



DOI: 10.36108/wjss/4202.90.0180

## THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL ALIENATION AND POLITICAL APATHY ON VOTING: A SURVEY OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

GOD'STIME OSARIYEKEMWEN IGIEBOR

### Abstract

This paper examined the opinions of electorates on the impact of the apathy and alienation variables on low voter turnout in Nigeria's 2019 general elections. The paper employed the ex-post facto design and a survey in data generation and organisation. The systematic sampling technique was used to select 1, 200 samples from the chosen local government areas in Nigeria. The descriptive-analytical method was utilised in the analysis of the qualitative data to ascertain the level of correlation inherent in the propositions. From the findings of the research, political alienation is a major cause of voter abstention while political apathy is a minor cause; bad governance, electoral violence and malpractices are the alienation and apathy variables causing voter abstention in Nigeria. Consequently, it is suggested that governance should be people-oriented; violence incidences during elections should be mitigated; and the enforcement of appropriate sanctions against election offenders should be adopted to encourage citizens' participation in the democratisation process.

**Keywords:** Political Apathy, Political Alienation, Voter Abstention, Voter Turnout, General Elections

### Introduction

The concept of popular participation and adequate representation are requirements of a robust democratization process. Adequate participation of the citizenry in the democratic process ensures its credibility, legitimacy and consolidation. Election serves as the linkage between the electorates and candidates and the opportunity for the people to exercise their voting and decision-making rights in the political system of the state. If participation is low, the link between the candidates and electorates becomes weakened. The outcome will not benefit the democratic process. As stated by the International IDEA, (2016), there is a gradual decline in the turnout statistics of voters worldwide. This development can harm the electoral process and democracy which is built upon the concept of popular participation. The Nigerian electoral process is also affected by the low turnout of voters, especially from the Fourth Republic (since 1999) (International IDEA 2019).

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)





This research is a survey on voter abstention in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The paper investigates the impact of alienation and apathy on voter abstention in Nigeria and the nature and degree of abstention. The central thesis of the study is that political alienation and not apathy are mainly responsible for the low level of turnout during election periods and the general elections of 2010.

### Statement of the Problem

The participation of voters in elections in Nigeria, particularly from 1999 till 2019 has been declining. These elections have recorded low turnout in voter registration and voting. Once elections have been conducted and the winners declared, nobody cares about the numbers that voted in the election process. The low turnout is a potential threat to the legitimacy and continuity of a credible democratic process. Thus, the issue calls for serious concern. Some studies have been conducted which revealed that voter apathy was responsible for the declining voter turnout in Nigeria. However, the turnout of voters in Nigerian elections is still very evident. These studies include Arowolo and Aluko (2010), Fox (2015) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (2012). The voter turnout statistics of registered voters for 1999 was 52.3%. For 2003, it was 69.1% (a fair improvement), 58% in 2007, and 53.7% in 2011.

In 2015, the turnout statistics were 43.6% and a dismal 34.7% in 2019 (Ojetunde, 2019; International IDEA database, 2019). The statistics indicate a decline in voter electoral participation, especially from 2007. The highest decline in turnout occurred in the 2019 elections, an indication that the problem of abstention from voting by citizens remains unresolved and continues unabated. This present study has, thus, posited that alienation is the main cause of the declining turnout of voters in Nigerian elections and that apathy is an appendage to alienation in the process. Therefore, some variables have been put forward to test whether both apathy and alienation are the causes of voter abstention, which is the major factor and the degree of relationship. The variables include electoral violence, electoral malpractices, and poor political governance.

The paper is structured into the introduction (concepts, literature and theory), methods and materials, results and discussion and conclusion.





## Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this research is to find out the effect of apathy and alienation on voters' participation in the 2019 general elections. The **objectives of the study are to:**

- a) Examine the cause(s) of voter abstention from the Nigerian electoral process;
- b) Ascertain the nature of abstention (whether alienation or apathy) concerning voting activities; and,
- c) Ascertain the consequence of the declining turnout of voters to the Nigerian democratisation process.

## Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- a. Is bad governance responsible for voter abstention?
- b. Is electoral violence responsible for voter abstention?
- c. Is electoral malpractice responsible for voter abstention?

## Research Proposition

- a. Bad governance causes voters to abstain from the Nigeria's electoral process,
- b. Electoral violence causes voter abstention in Nigeria, and,
- c. Malpractices during elections cause voters to abstain from the Nigeria's electoral process.

## The Rationale for the Study

The active involvement and engagement of the citizens in political participation and decision-making (opportunity to make choices) is the hallmark of democracy. When political/electoral participation is threatened by forces of alienation and apathy resulting in the abstention of the citizens from the political or voting process, the legitimacy and stability of the political system are endangered. Also, the right, opportunity and freedom of the citizens to exercise their franchise and take part in political decision-making would be eroded. Thus, it becomes imperative for this paper to determine the main reasons for voter abstention, and the nature of abstention, i.e., whether the declining voter turnout in Nigerian elections is a factor of political alienation or political apathy. These would enable the adoption of appropriate measures to address the issues most affected by the nature of abstention for the overall stability of the political process.





### Extant Literature

#### a. Theoretical Exposition

The theoretical concepts applied to this paper are democracy and alienation.

