

VOTERS' BEHAVIOUR AND PERCEPTIONS DURING ELECTION PERIOD IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF EDO STATE

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Abstract

Nigeria, a sovereign nation, more than anything else, has the greatest obstacle to her nascent democracy as the neglect of voters' behaviour and education. This datum has negative impacts on the electoral process and by extension the nation building as evidenced in the spates of armed robbery attacks, political assassinations, religious conflicts, political thuggery, rigging, and myriads of electoral malpractices among other social vices. The seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts in the country is obvious in many ways. Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public. This paper examines the effects of Voters' behaviour and perceptions during the election period in Nigeria using Edo State as a case study. Political activities all over the world and particularly in Nigeria often provide the philosophical drive, and in some cases, the front-line troops for social change, including revolutions and resolutions for good governance.. The paper went on to evaluate the election period in the light of the interaction and dynamism within the system, stakeholders in the electoral process and the ability to know their behaviour and perceptions on violent and credible elections in Nigeria.. Hypotheses were postulated and the Political Communication Theory was used to explicate the work. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. From the primary sources, the survey method, that is, the use of questionnaires were designed and adopted. Data obtained from this method were analyzed with the aid of Simple Percentage. Thereafter, the five researchable hypotheses were tested and accepted while the null hypotheses were rejected. The implication is that there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Generally, the paper discovered a task that must be done with collective efforts of all stakeholders for the growth and development of Nigeria. In the light of this finding, the work suggests policy formulations and implementations which are aimed at repositioning the future elections in Nigeria in general and Edo State in particular. Finally, this study concludes that all stakeholders in the federal polity should thread softly, be objective, rational, altruistic and magnanimous in order not to make the existence of true federalism (social, education, political and democratic cohesive existence of the people, peace and tranquility) a fleeting illusion and a mirage.

Keywords: INEC, Voters, Behaviour, Electoral Fraud, Democracy, Edo State.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in the Nigerian political space is the neglect of voters' behaviour and perceptions which truncates nation building as evidenced in the spates of armed robbery attacks, political assassinations, religious conflicts and education funding coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts (Uhunmwangho and Epelle, 2011). The situation is worsened by the increasing number of uneducated Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities (Nigerian Tribune, 2002). The above statement from an editorial comment by a national daily in Nigeria indeed epitomises the central focus of this paper, the aim of which is to analyze the voters' behaviour and perception Towards Sustainable and Violent Free Electoral Process in Nigeria with particular reference to Edo State.

Political activities all over the world and particularly in Nigeria often provide the philosophical drive, and in some cases, the front-line troops for social change, including revolutions and, occasionally centre of excellence. Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public. Whenever the word voting or election is mentioned in Nigeria, what quickly comes to the mind of Nigerians is rigging among politician. According to Forest (2016), election or voting in Nigeria is the illegal manipulation of election procedures, through fraud related to ballot box fixing and connivance between electoral officials and party agents to influence the result of an election. It has become malignantly a progressive phenomenon in the Nigerian democracy process and a means to ensure electoral success, while subverting contemporary notions of "credible" "free and fair" democratic standards or a minimum, regalia honest, conduct of elections in the selection or conditions between choices. Therefore, the development of political and administrative institutions in Western Europe has shown that other countries that have modernized or developed politically and those new and old nation states that strive towards modernization or development have developed political system. The different methods of election rigging includes ballot box stuffing ballot-box-hacking collusion between electoral staffs and party agents, illegal printing of voters card, falsification of results and inflation of votes rind voters register (Anifowose, 2019). The word rigging in Nigeria is widely synonymous with election fraud, with little in-depth coverage devoted to bid rigging or the free enterprise related price rigging. This is partly as a result of the real and perceived violent, chaotic and corrupt nature of the elections conducted in 1959, 1964, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2014 etc (Forest, 2016).

Today, most elections conducted usually follows allegations of rigging with party officials sometime defending themselves by the notion, that the complaints are null as a result of the involvement of all parties in the act and that opponents were complaining because they were out-rigged. In 1956 - 1966, there were instances of election rigging which is related to the ballot-box system employed and also because of the number of illiterate voters who voted, it was perceived that the electoral outcome was impeded but this was in contrast to the 1964 election where their perception of mass-rigging in all regions of the Federation. A follow up election in 1965 left in doubt the suppose victory of the Western Region Premier's party throwing the rigging into crises (Anifowose, 2019). The rigging habit of Nigeria politicians have been of great concern to Nigeria in general and Edo State politicians in particulars.

