

Voters Turnout and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Examining the Pains and Gains of General Elections in Nigerian Fourth Republic

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Abstract

The rich history of Nigeria's democratic battles for votes reveals a growing concern and shared aspiration for the strengthening of the democratic system through legitimate, open, and equitable elections to address the issue of low voter turnout. Since the beginning of democratic rule in 1999, there has been a consistent and continuous decrease in voter participation in subsequent elections at all levels of government, whether it is federal, state, or local. Noteworthy factors that have contributed to this decline include distrust in political and governmental processes and an excessive presence of security forces in tense inter-ethnic relations. This research paper delves into the consequences of voter turnout and general elections in Nigeria, employing the 'Rational Choice Theory Model' proposed by Georges Homans in 1961 as its theoretical framework and utilizing secondary data collection methods. The findings of this study strongly advocate for a systematic update and purification of Nigeria's voter register to ensure its accuracy before the next phase of the country's fourth democratic dispensation. The implication for public policy is that this clean-up process would greatly enhance political involvement and the management of election data in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Voter Turnout, Election Results, Political Engagement, Democratic Strengthening, and General Elections.*

1. Introduction

Credible elections are essential for the selection of legitimate political leaders, as they allow individuals to actively engage in choosing their preferred candidates. In modern democracy, citizens engage in the process of selecting individuals to hold certain political positions and act as their representatives. Therefore, for any state to elect widely accepted leaders, it is crucial to ensure both credible elections and a significant voter turnout on election day. Voter turnout is a key metric that reflects the level of citizen engagement in the government of their nation. A thriving democracy often exhibits a high voter turnout rate, while voter indifference and distrust in the political system often correlate with a low turnout rate (Solyonov, 2016, p. 13). As stated by Nwankwo et al. (2017, p. 249), the participation of voters is crucial for the success of an election, as it serves as a fundamental

element of democracy and an essential measure of democratic performance. Voter turnout, the most common expression of participation in a democracy, significantly influences the process of democratic consolidation (Young, 2004). For democracy to be effective and significant, it is crucial to have electoral participation and public engagement in the political process (Dalton, 1998, quoted in Agu et al., 2013).

Amanyie et al. (2015) argue that the level of democracy's quality depends on the degree of citizen involvement in the democratic process rather than the quantity of political parties officially recognized within a particular nation. Therefore, robust citizen engagement in the democratic process, especially in the selection of leaders and the creation of policies, holds significant importance. They also suggest that a political structure can be classified as democratic when its most influential decision-makers are elected through just, transparent, and periodic elections. These electoral processes should facilitate open competition among candidates for voter support, with virtually all adult citizens being eligible to participate in voting.

Since gaining independence in 1965, Nigeria has held only a few general elections, specifically in 1979, 1983, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. Despite an increase in the number of registered voters, Nigerian general elections in the fourth republic have witnessed low or declining voter turnout (Omotola and Alyedogbon, 2012; Nwankwo et al., 2017). It is imperative for Nigeria to promptly address the significant decrease in voter turnout between 2007 and 2023, as indicated by available statistics. Turnout increased from 52.3% in the 1999 election to 69.1% in 2003, but then declined to 53.7% from 2007 to 2011. It further declined to 43.6% in the 2015 election and 35.6% in the 2019 election (Abdallah and Krishi 2019 and Obiejesi 2019). The persistent lack of voter participation poses a substantial risk to the establishment and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

In 2023, Nigeria held its general elections for the presidency and national parliament on 25 February and the governorship and state houses of parliament on 18 March. However, just 24.9% of the 93.47 million eligible voters actually voted in the most recent presidential and legislative elections. At a disheartening 26.72 percent, this represents the lowest voter participation since the restoration of democracy in 1999. Future elections in Nigeria's fourth democratic republic will exacerbate this trend if it remains unaddressed.