##### i. Democratic Concept

The concept of democracy is based on fundamental rights, freedom to choose representatives and participation in the decision-making process of the political system. This freedom of choice and to make binding decisions gives the people the power not only to decide who should govern them but also the right to remove from power those who act arbitrarily. Thus, for democracy to function, the full participation of the people is required since the practice is based on majority rule. Dalton (2002) posits that democracy is an instrument for expanding the scope of human development and a means to defend the people against government repression and ensure stability in the political system.

Voting serves as the avenue for people to exercise their right to select their preferred representatives in government. The voting activities become the contact point between the candidate's seeking election and the people. This opportunity for convergent interest between the representatives and the citizens apart from providing a voting opportunity also engender discussions, deliberations and wider political participation. Therefore, a decline in voter turnout would reduce the linkage activities between the representatives and the people which may result in a crisis of democracy and political instability (Macpherson, 1977; Barber, 1984). According to Abdullahi (2015), reduced participation of the people may result in fewer people-oriented policies and programmes by the government. It is noteworthy that the concept of democracy as practiced since the late-20th century is contradictory. The reason is that the societal system in operation which acknowledges the political equality of citizens through the franchise also maintains actual inequality of class, prospect and wealth (mainly through the operation of capitalism) (Fenichel, 2004; Franklin, 2004). The argument is that this form of democracy is the main reason behind the prevalent voter declining turnout (Macpherson, 1977; Barber, 1984). Regardless of the argument, the democratic concept acknowledges voting as an essential element and elections continue to serve as linkage and decision-making parameters within the framework of representative democracy since it provides some measure of public control over elected representatives. As





submitted by Teixeira, (1987), voting as a form of political participation is the most common form of political engagement for the majority of the citizens.

### **b. Theoretical Analysis of Alienation as the Cause of Voter Abstention**

As a theoretical construct, alienation explains the isolation of the voter from electoral participation due to the perceived incapacity to influence the prevailing political arrangement or environment. The voter is thus disenchanted and constrained to refrain from participation in the political system. To Seeman (1959), alienation is a shared belief by the individual that his/her efforts and actions cannot influence or bring about the expected political outcome.

Thus, political alienation signifies the erosion of the political rights, power and liberty of the individual to make binding decisions (Roberts, 1987). The categorisation of the variables of political alienation by Finifter (1970) into political powerlessness, political meaninglessness, political normlessness, political isolation, and political disappointment explains the disadvantaged position of the citizens who despite having the desire to participate in the political and electoral system are unable to do so because of constraining forces in the political and social environment. Kim (2005) and Catterberg and Moreno (2006) are of the view that political alienation is a perceived sense of lack of confidence and inability to affect political institutions, structures and outcomes by the citizens. The alienation variables particularly political powerlessness and political disappointment may largely account for voter abstention in the electoral process resulting in alienation and even apathy.

The prevalence of the variables of political corruption, bad governance, electoral malpractices and electoral violence put forward for examination by the study may generate discontentment and disappointment in Nigerian voters. This may lead to isolation and abstention from participation in the political process. The determination of the cause(s) of voter abstention, the degree and the nature of abstention are what the research intends to unravel.

The theoretical construct of alienation is adequate in explaining political apathy. Political apathy is the last stage of alienation as the alienated individual becomes apathetic to the political system. Thus, a continuous voter turnout declines and disaffection and disenchantment with the existing political system practiced by the citizens, may not only result in alienation but apathy.





### c. Political Alienation

Political alienation refers to an enduring sense of isolation, estrangement and failure or refusal of individuals to identify with the subsisting political arrangement and environment. Political alienation is related to the process of voting during an election. According to Glasberg and Shannon (2010), politically alienated persons want to vote but their perceived incapacity to affect the outcome of elections makes them insignificant and reluctant to do so.

According to Seeman (1959), alienation is a view shared by the individual that his/her efforts and actions (in the electoral system) cannot achieve the desired or expected political outcome. Alienation has been seen by Seeman (1975), Roberts (1987), Korzeniowski (1994), and Dalton (2007) as the perceived inability to affect electoral outcomes resulting from a loss of confidence and trust in the political institutions and processes.

Finifter (1970) categorised political alienation into political powerlessness-incapacity to affect electoral outcomes; political meaninglessness-unpredictable and uncertain political or governmental actions; political normlessness-obvious deviations from policy outcomes of government; political isolation-a rejection of prevailing societal norms; and political disappointment-frustration due to poor policy output and performance of the political system.

### d. Conceptualising Political Apathy

Political apathy can be explained by a person's lack of desire to personally get involved in political activities (Dean 1960; Rosenberg, 1954). Political apathy has also been construed as a generalized indifference towards political activities; the apathetic is seen to possess a low-level awareness of political issues and only have enough knowledge to decide not to participate in them (Thompson & Horton, 1960). For Fox (2015), political apathy connotes the lack of interest or desire to engage in political participation. These definitions stem from an attitudinal orientation which can be distinguished from a lack of participation in political activities. Political apathy thus results in a decline in political participation (Arowolo & Aluko 2010).





