Political Participation and Voting Behavior in Nigeria: A study of the 2015 General Elections in Benue State.

By

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Abstract

The engagement of citizens in public affairs is the benchmark of the liberal democratic system. The availability of participation opportunities and the concomitant enabling processual and institutional pre-requisites, allied with positive political orientations to the political system, make it possible for citizens to choose their leaders at elections and also influence the public policy process, and ultimately, the longevity of the democratic system of government. The thrust of this paper is therefore to empirically study the level of political participation and voting behavior of Nigerian citizens in the 2015 General Elections in Benue State. The paper accordingly aims to among other things investigate the role played by the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), in the mobilization of citizens for the General elections, the factors that induced citizens' participation as well as the level of conformity of the political behavior of the electorate with electoral guidelines. The paper also seeks to assess the extent to which participation and voting behavior contributed to the credibility and success of the polls. To this end, the study applies the procedural theory of democracy and the standard Socio-Economic model that postulates the factors that intermediate between actors and their ability to participate. A survey methodology has been adopted. The study concludes that effective political participation and the voting behavior of citizens tantamount the effectiveness of the political process and it is thus recommended amongst other things that for political stability to be maintained, the electoral process must be accommodating, and allow for expression of the electoral freedom of the people as well as giving cognizance to the socio-economic wellbeing of the people.

Key words: Political Participation, Voting behavior, Liberal Democratic System, Political Stability, Electoral guidelines.

Introduction

The history of political participation in the more than half a century of Nigeria's existence as a sovereign nation-state is a chronicle of political uncertainties. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been struggling to install a viable and durable democracy but its dismal political actuality characterized by consistent inability to conduct credible and transparent elections in which its citizens have access to adequately enforced and effectively protected opportunities, to exercise their franchise in the choice of their leaders, has made the agenda of democratic sustainability largely a mirage. This accounts for the copious failed attempts at democratic transitions.For instance the collapse of the First and Second Republics and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 General Elections and the consequent abortion of the Third Republic (Dudley 1982, Akinsanya 2005;Agbaje 2005).

Since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999, transitional elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 were won and lost under conditions in which electoral malpractices, rigging and violence were pronounced, a phenomenon described by Dauda as "The Slippery side of landslide" (Dauda 2007 p102).

Participation in Elections in Nigeria is characterized by machine politics which "involves the parceling out of parts of the State including territories to individuals, usually under the leadership of one or two notables … who maintain their prebends essentially by force" (Ibeanu 2007 p9). Ibeanu further asserts that under such circumstances, elections give rise to the primitive accumulation of votes, which he refers to as the "winning of votes by both objective and structural violence and disregard for the rule of law" (Ibeanu 2007 p6). In this kind of environment, there is usually sustained rigging which ensures that votes do not count and voters are not counted (Jinadu 2007; Mohammed 2007), leading to the lack of credible elections.

There are definitely studies on elections in Nigeria especially since 1999, but this particular study is a focus on political participation and voting behaviour. Existing studies have been preoccupied with the history of elections, issues of electoral violence, the legal framework for election, the role of security agencies, electoral bodies, and electoral reforms thereby failing to empirically investigate into those factors that motivate voters to turnout at elections and their voting behaviour. This study aspires to fill the void by undertaking an empirical study of political participation and voting behaviour in the 2015 General Elections in Benue State of Nigeria.

