security agencies have negative effect on electoral participation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4. Do you think party leaders in Nigerian emerge through the democratic process of election?

- a. Yes
- b. No

5 Does non practice of internal democracy lead to low electoral participation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

6. Do political parties appoint visionary leaders?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7 Does poor civic education leads to political apathy?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. Does non-engagement in civic education by political parties have negative effect on electoral participation?

- a. Yes
-



b. No.

9. Do party members participate actively in electoral campaign, rallies and other political activities?

a. Yes

b. No

10. Do you think there is inadequate civic education in Okigwe Zone?

a. Yes

b. No