Previous studies have identified multiple factors contributing to low voter participation, including instances of electoral violence, public skepticism toward the political and electoral systems, delayed or insufficient election supplies, dysfunctional voting infrastructure, and substandard organization (Solijonov, 2016; Obiejesi, 2019; Amanyie, 2015). The primary objective of this study is to analyze the influence of voter turnout on strengthening the process of democratic consolidation during national elections in Nigeria. More specifically, the paper explores the obstacles and advantages inherent in Nigeria's democratic framework. Furthermore, the study endeavors to recommend appropriate measures to enhance citizen involvement in the fourth-coming national elections in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Discourse

Voters Turnout: The term "voter turnout" describes the percentage of registered voters who actually cast ballots in an election. The percentage of registered voters who actually cast ballots on election day is called the voter turnout. The percentage of votes cast in an election that include both legal and

invalid ballots is known as the total number of votes (Soliforov, 2016, p. 4). Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible voters who actually cast a ballot in an election. According to Roberts (2009) "voter turnout" is a percentage that indicates how many individuals out of the entire population cast ballots in an election.

Democracy: The term democracy originates from the combination of two Greek words: demos, which refers to the populace, and kratos, which signifies governance or ruling. In its literal sense, democracy signifies a system of governance where the people hold the power. Democracy is a political system where voters either directly exercise power or choose representatives to form a governing body. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a form of governance where the people hold the power, exercise it, and aim to benefit them (Okolie, 2016). He further argued that we can refer to democracy as a system of governance where the citizens hold the authority. This type of government gives the people all state powers. Democracy is defined as a system of governance that adheres to the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule.

In addition, Iyayi, (2006) asserts that a democracy is a type of government that embodies several attributes, such as a robust civil society, equitable economic opportunities for all citizens, robust security measures, the protection of individual rights, and effective governance. Idike, (2014) lists the following characteristics of modern democracies: adults' inclusion, voting equality, enlightened knowledge, final control over the agenda, and effective engagement. Dahl asserts that a democratic society can yield numerous positive outcomes. These include a decrease in the likelihood of tyranny, an increase in freedom and individual agency, enhanced human development, protection of fundamental interests, political equality, a desire for peace, and economic prosperity.

Itu et al (2024) also argued that democracy is a way of life or a way of running the government that includes important things like freedom to choose one's own goals, standard of living, and economic means; the right to own one's own property; fairness and equality in society; no racial or social differences; everyone having the same chances; and solving problems as a group, with the help of the people's choices. Okolie (2016, p. 28) lists a number of democratic principles, such as fair and regular elections, strong political competition and civic engagement, the right to vote for all eligible citizens, a system of checks and balances to prevent abuse of power, an independent judiciary, strict adherence to constitutional rules, and finally a government that truly reflects the people.

Democratic Consolidation: The term "democratic consolidation" describes the process by which a society's democratic ideals are preserved, modified, and strengthened inside a country or state. Donnel (1996, as referenced in Ituma and Chukwu, 2016, p. 94) defined democratic consolidation as the existence of social and political rights necessary to provide free and fair electoral processes, both during and between election times. Furthermore, Omenna (2017) posits that democratic consolidation is the process of achieving successful governance through the development and maintenance of a democratic culture. Omenna (2017) posits that democratic consolidation is a process that fully internalizes, institutionalizes, and realizes democratic ideals and traits.

In addition, according to Diamond (quoted in Innocent et al., 2013, p. 202), democratic consolidation is an enhancement of democracy in every way possible. Diamond advocates for more systematic and transparent accountability, larger, more autonomous, and inclusive participation and representation, more comprehensive and rigorous protection of civil freedoms, and more robust, executive, free, and fair political competition.

3. Methodology

Secondary data was extracted from books, journals, newspapers, and other previously published sources using a document search. We examined the content of speeches, reports, diaries, publications, conversations, and newspaper headlines. This research technique enables the precise and systematic evaluation of qualitative data, facilitating the study's ability to derive comprehensive findings on the pertinent categories. The paper employed thematic analysis to investigate and integrate several themes identified in the qualitative data.