The lack of genuine democracy in a country, people's perceptions of not being able to influence the political agenda and the lack of interest in political life are all factors that can influence the levels of electoral participation considerably.

In the development process of any nation, voters' behaviour and perception occupies a key position in the scheme of things. It is the bedrock of every nation's economy and is an indispensable instrument for catching the young electorates for sustainable and democratic governance in the 21st century. Since the attainment of Independence, electoral fraud has remained a knotty issue. The first three attempts at democratic experiments were truncated on account of electoral fraud and poor election management. Also, the 1999 general elections that heralded the current democratic dispensation were reportedly characterized by widespread and monumental electoral malpractices and irregularities. Since the enthronement of the current democratic order, there has not been enough emphasis on voters' behavior and perception/educating the Nigerian electorates. Almost all the elections in this country, with special reference to the immediate past one have been characterized by huge electoral violence, intimidation, manipulation of electoral commission and security agencies, election rigging, multiple voting, hijacking of ballot boxes, vote buying, accusation and counter-accusation. Despite the sleepless day and night prayers by both African Traditional Religion, Christians and Muslims the massive and glaring electoral malpractices were of great concern to Election Observers both local and foreign (2019 *Electoral Act*). For example, Prayer for free and fair election in Nigeria which was approved by Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria reads:

"God our Father, as we stand at the threshold of fresh general elections in Nigeria, we your children come before you, conscious of how we have mis-used your gifts and blessings in our country since we started our new Democratic journey. We also humbly acknowledge how we all, leaders and Followers, have turned away from you and favoured corruption, impunity and Violence. We admit that we have allowed greed, hatred and fraud to permeate and mar our elections up till now" (CBCN, 2022).

The big question now is, have the "voters' behaviour and perceptions been considered indispensable in the Nigerian electoral process?.

Problems

Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public. Democracy requires an active citizenry because it is through discussion, popular interest and involvement in politics that societal goals should be defined and carried out. Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force. In recent years, voter participatory behavior has reached worrying dimension worldwide. Through the various generations of elections, declining voter participation, especially among the youth, has steadily and increasingly become a major issue of concern that has been equally affecting emerging democracy and consolidated ones (Anifowose, 2019).

Decreasing voter participatory behavior is a cause for concern because voter turnout is one of the main indicators used to measure the levels of democratic development and robustness of a country. Poor voter participatory behaviour can be related to and originated by many factors

closely related to the democratic, economic and social development of a country. The lack of genuine democracy in a country, people's perceptions of not being able to influence the political agenda and the lack of interest in political life are all factors that can influence the levels of electoral participation considerably. Other factors may include: low confidence in the political candidates/parties due to unfulfilled promises; insufficient levels of accountability of elected candidates to their constituents; the lack of political maturity of parties; violence during the electoral process; and the low levels of democratic culture and awareness of the electorate, and other stakeholders (Onimisi & Omolegbe, 2019).

Voters' participatory behaviour impacts upon the electoral process and its outcome. Any serious effort at electoral reforms to bring about free, fair and credible elections must take into account the challenges, especially of voter declining participation in the electoral process. Thus, it became imperative to do a study on the nature, causes, dimensions and consequences of declining voter participatory behavior, with a view to being adequately informed in designing future strategies to tackle its challenges in the Nigerian context (Onimisi & Omolegbe, 2019). In a country trying to consolidate democracy after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilizing people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well conceptualized and carefully designed. In doing this, people's perceptions and attitude have to be studied, analyzed, understood and taken into consideration. In any case, liberal democracy is in crisis in many countries, developed and developing (Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2017).

Most of the nullification and cancellation was as a result of rigging perpetuated by some or all of the various actors, the politicians. However, despite the glaring cases of fraud at the election which necessitated the nullification and cancellation of these results, curious enough, not a single perpetrator has either been apprehended or persecuted.

Worried by this development, many have asked, is it that electoral crime is not a punishable offence? Are there no provisions in our "law books" (constitution) on how to deal with those who commit crimes during elections? Or are these criminals invisible? If the tribunals could affirm that the irregularities necessitating the nullification of these elections and the call for a fresh election were actually committed, can't they also identify the perpetuator and met-out punishment on them accordingly to serve as deterrent (Uwa & Ologunowa, 2013).

These and many more are questions that have bogged the minds of voters and political observers who are of the opinion that something must be wrong somewhere.