### e. Distinguishing Political Alienation from Political Apathy

To put this study in a better perspective, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between political alienation and political apathy. According to Fox (2015, p. 151):

...political alienation refers to a lasting and relatively stable orientation denoting feelings of estrangement from or non-identification with some aspect of the formal political system, arena, or process. It is an active orientation which implies clear behavioural consequences, and in which the individual has at least some cognitive awareness of the object and manifestation of their alienation. It can manifest itself in several ways, and this is reflected in its various dimensions.

Political apathy connotes the lack of desire by an individual to personally get involved or engaged in political activities (Dean, 1960). Thompson and Horton (1960) also agree that political apathy is the seeming indifference towards political activities. Thus, the apathetic are barely aware of political activities and do not have an interest to participate in the political process. Contrasting political alienation with political apathy would mean that one is the opposite of the other. While the politically alienated individual feels compelled to take part in political activities but is restrained by certain forces, the politically apathetic individual shows a seeming indifference towards political activities and a loss of interest to take part in them. Thus, the concept of political alienation should not be confused with political (voter) apathy which connotes an individual's indifference towards political or voting activities (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010).

### f. An Overview of Voter Turnout Globally

Generally, election serves as the focal point for ensuring democratic representation and performs vital functions in a democracy. Apart from engaging the citizenry or eligible voters to determine their choice of candidates, it serves as a tool through which the electorates induce accountability from elected officials. A credible election gives legality to elected officials and enhances the sustenance of the democratization project (IDEA, 2006; Falade, 2015).

Universally, there is a widely acknowledged gradual but consistent decline or abstention of voters in the past several years; although there is little consensus in terms of what can be regarded

---

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)





as an acceptable or reasonable level of turnout. Yet, this development has raised serious concern among governments, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), citizens as well as non-governmental bodies.

In 2006, The International IDEA conducted a study that made use of election statistics from 1945 to 2015 in 214 countries. The study which covers both presidential and parliamentary elections revealed that in the preceding years leading up to the late 1980s, there was an average turnout that fluctuated from mid-to higher 70% range. There was an average turnout of 76.4% between 1945 and 1960; it increased slightly to 75%, and then to 77.1% in 1961 but declined between the periods of 1976 and 1990 to 74.8%. The average voter turnout then declined substantially to 69.7% between 1990 and 2006; it reduced to below 69% in the decade to 2006 and the decline continued, reaching up to 66% between the periods 2011-2015. Furthermore, there was a decline in the standard deviation of these figures to around 2.5% from a previous over 3%. The study outcome indicates an overall world turnout decline rate which shows that little variations now exist between advanced and developing democracies (International IDEA, 2006; 2016).

### **g. Voter Turnout Analysis between 1999 and 2019**

Adequate turnout and participation of citizens in the democratic process engender a robust and development-oriented democracy. When the numbers of citizens' participation in the electoral process continue to decline, it means there is a problem either with the process or with the political system as a whole. This scenario should be the concern of every actor in the political system. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the turnout of voters for Nigeria's elections has been checkered and mostly unimpressive. In 1999, the return to civilian rule from military dictatorship, 57, 938, 945 persons were registered for the election while 30, 280, 052 persons representing 52.26% voted. This low turnout figure could be expected as the country was conducting the first election to return to civilian rule.

The people were not quite sure whether the military government would hand over power to the civilians coming from the wake of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections by the General Ibrahim B. Babangida military junta. However, in 2003, 60, 823,033 were registered by the INEC for the elections. 42, 018, 735 persons representing 69.08% voted in the elections. The figure was not too impressive even though it indicated a slight increase in the number of registered voters and







those who voted. A much better turnout would have been appropriate judging from the fact that the 2003 election was the second in the advent of the Fourth Republic an indication that democratic rule was solidifying. The disappointing turnout of voters continue in the 2007 elections as only 35, 397, 517 persons voted to represent 57.49% out of the 61, 567, 036 that were registered by the INEC.

For the 2011 general elections, 73, 528, 040 persons were registered while 39, 469,484 representing 53.68% cast their votes. Though the numbers of registered voters seem to be increasing, the number of those who participated in the elections continues to drop. The same scenario occurred in 2015. 67,422,005 people were registered for the election and only 29,432,083 representing 43.65% took part in the voting. The 2019 general elections recorded the lowest voter turnout in the history of elections in Nigeria. 82, 344,107 were registered for the election while a dismal and very disappointing 28, 614, 190 representing 34.75% took part in the voting.

The history of voter turnout or voter participation in the Nigerian elections in the Fourth Republic (since 1999) has not been impressive. Robust voter participation in the democratic system is required to engender and sustain democratic development and political stability. A continuous decline in voter participation would harm the credibility and legitimacy of elections and the entire political system. Thus, the declining state of voter participation in the electoral process should not be ignored just because the processes of electioneering, voting, declaration of winners and governance are still ongoing irrespective of voter turnout during elections. Though, it is acknowledged that there are no definite statistics of voter participation required before an election can be adjudged as acceptable, participation of the majority in the voting process is a sign of support, acceptability, legitimacy and active citizenry involvement in the democratic process.

The above analysis was put together using the International IDEA Data Base (2015, 2019) statistics in Table 1.