4. Theoretical Framework

As a foundation for examination, the paper has employed the rational choice theory (RCT). Rational choice theory is known by various names, such as rational action theory, choice theory, and rational choice. The works of Tullock (1962), marked the initial appearances of this theory (Igboeche, 2018). According to this notion, individuals have the freedom to express their preferences among the available options. A rational individual also takes into account the available information, the probability of an event, and the costs and benefits of other alternatives while making a decision. Furthermore, according to this theory, voters and political parties act rationally when making decisions, guided by self-interest and motivated by the idea of maximizing the utility of their actions (Antunes, 2010).

Rational choice theorists argue that people's reluctance to engage in decision-making or political matters reflects their sanity rather than a lack of knowledge. This is because any reasonable person would carefully consider the potential advantages and disadvantages of getting involved. In the context of electoral politics, RCT suggests that voters or electorates are rational individuals who, on election day, weigh the perceived benefits and costs of voting and make decisions based on these considerations. If individuals believe that the outcome of the election will not personally affect them or if they perceive the effort required to cast a ballot as too burdensome, they are less likely to vote. Itu et.al (2024), argued that calculus of voting model describes how voters make reasoned decisions based on the expected utility of voting. Citizens should evaluate the pros and cons of voting and only cast their ballots when they determine that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks (Vergne, 2011).

The relevance of this theory to the present paper lies in the clarity it brings to the question of whether the judgements made by the electorate or voters regarding the costs and consequences of voting on election day explain the low voter turnout in Nigeria's general elections. To put it another way, this concept will assist in deciphering whether the low turnout stems from voters' belief that their vote holds no significance. This means that if people don't think voting will benefit them, they won't vote.

From 1999 until the current day, Nigerians have had the opportunity to cast ballots in general elections. However, according to this idea, the costs of voting outweigh the advantages; therefore, some may choose not to participate. Electoral violence, election postponement, opaque voting procedures, tardy delivery of voting supplies and staff, and other similar issues might all dissuade voters from casting ballots on election day. If voters believe that their vote will be disregarded, that their decision will not have a positive impact, or if they fear for their safety, they are unlikely to bother casting a ballot. The people of Nigeria have lost faith in the voting system and have expressed concerns about potential security breaches due to the prevalence of election fraud, irregularities, violence, and threats. These factors contribute to the decreased likelihood of individuals voting on election day.

Due to its numerous merits, the paper argued that Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as a paradigm for deductive political analysis. Besker (1976) has described the rational choice model as a comprehensive framework for comprehending human behavior. Rogowski (1997) asserts that this model is a highly rigorous theory applicable to contemporary social activities. Harsanyi (1977) states that it is a language of social science that is accessible to all. Ogu (2013) has discussed three additional characteristics of the RCT, namely generalizability, predictability, and parity. However, critics and scholars have identified specific issues with the RCT. Alternative theories can better explain the complexity of human interaction and social actions; the challenges of obtaining sufficient information and dealing with ambiguity; the influence of habits and norms on behavior, which can lead to significant social actions when deeply ingrained; and the fact that the RCT encompasses every conceivable calculated course of action in rational choice, thereby exposing the construction of standards for rationality.

5. Nigerian Voter Turnout from 1999 to 2023 General Election in Nigeria

There are numerous factors that contribute to the reluctance of Nigerians to participate in voting, as per the existing literature. Our nation has a tumultuous past, marred by violence, ballot box thefts, and the disruptive presence of troublemakers and conflicts at polling stations. This has instilled a sense of fear among many individuals, making them apprehensive about the safety of voting. Furthermore, the lack of adequate protection for voters during elections raises doubts about the significance of their votes. Danjibo and Oladeji (2007) argue that the absence of sincere and reliable candidates is another reason for the low voter turnout. Thus, abstaining from or refraining from voting altogether becomes the preferred choice for many. But politicians' inability to deliver effective leadership is the single most important factor contributing to voter disinterest. The decline in morale and the disregard for patriotic expectations have become secondary concerns.