The major problem is the boldness and audacity of those who engaged in the unwholesome practice of rigging and it is a direct consequence of the fact that although rigging has featured in virtually all the elections held in the country since independence except maybe 1993 elections, no single individual has been known to have been apprehended, persecuted and duly punished. Even when the culprits are apprehended on Election Day, they are quickly released when; their masters, the politicians step in to secure their release. It is against this background that the following hypothetical questions needs to be answered:

1. What is the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process?
2. What are the roles of INEC and political parties on voters' participatory behavior?

3. How effective are the institutional responses to voters' participatory behavior during electoral processes in Edo State?

The Objective of the Study:

The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process.
2. To examines the roles of INEC and political parties on voters' participatory behavior.
3. To find out whether how effective are the institutional responses to voters' participatory behavior during electoral processes in Edo State.

Hypotheses

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process in Edo State
2. There is no significant relationship between the roles of INEC and political parties on voters' participatory behaviour..
3. There is no significant relationship between how effective are the institutional responses and voters' participatory behaviour during election process Edo State.

Theoretical Exposition

The theory of political communication was developed by Philip Denter in 1992. Philip Denter noted that political influence/advertising is effective in the sense that it makes voters like candidates' advertised policies better. Advertising is purely persuasive. The assumption of purely persuasive advertising is very common in both political advertising and advertising on goods markets. A candidate has a comparative advantage in an issue if his policy in this issue is relatively more popular than a weighted average of the relative popularity of all his policies. If candidates have comparative advantages, it is beneficial to highlight one's advantage for two reasons. First, advertising a policy plan strengthens the advantage. Second, priming this issue draws attention to one's strength and away from one's weakness. This is also beneficial. While the advertising effect is also beneficial in issues in which a candidate does not have a comparative advantage, the priming effect is now detrimental (Franz and Ridout, 2017). However, as long as the first effect dominates, the candidate will still publish some adverts on that issue. Because of the additional costs (as which we can interpret the negative effect of priming), candidates publish more adverts on their comparative advantages than on the other, unless the issue in which there is a disadvantage becomes very important. If this is the case, a marginal increase in perceived quality of one's policy platform in an issue has a relatively strong effect on a candidate's overall assessment, and hence in that issue the advertising effect dominates. To the contrary, in less important issues the priming effect is more important and there we should hence expect more divergence.

While relating this theory to the paper, voters have priors about the quality of candidates' policies in the different policy issues and about the issues' relative importance. Candidates spend time or money (on social media advertisements.) in an effort to influence voters' behaviour and decision at the ballot. Influence has two simultaneous effects: (i) it increases the quality of the policy in the issue as perceived by the voters through policy advertising and (ii) it makes the issue more salient through issue priming, thereby increasing the issue's

perceived importance. A strategy is an allocation of influence activities to the different issues or topics. It show conditions under which candidates' strategies converge or diverge, which issues – if any – will dominate the campaign, and under what conditions candidates are forced to focus on issues in which they are perceived to be weak (John, 2016).

Voters evaluate political messages based on partisan bias such that those who do not have this bias evaluate messages on opposing candidates in an independent manner, while those who hold this bias evaluate messages based on their pre-existing notion? In a place like the United States of America for instance, voters have a huge store of political information, making it possible for them to hold partisan views such that campaigns and adverts have little influence on them. But in developing countries where different parties constantly rise and fall and where people have a reduced information store and less political leanings, advertising can have a significant influence on voters (Green, 2017).

It is with this in mind that we set out to examine if the use of the media in political communication alone do influenced voting behaviour regarding the election and specified candidates or not. We also set out to decipher electorates' knowledge of the intention of political communication on media as well as the behaviour of voters viz-a-viz political advertising messages on media (Touyor, 2015),.

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey method. The survey was based on selected Local Government Areas in Edo State which is the focal point. The population of the study consist of 250 base on two categories (Senior and Junior) staff of the Local Government Areas in Edo State (see table one). Out of this number, one hundred and seventy of them met our criteria and therefore form our sample size as can be seen in table one below:

TABLE 1: POPULATION OF STUDY

S/No	Local Government Areas	Category of Respondents	No. of Returned Questionnaires	No. of Not Returned/Invalid Questionnaires	Total No. of Sampled Respondents
1.	Uhunmwonde	Senior Staff	16	6	31
		Junior Staff	5	4	
2.	Orhionmwon	Senior Staff	17	8	31
		Junior Staff	4	2	
3.	Egor	Senior Staff	18	7	32
		Junior Staff	4	3	
4.	Ikpoba-Okha	Senior Staff	15	7	31
		Junior Staff	6	3	
5.	Oredo	Senior Staff	17	6	32
		Junior Staff	5	4	
6.	Ovia South West	Senior Staff	17	8	31
		Junior Staff	4	2	
7.	Ovia North East	Senior Staff	18	7	31
		Junior Staff	4	3	

8.	Esan Central	Senior Staff	16	6	31
		Junior Staff	5	4	
TOTAL			170	80	250

Source: Field Survey 2023.