Table 1: Voter Data Turnout for Nigerian Elections (Presidential-1999 to 2019)

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	Voting age Population	Total Population
2019	34.75%	28,614,190	82,344,107	106,490,312	208,679,144
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	91,669,312	181,562,056
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	81,691,751	155,215,573
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	71,004,507	131,859,731
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,033	64,319,246	129,934,911
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	52,792,781	108,258,359

Source: International IDEA Data Base, 2015; 2019”

## Methods and Materials

The ex-post facto design and survey are employed for the study. The six geo-political zones of the Nigerian state make up the study population. The population of 140,431,790 based on the 2006 Population census is adopted for the study (Nigerian Data Portal, 2006). The size of the sample of the study is 1,200 respondents. The sample was chosen using stratified, simple random and systematic sampling techniques. The geo-political zones were stratified and the simple random sampling technique was employed to select from the zones, the states, and the local governments' areas. The systematic sampling technique was then used to select the chosen subjects 1,200 in the various selected local government areas. The Taro Yamane formula was used to select the sample size based on the population of 1,497,157. A margin of 5% error and a 95% confidence level were employed to calculate the population which yielded 400 samples.

The computed sample size of 400 was multiplied by 3 which yielded a sample of 1,200. This action was taken to ensure a more representative sample, increase the level of confidence, reduce the margin of error, and make up for possible attrition. The systematic sampling technique was employed in the selection of the respondents because it is less stressful to use and is more appropriate for selecting subjects from a large population. The study utilised an open-ended-type questionnaire to elicit information from the respondents. This method allows the respondents to freely express themselves and provide answers beyond the questions posed. The analytical

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)





approach is used in the analysis of the generated data for easy and adequate comprehension of the study phenomenon.

## Results and Discussion

The study administered 1,200 questionnaires to the selected respondents from which 1,060 questionnaires were completed and returned. The bio-data of the 1,060 subjects show that 57.1% are males and 42.9% are females. 66.04% of the respondents are between the ages 18 and 39 while 33.96% are 40 years and older. This sample distribution indicates that the sample mostly constitutes the youthful age category required and active for political participation. Furthermore, 25.9% are married and 74.1% are single. Also, 71.7% of the respondents hold tertiary degree certificates while 28.3% hold secondary and primary school certificates. The respondents thus possess the basic education to give an informed opinion.

**“Table 2      Tabulation of the Selection Process**

SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	PERCENTAGE (%)
<b>JOS SOUTH</b>	311, 392	250	21
<b>DEKINA</b>	260, 968	209	17
<b>IBADAN SOUTH WEST</b>	283, 098	227	19
<b>EKITI WEST</b>	179, 600	144	12
<b>DEGEMA</b>	249, 461	200	17
<b>UGHELLI SOUTH</b>	212, 638	170	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	1, 497, 157	1, 200	100

**Source:** Nigeria Data Portal, 2006)/Researcher

The sample size statistics in Table 3 are gotten by multiplication of each respective local government population figure by the sample of 1,200 and dividing by the total of 1,497,157. The multiplication of the sample of each local government area by 100% and dividing by the total sample, yielded the percentage figure.





## Tabulation of Qualitative Data Showing Responses of Respondents

### Question 1

Do you think that elections are necessary for choosing political officials in Nigeria?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Elections guarantee democratic arrangement and ensure change and continuity in governance.</li><li>*Elections are important in Nigeria only when they are properly conducted.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Votes do not count.</li><li>*Leaders are picked in the interest of the godfathers.</li></ul>

### Question 2

Are you interested in taking part in the political and electoral process in Nigeria? If yes, state why and if no, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*If due process is followed.</li><li>*If the political officials would stop hijacking the electoral process to ensure free and fair elections.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*The people's votes do not count because of manipulation of the electoral process.</li><li>*The political process is very porous; godfathers pick their loyal subjects and elections are not free and fair.</li><li>*The process is full of bribery and corruption.</li></ul>

### Question 3

Did you register to vote in the 2019 general election? If yes, state why and if no, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*To vote out the non-performing government.</li><li>*To select the desired candidate.</li><li>*In the interest of patriotism.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Insecurity.</li><li>*manipulation of elections.</li><li>*Leaders are not chosen by vote cast.</li><li>*Stressful registration process.</li></ul>

### Question 4

Did you vote in the 2019 elections in Nigeria? If yes, what was your experience? If not, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*It was an improvement upon previous elections.</li><li>*Very stressful voting process.</li><li>*Violence and disruption of voting.</li><li>*The election was not transparent.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Inability to access voter's card.</li><li>*Fear of violence and insecurity.</li><li>*Manipulation of the election.</li><li>*Votes will not count.</li><li>*Corrupt political leadership.</li></ul>





## Question 5

Are you interested in casting your vote during elections in Nigeria? If yes, why and if no, why not?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*It is an opportunity to vote out bad leaders, but such an opportunity is not available because the electorates' votes do not count in the Nigerian situation.</li><li>*If it is free and fair.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*It is a necessity.</li><li>*Previous votes cast amounted to nothing; votes do not count in Nigeria and there is no good governance.</li><li>*It amounts to time-wasting to vote for nothing.</li><li>*Elections are not free and fair.</li><li>*Because of electoral violence.</li></ul>