People perceive the electoral system as fundamentally flawed and perpetually ineffective, with political actors and institutions acting more like gladiators than statesmen. Consequently, the general public often feels powerless in the face of political and electoral misconduct, which further exacerbates the mismanagement and unsatisfactory outcomes of Nigeria's elections. Political oligarchs' decisions, made outside the framework of electoral norms, regulations, and procedures, rob voting of any real decision-making power. In the words of Fawole (2005), "winners and losers are often predetermined, leaving voters to merely play out the charade of confirming previously made decisions." Apart from the effort involved in voting, individuals see little immediate benefit from their participation.

From 1999 to 2023, the study shall examine the rate of voter turnout in Nigeria's general (presidential) election. You can see this in the table down below:

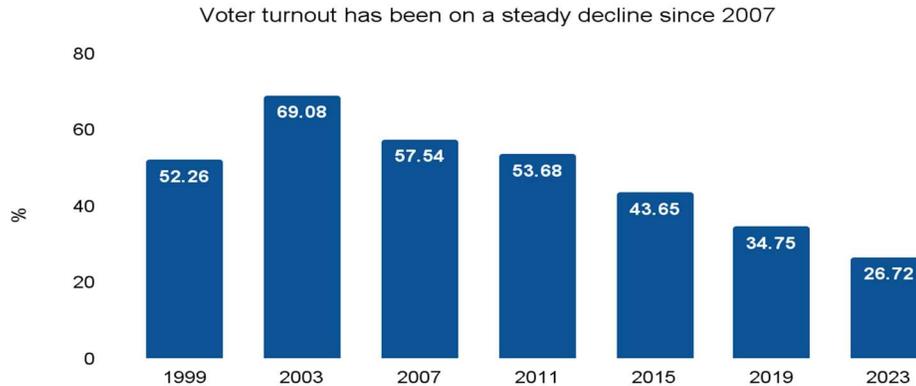
Table 1: Showing the Rate of Voter's Turnout in Presidential Election from 1999 to 2023

S/N	Election years	No of R e g i s t e r e d voters	No of voters' turnout	Percentage
1	1999	57,838,94 5	30,280,05 2	52.3 %
2	2003	60,823,02 2	42,018,73 5	69.1 %
3	2007	61,567,03 6	35,397,51 7	57.4 %
4	2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.7 %
5	2015	67,422,00 5	29,432,08 3	43.6 %
6	2019	82,344,10 7	29,364,20 9	35.6 %
7	2023	93,469,008	24.9 million	26.72%

Source : Obiejisi, (2019) Amayie et al (2015)

The bar chart below shows that the turnout in the just-concluded 2023 general election was 8.03 percent lower than the 34.74 percent turnout in the 2019 general election.

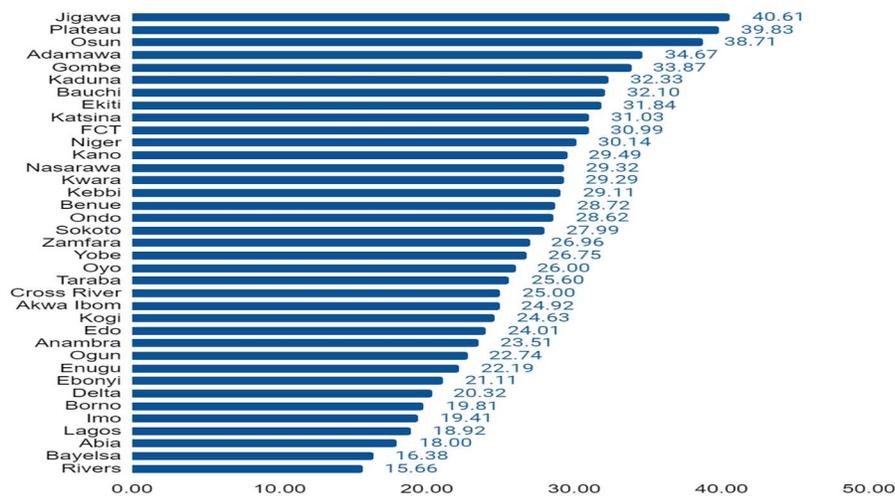
Percentage of Voter Turnout in Nigeria's General Elections



Source: INEC; IDEA | Chart: Dataphyte

The turnout in the 2023 election fell short of the desired 50% mark envisioned by INEC, but it also reflected the prevailing trend in recent Nigerian elections. Merely two out of the 36 states, namely Adamawa and Jigawa, achieved voter turnouts surpassing 40%. Plateau, Osun, and Gombe State followed suit with percentages of 39.83%, 38.71%, and 33.87%, respectively, as depicted in the chart below.