Methodology

A survey methodology has been adopted for the study. A sample of 200 respondents each was drawn using purposive random sampling technique from the three local governments of Kwande, Makurdi and Otukpo totaling 600 respondents. The three local governments were selected based on the fact that they have the highest number of registered voters in Benue North-East, Benue North-west and Benue South Senatorial zones respectively. The data elicited from the 600 sampled population was used to measure the factors that influenced voting participation, the role of INEC in the election and the voting behaviour and voter turnout in Benue State. Data was quantitatively analyzed using percentages and tables. Graphic illustration was done using Column charts.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of political participation, election and voting behaviour are closely interrelated as they are mutually reinforcing because they all revolve around the concept of democracy which upholds citizens' engagement in public affairs. Without political participation, the need for elections and voting will not arise in a democratic system. Political participation describes the voluntary or non-coercive involvement of citizens in the political affairs of their country. This definition points to the fact that political participation does not entail the use of force. In the same vein, Uhlaner (2001) sees political participation as political engagement. Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) noted that political participation is thought of as a set of rights and duties that involve formally organized civic and political activities. Together, the above definitions emphasize the praxis, not the teleology of participation. Verba and Nie (1972 p2) had earlier noted that "Political Participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take". In the same vein, Verba et al (1995) characterized political participation as an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action –either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.

These conceptions of political participation are adequate and have been consequently adopted for this study for the following reasons. First, the definitions are broad in that they cover a variety of ways that citizens participate in relation to varied issues in a democratic society. Secondly, they are essentially concerned with acts that aim at influencing activities of the

government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel. This means that participation is a purposive activity. On the basis of the second observation, a distinction is made between ceremonial and instrumental participation (Verba and Nie 1972, Dahl and Stinebrickner 2005). Ceremonial participation takes place when citizens engage in political acts that do not impact on the public policy process. The distinction between the two forms of participation, according to Verba and Nie is that ceremonial participation is supportive in nature and is said to take place when citizens take part by expressing support for the government by marching parades, by working hard in developmental projects, by participating in youth groups organized by governments or by voting in ceremonial elections, while instrumental or democratic participation on the other hand emphasizes processes of influencing government policies.Instrumental participation is concerned with empirical political orientations and participatory activities. Thus, political participation in the latter context is seen as a teleological activity in which citizens see themselves as capable of, and, do indeed influence the authoritative allocation of values.

The literature on political participation bifurcates into mobilized and institutionalized (Seligson 1980) modes with the implicit or explicit assumption being that the two are mutually exclusive.From these perspectives, individuals who engage in mobilized actions such as riots, protests, strikes and other forms of civil disorder are regarded as non-participants in institutionalized forms such as campaigning and voting. We argue, following Seligson that the mobilized and institutionalised modes are not exclusive categories. Mobilized participation can bring about institutionalized participation and vice versa. In explicit terms therefore, individuals who are involved in mobilized actions may be the same people who participate formally. Mobilized participation is often associated with lack of trust or satisfaction with the political system, its institutions and elites, all of which could lead to violence. In this sense, it is associated with the expression of grievance. Although it is often viewed as a means of redressing injustices, it is anti-system to the extent that it constitutes an affront on peace and political stability. Institutionalized participation is formally recognized, and is anchored on clearly defined rules and procedures which are extended by formal democratic institutions such as electoral bodies operating within the specifications and bounds of the law. This study endorses the institutionalized variant and will view any form of riots or violent protests as aberrant and anathema to the fidelity of elections and in this case, the 2015 general elections. The universe of formal participation consists of particularized and collective acts on the one hand, and electoral

and non-electoral activities on the other hand (Verba and Nie, 1972). Electoral activities are those activities that are directly connected with the electoral process and include voting in primary and general elections, campaigning, working as poll officials, membership in political parties and political clubs, involvement in political debates, attending political party meetings or rallies, contributing money to parties or candidates, and any other such related activities. Non- electoral activities include particularized contacts with political elite, active membership in community problem-solving organizations, among others.

Elections and voting are indispensable aspects of political engagement. "The most common form of political participation is exercising the right to vote"(Flanigan and Zingale 1998, p6) in elections. Election is a basic component of a liberal democratic political system. This assertion is underscored by the fact that democratic representation is built on elections. It is in concert with this assertion that Flanigan and Zingale, further conceptualize election as the formal mechanism by which citizens maintain or alter the existing political leadership. For these scholars therefore, two observations are necessary. First, periodic and competitive elections give ordinary citizens the power to offer continued support to, or rejection of, their elected leaders. Election therefore provides the electorate with the opportunity to evaluate, or make an assessment of leaders' political performance, and to consequently pass their verdict. Secondly, elections and democratic representation are irrevocably imbricated with, and as a matter of fact, operate within the context of prevailing political values and beliefs that constitute the society's political culture.