## Question 6

Are you aware of anybody who was registered but did not vote in the 2019 election? If yes, do you know why?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Inability to access voter's card.</li><li>*The people's votes will not count.</li><li>*It is useless to stand under the sun to vote and in the end, the votes would be manipulated.</li><li>*Cumbersome voting procedures.</li><li>*Insecurity and violence.</li><li>*To use a voter's card for other purposes- such as the opening of a bank account.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Respondents had no such experience.</li></ul>

## Question 7

Do you hold the view that many people in Nigeria who were registered voters wanted to cast their votes but did not participate in the voting because of the manipulative actions by elected politicians in the electoral process?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Electoral manipulation takes place at every level of the Nigerian state.</li><li>*Electoral manipulation is very visible in the Nigerian political process.</li><li>*It is the godfathers' game.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*It is the corrupt politicians that hijack political offices and not the elites.</li></ul>





## Question 8

What is your opinion about the fulfilment of promises by elected officials made during campaigns? Is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory? Please comment.	
Majority (Unsatisfactory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*The political officials believe that with their money they can manipulate elections and neglect the electorates to serve themselves.</li><li>*Electoral promises are just propaganda meant to induce eligible voters to vote for the political officials in their bid to capture power.</li><li>*Political officials have failed to fulfil electoral promises.</li></ul>
Minority (Satisfactory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Very few of the politicians are fulfilling their promises to their constituencies.</li></ul>

## Question 9

Do you think that violence during elections poses, a major problem to the Nigerian electoral process?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Violence and insecurity have become norms in Nigeria's elections, for many years now.</li><li>*Violence and insecurity obstruct free and fair elections and scare people away from casting their votes.</li><li>*Insecurity and violence are among Nigeria's major electoral problems.</li><li>*people always lose their lives during elections in Nigeria.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Respondents had no such experience.</li></ul>

## Question 10

Do you think that many registered Nigerians wanted to cast their votes in the 2019 elections but abstained for fear of violence during the election periods?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*No one wants to become a victim of electoral violence no matter how patriotic.</li><li>*People had gone out to vote in a series of elections only to end up being shot or killed.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Respondents believe that patriotic citizens will not be discouraged from voting by violence during elections.</li></ul>





## Question 11

Are you of the view that the INEC conducted the 2019 elections in a free, credible and transparent manner? Give your reasons.	
Minority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*The INEC is overcoming several limitations to conduct credible elections in Nigeria.</li><li>*To some extent but the lack of autonomy is affecting the INEC</li><li>*To some extent but the INEC will perform better without interference from the government and political officials.</li></ul>
Majority No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*INEC tends to favour the political party in power; this was evident in the 2019 elections.</li><li>*INEC officials are induced with money most of the time.</li><li>*INEC officials are corrupt.</li><li>*INEC has not conducted free and fair elections whether in 2019 or previous elections.</li><li>*INEC is not independent so, it cannot conduct credible elections.</li></ul>

## Question 12

Do you share the view that many eligible voters in Nigeria were interested in taking part in the voting process of 2019 but did but refrained from the belief that electoral fraud by political and electoral officials would make their votes not count?	
Majority (Yes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*The votes would not count.</li><li>*Godfathers secure elective positions unduly for their desired candidates so that the peoples' votes do not count.</li></ul>
Minority (No)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*No sufficient evidence to believe so.</li></ul>

## Question 13

What do you think is/are the reason(s) why some registered voters did not vote in the 2019 general Elections	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Violence and insecurity.</li><li>*Thugs' activities and killings.</li><li>*Ballot box snatching.</li><li>*Hijacking of electoral materials.</li><li>*Tedious registration and voting processes.</li><li>*Stress in waiting endlessly for electoral materials.</li><li>*Corruption and godfathers' undue influence on the electoral process.</li><li>*The feeling or belief that votes will not count.</li></ul>
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*It is not everybody that votes during elections; some people are just lazy while others are unpatriotic and self-serving.</li></ul>





## Question 14

If you do not want to vote during an election, please list three factors that would make you take such a decision.	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Violence or fear of violence</li> <li>*Insecurity</li> <li>*Irregularities in the voting process.</li> <li>*Corruption, rigging, godfathers' influence.</li> <li>*Manipulation of votes.</li> <li>*Vote buying.</li> <li>*Cumbersome voting process.</li> <li>*Delay of electoral materials.</li> <li>*Failure of political officials to keep to electoral promises.</li> <li>*Dictatorship of godfathers.</li> </ul>
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*I will vote no matter what.</li> <li>*It is my right to vote.</li> <li>*I am a patriotic Nigerian; after all, Rome was not built in a day-Nigeria is still developing.</li> </ul>

## Question 15

What should be done to encourage people to vote during elections in Nigeria?	
Majority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Use of electronic transmission to reduce fraud, manipulation and stressful voting procedures.</li> <li>*Provision of adequate security.</li> <li>*Ensure free and fair elections.</li> <li>*Ensure that the electorates' votes count.</li> <li>*Eliminate corruption.</li> <li>*Discourage godfathers' undue influence.</li> </ul>
Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*People should be patriotic no matter the situation and go out and vote; there is no perfect system.</li> <li>*To educate the electorates on the need to exercise their franchise.</li> </ul>

Source: Field Survey, 2019

## The Analysis of Findings

The research findings indicate that a majority of the subjects believe in the relevance of the conduct of elections in Nigeria because it ensures democratic transition and continuity in governance but only when they are conducted credibly. Also, a majority of the subjects want to take part in electoral activities only when the political officials follow due process and play the game according to the rules. A minority of the respondents nevertheless, show a lack of interest because of electoral manipulation, bribery, corruption and undue influence of godfathers.