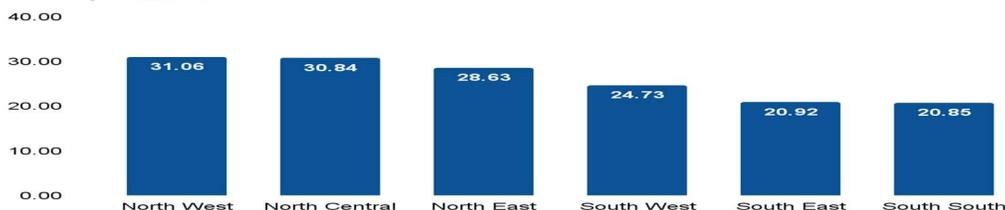
Percentage of Voter Turnout by States in the 2023 General Election



Source: INEC | Chart: Dataphyte

Similarly, the voter turn-out of 2023 general election in the six Geo- political zones in Nigeria as tabulated in the chart below.

Percentage of voter turnout in the 2023 Presidential election by Geo-political zone



Source: INEC | Chart: Dataphyte

The 1999 electoral exercise witnessed a staggering total of 57,838,945 individuals who had dutifully registered to partake in the democratic process. Astonishingly, 30,280,052 of these conscientious citizens, comprising 52.3% of the overall number, zealously exercised their civic duty by casting their precious ballots. Fast forward to the year 2003, and the number of registered voters witnessed a meteoric rise of 60,823,022 individuals, exemplifying an unwavering commitment to the democratic cause. Of these valiant souls, an impressive 42,018,735, constituting a formidable 69.1% of the total, actively participated in the electoral process. The subsequent year, 2007, witnessed a rather disheartening decline in civic fervor, with voter turnout languishing at a meager 57.4%. Numbers provided by INEC indicated that out of 61,567,036 registered voters, a mere 35,397,517 bothered to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

The year 2011 saw a noticeable increase in the number of registered voters, with an astounding 73,528,040 individuals eagerly signing up to partake in the democratic exercise. Alas, only a fraction of this mammoth figure, specifically 39,469,484 voters, mustered the motivation to cast their ballots, resulting in a voting turnout of 53.7%. The subsequent electoral cycle in 2015 bore witness to an even more disheartening decline in voter engagement, with the number of registered voters standing at 67,422,005. Regrettably, only 29,432,083 individuals, representing a mere 43.6% of the total, mustered the enthusiasm necessary to participate in the democratic process.

The 2019 presidential election, by all accounts, witnessed a rather dismaying turn of events. Despite boasting an impressive 82,344,107 registered voters, a paltry 29,364,209 eligible individuals cared enough to exercise their sacred right to vote, culminating in a depressing turnout rate of 35.6%. A closer analysis of historical data pertaining to voter turnout in Nigeria exposes a rather unsettling trend. Between 1999 and 2023, the average voter turnout hovered around a somewhat lackluster 51.95%. An alarming revelation accompanies this disquieting statistic: voter turnout has been steadily declining, despite a simultaneous increase in the number of individuals registering to vote. If we do not take swift and decisive action, this sobering reality foreshadows a bleak future for voter engagement in Nigeria's forthcoming elections.

6. Discussing the Pains of Low Voters Turnout and The Gains of Voters Turnout of General Election in Nigerian Fourth Republic.