In a paraphrase of Gwinn and Norton, Oddih (2007) describes election as the formal process of selection of persons for public office or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting. He states that election serves as a means by which a society may organize itself and make specified formal decisions, adding that where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relation in a society, and as a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual freedoms.

Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary democratic politics concerning leadership recruitment. Zahida and Younis (2014) see voting as the function of electing representatives by casting votes in an election, in addition to the fact that citizens use voting as a means of expressing their approval or disapproval of government decisions, policies and programmes, the policies and programmes of various political parties and qualities of candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being representatives of the people.

Rose and Massaavir (2014) on their part have provided a conceptualization of voting that is broad and encompassing in nature. For them, voting covers as many as six important functions:

a. It involves individuals' choice of governors or major governmental policies;

b. It permits individuals to participate in a reciprocal and continuing exchange of influence with the office-holders and candidates;

c. It contributes to the development or maintenance of an individual's allegiance to the existing constitutional regime;

d. It contributes to the development or maintenance of voters disaffection from the existing constitutional regime; and,

e. It has emotional significance for the individuals; and for some individuals it maybe functionless that is devoid of any significant personal emotional or political consequences. Voting gives rise to the related issue of voting behaviour.

Scholars studying political behaviour have identified a plethora of ways in which political participation is important in a democratic polity (Verba and Nie 1972; Seligson 1980; Powell 1992; Flanigan and Zingale 1997; Nwankwo 2002: Dahl and Stinebrickner 2005). Powell for instance, recognizes that participation by citizens in competitive elections is a distinctive feature of democratic politics, noting that substantial citizens' involvement in meaningful elections both reflect and encourage a sense of democratic legitimacy that will help to contain violence and encourage regular competition. Political participation is therefore a tool for managing political conflict. It is a critical activity that may help play the essential role in forcing elites to respond to other forms of citizen involvement. Verba and Nie (1972, p1) also posits that "if democracy is interpreted as rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the question of the nature of democracy in a society.Political participation is thus "at the heart of democratic theory and at the heart of democratic political formula" (Verba and Nie1972: p3).

Engagement in public affairs also serves as an important link between the government and the governed. It affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond (Verba et al 1995). As a result, it also enables citizens to make inputs into the political system by channeling their demands and supports.Understood in this sense; therefore, participation enables the society to consciously set political goals. Verba and Nie (1972, p4) are very explicit on the relevance of participation in this context when they declared that

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It represents a process by which goals are set and means are chosen in relation to all sort of social issues… Through participation, the goals of the society are set in a way that is assumed to maximize the allocation of benefits in a society to match the needs and desires of the populace. Participation is not committed to any social goals but is a technique for setting goals, choosing priorities, and deciding what resources to commit to goal attainment.

Another relevance of political participation is that it is viewed as a source of interaction with the government as it serves as a platform for citizens to perform their civic duties or political obligations. Citizens who exercise their rights for instance by voting in elections are likely to be more satisfied with their membership of the state, and their own role in it. Civic engagement is consequently, a source of procedural utility- the valuation accorded the political process in its own right rather than its political outcomes (Stutzer and Frey, 2006). Citizens develop a sense of trust and confidence when they are involved in the political process but become disillusioned and estranged from it when there are limited participatory opportunities.

Furthermore, electoral participation is viewed as "An educational device through which "Civic virtues" are learned" (Verba and Nie 1972). Through participation, citizens learn political responsibility; acquire knowledge about the political culture, the organization of the democratic system, its institutions and their functions, and roles of incumbents. It is thus related with political socialization.Increased awareness about the workings of any democratic system determines the level of affective and evaluative orientations which collectively underpin the legitimacy, stability and survival of the political system.