The study discovered that majority of the subjects were registered by INEC in the general elections of 2019. Their reasons include voting out non-performing leaders and to select their desired candidate. However, some of the respondents did not register because of insecurity, electoral manipulation, the stressful registration process and their claim that leaders are not chosen by the votes cast. Furthermore, a majority of the subjects are eager to participate in voting if the process will ensure credibility, fairness and equity. They opined that it was an opportunity to vote out bad leadership. Some of the respondents, on the contrary, stated that they are not eager to vote during elections because they see it just as a necessity; others stated that since votes cast in previous elections amounted to nothing, it is thus, a waste of time to vote. Others pointed to electoral violence. It was also found that the majority of the respondents took part in voting in the 2019 elections. The minority of respondents who did not vote attributed their reasons to the inability to access their voter's card, fear of violence, and manipulation of the election. Also, a majority of the respondents knew of registered voters who did not cast their votes in the 2019 elections. Their reasons include the inability to access their voter's card, votes will not count, a stressful voting process, violence, as well as to use of the voter's card for other purposes other than the election.

It was further revealed that majority of the respondents believe that many Nigerians who want to vote during elections decide not to participate because of electoral misdemeanours by political elites and godfathers. This scenario will impede the fulfilment of electoral campaign promises by elected political officials. Also, a majority of the respondents believe that many people in Nigeria want to participate in voting during elections and the 2019 elections but abstained for fear of violence. According to them, no matter how patriotic, no one wants to be shot or killed for exercising their franchise.

A minority of the respondents, however, share a contrary view. Majority of the respondents also share the view that many people in Nigeria who want to participate in voting during elections decide not to because they think their votes will not count because of fraudulent practices by political and electoral officials. Finally, a majority of the respondents listed the reasons why they would decide not to participate in voting on election day including violence during elections, irregularities in the voting process, corruption, rigging, influence of godfathers and the manipulation of votes, vote-buying, the stressful voting process, delay of electoral materials and





failure of political officials to keep to electoral promises. A minority of the respondents, however, opined that as patriotic Nigerians, they will exercise their franchise under any circumstance.

### The Analysis of the Research Proposition

The responses of respondents are categorised and analysed in line with the research proposition.

- a. Bad governance causes voters to abstain from the Nigerian electoral process.

Responses of respondents to questions 7, 8 and 14 clearly show the impact of bad governance on voter abstention. For question 7, a majority of the interviewees are of the view that many people in Nigeria abstain from voting because the elected political officials exhibit bad governance attitudes and are failing to fulfil electoral promises. In response to question 8, a majority of the subjects believe that the electoral officials are fraudulent in discharging their electoral duties. Concerning question 14, a majority of the respondents listed the incapacity of the elected officials to fulfil the promises made to the electorates during the campaign as one reason they would abstain from voting during elections. Thus, the outcome of research proposition one shows that unfulfilled campaign promises made by candidates during electioneering hurt and impede the active participation of voters in Nigeria.

- b. Electoral violence causes voter abstention in Nigeria.

Responses of respondents to questions 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 14 clearly show how violence during elections causes low voter participation in the process of elections. Concerning question 9, a majority of those interviewed opined that insecurity and violence are prevalent in the Nigerian organised elections and which also impact on the 2019 general elections. Thus, violence and insecurity obstruct the free and fair electoral process and scare people away from casting their votes. In response to question 10, the majority of the respondents opine that many people in Nigeria who are willing to vote, decide not to for fear of violence. Also, responses to questions 3, 4, and 5 show that some of the respondents did not register or vote in the 2019 elections because of fear of insecurity and violence. Similarly, one of the reasons given by respondents why they would decide not to take part in the electoral process is the dread of violence during elections. Thus, the results of research question two shows that electoral violence has negative effects on voting in Nigeria.





c. Malpractices during elections cause voters to abstain from the Nigerian electoral process.

The impact of electoral malpractice on voter abstention can be seen in respondents' responses to questions 5, 11, 12, 13 and 14. Responses to the question 11 show that a majority of those interviewed believe that the INEC cannot conduct an election that can be adjudged as free and fair. A majority of the interviewees response to question 12 show that many people in Nigeria abstain from voting because they feel the political and electoral officials would be manipulated their votes and therefore, would not count. Thus, the response to question 5 shows that the majority of those interviewed are willing and ready to participate in the process of election that would be free and fair. In response to question 14, one of the reasons given why registered voters abstain from the process of election is electoral fraud. Thus the outcome of research proposition three shows that electoral malpractices hurt voting activities in Nigeria.