Both Primary and Secondary sources of data were explored in trying to generate data for this study. The specific information required for the study was Voters' Behaviour and Perceptions During Elections in Nigeria, Rigging Behaviour, Attitudes, Inducement and violent free with administrative mechanism put in place among others. The questionnaire formed the main instrument used in generating primary data, while documented information on prints that are relevant to this study, constituted the secondary source of generating data. To compliment the information received through the questionnaire, respondents were also interviewed. As the research is based on attitude and opinions, the statistical tools employed in analyzing responses include, tables and simple percentages. All the one hundred and seventy copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents studied were duly completed and returned in a useable form. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Of all the one hundred and seventy respondents, eighty (47%) of them are married; fifty (29%) are single while twenty one (13%) are divorced and the remaining nineteen (11%) are either widow or widowers. Thirty (18%) of them are within the age bracket of 18 – 25, Fifty (29%) are between the age bracket of 26-35; while eighty (47%) are within the age bracket of 36-45 and the remaining forty six years and above are ten (6%).

TABLE 2: Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process in Edo State

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	110	65
No	60	35
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 2 shows that 110 (65%) of the total respondents agreed that the role and position of electorate in electoral process in Edo State and are of relevance and impacted negatively on people enjoying the dividends of democracy in Edo State in particular and Nigeria in general, conversely responsible for the lack of attitudinal change, voters apathy and fragrant disregard for rules and regulations.

Therefore, the hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between the role and position of the electorate in the electoral process in Edo State in Nigeria is accepted.

TABLE 3: Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between the roles of INEC and political parties on voters' participatory behaviour.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	105	62
No	65	38
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 3 shows that 105 (62%) of the respondents agreed that there is correlation between the roles of INEC and political parties on voters' participatory behaviour which led to undue low turn out during election and financial inducement, while 65 (38%) were not satisfied or disagreed.

TABLE 4: Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between how effective are the institutional responses and voters' participatory behaviour during election process Edo State.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	120	71
No	50	29
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 4 shows that 120 (71%) of the respondents agreed that there is no effective institutional responses which is responsible for voters' participatory behaviour during election process in Edo State which substantially led to economy drawback and also hampered significantly on political actualization while 50 (29%) disagreed with the opinion.

Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between how effective are the institutional responses and voters' participatory behaviour during election process in Edo State is accepted.

Findings Based On Hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the hypotheses, all the research hypotheses were positive which implies that

(H_r) 1-3 were accepted.

More so, the study revealed that Voters' Behaviour and Perceptions during Election in Nigeria, Edo State as a focal point could impact negatively on developmental strike on the Nigerian Democratic process.

1. Furthermore, this paper has highlighted several challenges and solutions as per the findings in the hypotheses carried out in the research. However, again, it was found that, the application of necessary mechanism in checkmating election rigging, charting and planning Public Enlightenment and eliminating all sorts of rigging behaviour are

- not put in place as evidenced in the 25th February, 2023 Presidential and National Assembly election.
2. It was revealed that a clear understanding of the Voter's Behaviour and Perceptions by the electorates which would effectively, efficiently and economically enhance the process of public service delivery are yet to be put in place.
 3. It was also revealed according to some respondents that the focus should rather be placed on the day-to-day voters' education by INEC and political parties in Edo State through the use of pamphlets, town criers and National Orientation Campaign to the populace before election.
 4. Effective law on Vote Buying and Ballot Snatching should be in place to ensure that perpetrators are dealt with (Akintoye and Uhumwuango, 2018).
 5. Transparency or openness appears to be the order of the day in order to stop rigging behaviour among Nigerian politicians.
 6. Power and wealth which used to be the driving force of rigging behaviour among Nigerian politicians should be jettisoned (Nigerian Civil Society 2019).

See figure 1 below shows more details of Nigeria Political map.