The impact of low voter turnout in democracy relies on the gap between those who participated and those who did not. Many people worry about low voter participation because they believe that those who do not vote are motivated by different political interests. With this key understanding, it's important to discuss some core areas of challenges of low (pains) voter's turnout general election in Nigeria's fourth republic.

Inadequate voter education. Education, when done right, provides knowledge and skills that may advance a nation. Many Nigerians are disappointed with their educational experiences since they feel their curriculum doesn't meet their demands, blocking their personal progress. A curriculum that ignores economic needs is the root cause of Nigeria's youth unemployment crisis. The educational system failed to give many new colleges graduates the skills needed to contribute to the nation's economic and social progress; therefore, they're out seeking jobs. Birch (2010) argues that education should aim to liberate people from the limitations and hardships they encounter on a daily basis. This means they need to be strong enough to face tomorrow. This is not true, and Nigeria's state at the time explains why fewer people voted.

The corruption indices. Corruption is a major factor influencing voter participation in Nigeria and other African nations. Embarrassing corruption and incompetent administration are global problems, not exclusive to the Nigerian government. People vote for politicians that have strong moral beliefs, stellar qualifications, and unfaltering integrity (Adejumobi, 2000). One-way young people might express their dissatisfaction and displeasure is by not voting. Corruption makes it difficult for them to succeed professionally, no matter how hard they work in school. Many Nigerians have lost trust in both previous and current administrations due to the widespread poverty they have caused. According to Beaton (2016), young people find it challenging to support politicians because of their self-interest.

Weak political parties' structures. The precipitous decline in voter turnout in national elections since 2003 shows that Nigerians are obviously less interested in being involved in the electoral process. In the 1999 elections, 52.3% of those who were eligible to vote actually did so. Although it peaked at 69.1% in 2003, this proportion has since declined. Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage decreased to 53.7%, followed by a further decline to 43.6%, culminating in a final figure of 34.75% during the 2019 presidential election (Adigun, 2020). During periods of increased voter engagement, significant effort often went into grassroots organising to guarantee inclusive participation for all individuals. Nevertheless, these formidable political entities grew excessively influential and faced allegations of engaging in unethical practices such as vote-buying and voter intimidation. Nigerian voters exhibited a marginal decrease in their tolerance toward these groups as their misconduct became increasingly evident, leading to a decline in party participation. The perception of political parties as either beneficial or detrimental does not diminish the evident relationship between the robustness of a party and the heightened engagement of voters.

The management of electoral process. Lack of faith in the election procedure and officials' ability to conduct genuine elections devoid of misconduct and other forms of electoral deceit intensifies voter apathy in Nigeria and across the African continent. Consider that certain voters may become disenchanted with the entire election process if they perceive their society incapable of holding an election that is fair, impartial, and devoid of violence. Dissatisfaction with the resolution of past election disputes could lead to this scenario. For example, during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, only 26.72% of eligible voters actually participated-the lowest turnout in the country's history. The post-election unrest in Nigeria in 2011, which arose after the defeat of a particular candidate in the country's northern regions and resulted in significant loss of life and property, likely sparked this. The 2019 election experienced a notable reduction in voter participation; in certain districts, only 20% of eligible voters exercised their right to vote. Evidence provided by INEC and IDEA reveals a sustained decrease in the percentage of eligible Nigerians exercising their right to vote. This vividly illustrates the lack of confidence that the nation places in our democratic institutions and the political process.

Breach of campaign commitments. The reason fewer individuals cast their votes is due to their doubts that their elected officials will truly implement their policies. This is also caused by people abstaining due to strong beliefs. The loss of trust in the outcome of elections among many Nigerians stems from firsthand experiences of their leaders' insincerity. The reluctance of elected officials to fulfil their campaign promises once in power closely ties this lack of trust. The decline in voting intentions among Nigerians becomes evident in consecutive elections. Madu and Abdulmalik highlighted this aspect in their study on voter participation in Nigeria, while Mataka and Nkandu (2020) did the same in Zambia.