### **The Nature of Voter Abstention in Nigeria**

A minority of the respondents do not see the election as important for choosing elected candidates and are not interested in the process because they believe that votes do not count and that candidates are picked in the interest of the godfathers. The opinion of this group which is a minority is not interested in voting because they believe it is a waste of time. Thus, the minority of the respondents who did not vote in the 2019 elections did so for lack of interest in the political process. This lack of interest in electoral participation is a display of apathy. The alienated persons are those who still express interest in the political process and are willing to participate but are hindered by acts of violence and electoral malfeasance by political and electoral officials. The respondents that hold this view are in the majority. Thus, alienation becomes the major reason for voter abstention in Nigeria while apathy is a minor cause. However, there is a thin line between alienation and apathy. The citizens can become apathetic after a prolonged period of alienation. Thus, apathy becomes the last stage of alienation.





## Summary of Findings

From the research results, it was found that, the abstention of eligible voters from voting in Nigeria is caused mainly by alienation. Also, bad governance practices, the incapacity of elected political candidates to fulfill electioneering promises and violence during elections (2019 general elections) are responsible for the alienation of voters in Nigeria. Furthermore, acts of fraud indulged in by electoral and political officials and the cumbersome process of voter registration and voting; alienate citizens from voting during elections in Nigeria.

From the results, it is clear that the interviewees and by generalisation the Nigerian electorates are eager and willing to partake in the processes of election in Nigeria. However, they are constrained, disenchanted and isolated from doing so by the prevailing political system environment. This position whereby the citizens are interested and willing to vote but could not do so because of some prevailing political-environmental factors indicates that they are alienated from the process. The alienated citizens represent the majority in the study while the apathetic citizens are a minority.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the impact of apathy and alienation on voter participation in Nigeria. It made attempts at finding out why voter turnout in the Nigeria elections and the 2019 elections are low. The study adopts a survey to elicit responses from 1,200 respondents and employed the analytical approach in the analysis of the generated data. Questions were posed and research propositions were postulated to guide and drive the study. The findings from the study validate the stated hypotheses and answered the questions posed succinctly. For instance, the hypothesis that states that bad governance, electoral violence and electoral malpractices cause voter abstention in the process of election and the 2019 election in Nigeria, was all validated as the majority of the subjects' opinions supported the research propositions.

The findings also indicate that voter abstention in the political system is the result of alienation and apathy engendered by the prevailing political environment in Nigeria. Furthermore, the analysis of the findings shows that the main cause of the abstention of voters from the process of elections is alienation and apathy is the minor cause. Thus, adequate voter participation must be





encouraged by eradicating the ills that compel one to become disenchanting, disappointed, isolated, and to lose interest in the political system. Governments at all levels in Nigeria should take the issue of declining voter turnout seriously by instituting mechanisms to discourage the trend as it is capable of harming the entire political system and therefore undermining credibility, legitimacy and stability. The study envisages more scholarly interest and investigations on the study phenomenon in the area of security and logistics effect on voter participation to support this study.

From the foregoing discussion, the following suggestions are made to encourage more citizens' participation in the political system.

First, good governance that respects freedom of opportunities, egalitarian culture, and citizens-based policies and programmes that would ensure the good life should be pursued by the elected government officials. When the elected politicians carry out their campaign promises and other good governance practices, the citizens or electorate would have confidence in the government and thus actively take part in political participation.

Second, appropriate and adequate mechanisms should be adopted by all tiers of government to ensure a violent-free environment during election periods in Nigeria. This could be achieved by the deployment of adequate, well-trained, equipped and motivated security personnel to every polling unit during elections. Well-equipped intelligence teams should monitor election activities and serve as backups to the security manning the various polling units.

Third, activities of the INEC should be free from political leaders' and party interference. Practices that would ensure transparency of elections and enhance their credibility should be instituted and adopted. In this vein, the use of electronic devices to aid voting efficiency should be employed during elections. The credibility achieved in the conduct of elections will engender confidence of the people in the electoral process and thus, the legitimacy of the elected government. Also, those caught perpetrating fraud during elections should be punished according to extant law to discourage others from following suit.

Finally, the INEC should ensure that their staffs are well trained, motivated and equipped with functional electronic gadgets to carry out voter registration and voting to reduce the often-stressful condition for the people. Polling centres that have many units should be split to reduce the crowd at the registration and polling centres to make it less stressful. Also, registration and voting





activities should be done at the stipulated time. It is demotivating and frustrating for people to wait endlessly for registration or for electoral officials to arrive at the registration and polling units. In this wise, the INEC should ensure efficient management of logistics to ensure punctuality and productive services.

### Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions, cooperation and support of the following people to the successful undertaking of the study: research assistants and family. The author is grateful to them.

### Author's Profile

God'stime Osariyekemwen Igiebor holds a Ph.D. degree in Comparative Politics and Development Studies. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. He is also, currently the Managing Editor of the Nigerian Journal of Politics and Public Policy, domiciled in the Department of Political Science, University of Benin. He has written several reviews and research articles in reputable local and international journals. His interests include Comparative Politics and Development Studies, Public Administration, Security and Strategic Studies, Criminology and Electoral Studies. He can be contacted via; +2348038795528 ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5790-1924  
[osariyekemwen.igiebor@uniben.edu](mailto:osariyekemwen.igiebor@uniben.edu)/ [goddyigieb@yahoo.com](mailto:goddyigieb@yahoo.com)

### References

- Abdallah, N., M., & Krishi, M., A., (2019, Feb 21). How voter turnout shapes Nigeria's elections, *Daily Trust*, Retrieved August 10, 2021 from <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-voter-turnout-shapes-nigerias-elections.html>
- Abdullahi, A., (2015). 'Promoting credible elections in developing countries: International development partners and civil society organizations in Nigeria', *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 9(5), 190-199.
- Arowolo, D. & Aluko, F. S. (2010). Women and political participation in Nigeria. *European Journal of social sciences* 14(4), 581-593.
- Barber, B., (1984). *Strong Democracy* (pp. 17-37) Berkeley, Calif.: the University of California Press
- Campbell, A., Gurin G., & Miller, W., E., (1954). *The Voter Decides*, (pp. xiii, 242) Evanston, Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company.