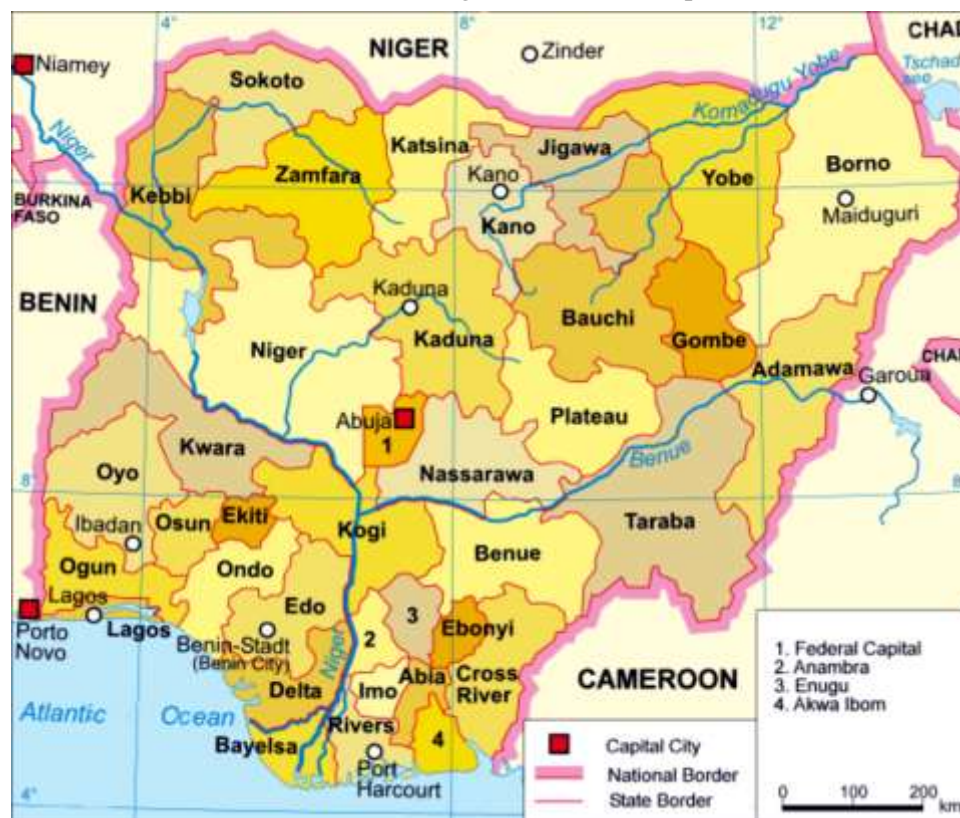


Figure 1: Political map of Nigeria

Source: www.nigeriamap caught 20 January, 2023.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For the high point of this study, data were collected from eight selected Local Government Areas of Edo State. Consequently, this study investigated Voters' Behaviour and Perceptions during Elections in Nigeria, with particular reference to Edo State as a focal point.

Data obtained from this method were analyzed with the aid of Simple Percentage. Thereafter, the three researchable hypotheses were tested and accepted while the null hypotheses were rejected. The implication is that there was relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Generally, the paper brought to focus that the inability of law enforcement agents to bring the victims of electoral crimes to book has contributed and is an encouraging factor for the increase in rigging behaviour. In a nutshell, it was discovered that some voters do not understand the perception of rigging and the negative effects on the nation but see rigging as just hijacking and ballot stuffing (Aja, 2018). Hence: rigging has taken over the place of free, fair and credible election in the country. The whole world is watching us and the process.

Recommendations

From strictly comparative point of view, both efficiency and effectiveness are abstract measures of rigging behavior on the basis of the findings. For further researches on credible elections in Nigeria, Nigerian politicians; voters, electoral agents, law enforcement agents, enlightenment, policy makers, educational institutions etc have a role to play in the eradication of rigging and must engage in its eradication process.

It is strongly recommended that the more law enforcement agents should be deployed to strategic positions and polling booths to ensure that riggers big or small be brought to book and made to face the rot of the law as this will deter others from rigging.

Policy makers should make more stringent law which the politicians cannot easily jump out of and laws on compulsory eradication of rigging. Government, policy makers must ensure the compulsory education of voter on the different types and methods of rigging before election.

Any politician found giving incentives (gifts) during election period should be automatically disqualify. Incentives given to political office holders should be reduced and that of civil servants, permanent secretaries etc be increased as this will reduce competition of political office holders thereby reducing rigging or crime. In a nutshell, stakeholders and electoral bodies should allow credible citizens to be vigilant as the social media when utilized well, can ensure that elections are collective and participatory efforts in the State in particular and Nigeria in general Campbell, J. (2019).

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