On the Political Side. The immeasurable political importance of diminished voter participation cannot be overstated, as it gives rise to societal challenges after the election has come to pass. Owing to this circumstance, politicians driven solely by self-enrichment are able to secure positions of power in elections where voter turnout is meagre. Nigeria bears witness to a concentration of political unrest within the ruling elite. Voters' inattention in exercising their voting rights has facilitated the proliferation of election malfeasance. The truth remains that when there is a substantial number of voters, it becomes arduous, if not insurmountable, for these self-serving and corrupt candidates to execute their strategies to influence the election. This is because there will be myriad well-informed citizens ready to exercise their democratic duty and ensure the smooth operation of all polling stations. Conversely, minimal voter participation allows corrupt practices within the electoral process to persist without scrutiny. Unremarkable voting turnout sends a message to the incoming leader that the populace is unconcerned with matters of governance and the environment. It fosters a culture of patronage, where the powerful are answerable to the group that elected them, even if it is to the detriment of the public, and it enables a single political party to monopolise a position of authority for an extended period, resorting to any means necessary to retain their grip on leadership.

On the Social Side. Low voter participation has a significant social influence on society as it impacts the election of leaders. The failure of leaders and citizens to carry out their responsibilities eventually leads to a society in disarray and crisis, as no one seems to care about the consequences of their actions on others. A state's economic and social aspects intertwine. A leader without a plan to make money and provide society with what it needs would ignore basic demands like a stable electricity system, clean water, a healthy environment, and enough new industry jobs for years to come. Nothing works, and the environment becomes inhospitable. Because the system is crooked and money buys justice, people are able to commit any crime without facing punishment. Another consequence of this system is that it leads to a significant number of people, particularly talented individuals, leaving the country. Despite the dangers, these individuals chose to leave their homes in search of better opportunities.

On the Economic Side. Low voter turnout has a contagious effect on a society's or state's economy. The reason for this is that a state's economy plays a crucial role in its survival, and its collapse would occur without it. One cannot have a strong government without a robust economy. Elections with low turnout are a waste of time and money. This is because when fewer people cast ballots, all of the money and resources set aside for the election—used to provide things like ballots, ink, and everything else—go to waste. Remember, the number of registered voters determines the allocation of election funds. Citizens' support for a government throughout the winners' four years in office depends on how they vote. Voters who lack support for an administration often refuse to pay taxes, which in turn forces the government to prioritize infrastructure and profit. This will assist in delivering essential services. Non-payment of taxes hinders sustainable development and growth, requiring reliance on federal allocations and loans from internal and external sources. Inadequate citizen participation

hinders government efforts to create employment opportunities, provide adequate pensions, address rising healthcare costs, and provide efficient public services due to financial constraints. If these are not working properly, the state's economy will continue to deteriorate.

Be that as it may, as citizens of this great nation, we hold in our hands the power to shape the course of our country's destiny. One of the most profound ways we can exercise this power is by actively participating in the electoral process. In Nigeria, where democracy is still evolving, our engagement in elections is not just a right but a responsibility that carries immense benefits for us all. Here are some key benefits of actively participating in Nigeria's electoral process and exercising your franchise in democratic elections.

The first benefit is **legitimacy in government**; the primary advantage stems from the government's acknowledgement that its authority must be based on a legitimate right to govern and the recognition of this right by the governed. In a democratic political framework, these principles focus on the electoral process, wherein the leader ascends to power through a transparent and equitable election. A legitimate leader commands the voluntary obedience of the majority of citizens, whereas an illegitimate leader faces resistance. Political legitimacy refers to the degree to which citizens perceive the state, its institutions, personnel, or policies as valid, along with the acknowledgement of that authority by the governed. A legitimate government signifies the widespread acknowledgement by the populace that the individual holding a political office or exercising authority aligns with commonly accepted norms, principles, and procedures.