## Wilberforce Journal of the Social Sciences (WJSS)

Website: [www.nduwjss.org.ng](http://www.nduwjss.org.ng) ISSN: 2504 – 9232 Volume 9 No. 1 (2024)

- Catterberg, G., & Moreno, A., (2006). The Individual Bases of Political Trust: Trends in New and Established Democracies, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 1(18), 31–48.
- Dalton, R. J., (2002). *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracy*. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Dalton, R. J., (2007). *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dean, D.G. (Mar. 1960). 'Alienation and Political Apathy', *Social Forces*, 38(3), 185-189
- Falade, D., A., (2015). Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some Selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Research* 14(8), 17-23.
- Fenichel, P. H., (2004). "Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance". *Scandinavian Political Studies* 27(3), 335–342.
- Finifter, A., W., (June 1970). "Dimensions of Political Alienation". *The American Political Science Review*, 64(2), 389–410.
- Fox, S. (2015). Apathy, alienation and young people: the political engagement of British millennials. PhD thesis, the University of Nottingham, Retrieved August 10, 2021 from <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/30532/1/Final%20Corrected%20Version%20-%20Apathy,%20Alienation%20and%20Young%20People%20The%20Political%20Engagement%20of%20British%20Millennials.pdf>
- Franklin, Mark N., (2004). Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945. (pp. 20-23). Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- Franklin, Mark, N., (2004). Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945, (p. 19). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Glasberg, Deric, S., & Shannon, D., (2010). *Political Sociology: Oppression, Resistance, and the State*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 1st edition, November 16, ISBN 1412980402. OCLC 815880812.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2006). *Voter Turnout Data from National Elections Worldwide- 1945 to June 30, 2006*. Retrieved December 10, 2021 from ([www.elections.org.za/content/workArea/Downloadasset.aspx?id](http://www.elections.org.za/content/workArea/Downloadasset.aspx?id)).
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2015). Voter turnout data for Nigeria, Retrieved August 10, 2021 from (<http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=168>)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)





## Wilberforce Journal of the Social Sciences (WJSS)

---

**Website:** [www.nduwjss.org.ng](http://www.nduwjss.org.ng) **ISSN:** 2504 – 9232 **Volume 9 No. 1 (2024)**

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2016). Voter Turnout Trends around the World, Retrieved August 15, 2021 from (<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voter-turnout-trends-around-the-world.pdf>)

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (2019). Electoral System Design Database, Retrieved August 10, 2021 from (<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/electoral-system-design>)

Kim, Chul, I. N., (2005). A Sense of Alienation Towards Government—an Analytic Framework, *International Review of Public Administration* 9(2), 55–64.

Macpherson, C. B., (1977). *The life and Times of Liberal Democracy* pp. 94- 105 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Nigeria Data Portal (2006). State Population, 2006, Retrieved December 20, 2021 from (<https://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/ifpbxbd/state-population-2006>)

Ojetunde, Damilola, (2019, March). Election: Nigeria has the lowest rate of voter turnout in Africa, International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR). Retrieved December 20, 2021 from (<https://www.icirnigeria.org/2019-election-nigeria-has-the-lowest-voter-turnout-in-africa/>)

Pulse. ng (2019, February). 2019 Election: Only 34.75% of registered voters voted, Retrieved December 20, 2021 from (<https://www.pulse.ng/news/politics/2019-election-only-3475-of-registered-voters-voted/ydl49c6>)

Roberts, Bruce, R., (1987). A Confirmatory Factor-Analytic Model of Alienation, *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(4), 346–51

Rosenberg, Morris (1954). 'Some determinants of political apathy', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Winter 1954-1955 pp.349-366

Sayers, Sean, (2011). *Marx and Alienation, Essays on Hegelian Themes* Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.

Seeman, Melvin, (1959). On the Meaning of Alienation, *American Sociological Review* 24(6), 783–791.

Seeman, Melvin, (1975). "Alienation Studies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 1(1), 91-123.

Teixeira, Ruy, A., (1987). *Why Americans Don't Vote: Turnout Decline in the United States 1960-1984* (New York: Greenwood Press).

---

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)







## Wilberforce Journal of the Social Sciences (WJSS)

---

Website: [www.nduwjss.org.ng](http://www.nduwjss.org.ng) ISSN: 2504 – 9232 Volume 9 No. 1 (2024)

Thompson, W.E., Horton, J.E. (Mar. 1960). 'Political Alienation as a Force in Political Action',  
*Social Forces*, 38(3), 190-195

Yamane, Taro (1967). *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*, 2nd Ed.; New York: Harper and Row

---

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