Good governance is the second benefit of high voter turnout; citizens' popular participation in governance not only ensures good governance but also builds citizens' confidence, allowing us to measure the performance of other types of governance. Therefore, the definition of good governance varies depending on one's perspective, but it should consistently strive for inclusivity and responsibility, ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. Sheng (2001) posits that eight main features distinguish good governance: participation, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, equity, inclusion, and rule of law. Consequently, effective leadership ensures the consideration of marginalised groups' opinions, allows the most vulnerable members of society to participate in policymaking, and minimizes corruption. In addition, it takes into account both the immediate and long-term requirements of the community. However, few countries or organizations have even come close to achieving the ideal of good administration. Nevertheless, we must take steps to achieve this goal and ensure sustainable human progress.

Fostering **accountability and transparency** is closely related to good governance. A vibrant electoral process fosters accountability among elected officials. Citizens who actively participate in voting and election monitoring send a clear message to politicians about the close scrutiny they face. This, in turn, encourages transparency in governance and reduces the likelihood of corruption and misuse of public resources.

Next is **shaping leadership and governance**. By casting our votes, citizens contribute to the selection of leaders who will represent us at various levels of government. By participating, we ensure that those holding public office are accountable and attentive to the requirements and ambitions of the community. Through informed voting, we have the ability to elect officials who possess the integrity, competence, and vision necessary to drive positive change in our communities.

Another benefit is the **promotion of social cohesion and unity**. Elections provide a platform for citizens from diverse backgrounds to come together and participate in a shared democratic exercise. Regardless of our ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic differences, the act of voting unites us as stakeholders in the democratic process. Through peaceful participation in elections, we reaffirm our commitment to national unity and solidarity.

The benefits of **empowering marginalized groups** are equally significant. Active participation in the electoral process empowers under-represented populations, encompassing women, young individuals, and those with disabilities, as well as minority communities. By exercising their right to vote and contest for political positions, these groups can amplify their voices and advocate for their interests. Increased representation of marginalized populations in the government promotes inclusivity and ensures that policies are reflective of the diverse needs of society.

Another benefit comes from **strengthening democratic institutions**, as robust and credible electoral processes play a crucial role in ensuring their stability and resilience. Participating in elections and upholding the principles of free and fair voting contributes to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. A robust electoral system bolsters public trust in governance and safeguards against authoritarianism and political instability.

Finally, participatory democracy and high voter turnout encouraged **innovation and collective decision-making**, which enables lawmakers to hear from the community on a wider scale, collect more data, and develop solutions that are more durable and resilient. More varied and representative groups of people will be involved in talks if governments can develop dynamic learning ecosystems with their communities. Governments may even come up with questions they haven't considered before because of the greater exposure to fresh ideas.

7. CONCLUDING/REMARKS

Lastly, it's interesting to observe that the majority of Nigerians don't seem to be enthusiastic about choosing their leaders. This is a key aspect of the country's political history. It would appear that Nigerian politics and voting are driven more by the elite than by the citizen-centered. A review of voter registration and participation rates dating back to 1999 has revealed a growing amount of indifference towards voting. Despite meeting the minimum voting age of eighteen (18), some individuals choose not to register or cast a ballot. This ignorance has many unpleasant consequences and endangers the country's democratic consolidation efforts.

Accordingly, the paper recommended as follow:

1. Strengthening mandatory voting by including provision for it in the constitution of 1999 and the revised Electoral Act of 2022. Voter registration and participation in elections are mandatory under these circumstances. If someone is eligible to vote but chooses not to, they should face severe consequences, such as fines and jail time.
2. Politicians should prioritize voter education, striving to improve the public's comprehension of voting, the political process, and the importance of participating in elections. In order to ensure that all eligible voters in the country have access to voter education programs, the government should collaborate with civil society organizations.
3. Lawmakers should consider enacting legislation to enhance electoral security, which would involve training security professionals to protect voters and polling sites during elections. To

hold those responsible for electoral violence accountable, we must investigate and prosecute them.

4. Regular scheduling of town hall meetings can increase voter turnout. These turns voting into a responsibility rather than a privilege for the people.
5. The electoral act should also cover voting using the internet and other online voting methods. This would allow people to vote from anywhere in the country without leaving the comfort of their own homes, which is a wonderful way to tackle the issue of insecurity.

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