Theoretical issues

This study is anchored on the procedural theory of Democracy which is itself an analysis or postulations of the aggregates of the variety of procedures and factors associated with political participation and voting behaviour in a democracy The perspectives selected are those that are thought to be relevant in the explanation of the factors that determine the voting behaviour of the electorates.

Procedural theory of democracy represents the core of the liberal version of popular government. Proponents of proceduralism (Powell 1992, Dahl and Stinebrickner, 2005), take interest in the utility of processes, procedures, rules and methods (elections), human rights – factors that are necessary for democratisation and its operation. Powell (1992) described a liberal democratic system as one with the following characteristics; the legitimacy of the government

rests on a claim to represent the desires of the citizens; the organized arrangement that regulates this bargain of legitimacy is the competitive political election that leaders are recruited at regular intervals and voters can make their choice among alternative candidates. This also calls for the existence of at least two political parties with equal prospects of winning;most adults can participate in the electoral process both as voters and as candidates for important political offices and voting is by secret ballot and participation is voluntary;citizens and leaders enjoy basic freedoms of speech, press, assembly and organization. Powell adds that a level playing ground should be created so that both established parties and new ones must be able to gain members and voters.

The views articulated by Dahl and Stinebrickner (2005), on the issue share some theoretical proximity with those of Powell. They posit in their attempt at a refinement of the democratic theory that the most appropriate term to describe democracy is 'Polyarchy.' According to them:

> ...a Polyarchy is a system with, among other things, a relatively higher tolerance for individual and organizational autonomy. Freedom to participate in and oppose the government… depends on a state's toleration and even protection of autonomy for both individuals and for organizations (Dahl and Stinebrickner, 2005 p84.)

They further argue that polyarchies are more inclusive versions of popular government because they apply across political systems that are territorially larger than Greek city states, and are generally typified by the following seven institutions;control over final decisions about government is vested in elected officials;elected officials are selected peacefully and removed in periodic, free, and fair elections;virtually all adults have the right to vote;most adults have the right to run for public offices in elections;citizens have rights effectively enforced by government officials, to freedom of expression including criticism of and opposition of their leaders, they have access, and an effectively enforced right to gain access to sources of information that are not monopolized by those in power; they possess an effectively enforced right to form and join political organizations such as political parties and interest groups.

Dahl and Stinebrickner note in addition that to maintain a polyarchal system, the people must share political attitudes and beliefs, and that the military is subordinated to civilian control. They stress that while the military is subordinated to civilian regime, the later must in turn be subject to control by means of the institution of free, fair and credible elections.

The scientific study of political participation and voting behaviour has produced many other models. These models include the sociological, psychological both of which find expression in the standard socioeconomic model. The thrust of the sociological model (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and Mphee, 1954; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) is that socio-economic forces influence voting behaviour. It argues that social differentiation on the basis of socio-economic status, religion and for example race. is a precondition for political dissent and electoral cleavages; that there are conditions of transmissibility which ensure the maintenance and continuity of this differentiation from generation to generation; and that conditions for social and physical proximity between members of a group facilitate and sustain electoral cleavage.

The other model offering explanations for voting behaviour is the psychological model. This model has two strands, with one emphasizing the role of partisanship (Campbell and Kaln 1952; Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954; Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Flanigan and Zingale 1998), and the other with its emphasis on political efficacy (Citrin 1974; Dahl and Stinebrcickner 2005) of individuals about their participation. Partisanship represents the feeling of sympathy for and loyalty to a political party that an individual acquires and holds throughout life (Flanigan and Zingale 1998). Scholars working within this framework argue that partisanship creates a stable and enduring psychological bond between an individual and his party and consequently the decision to vote for it. Flanigan and Zingale have observed that although party identification is an important determinant of voters' attitude and is associated with the phenomenon of the "expected vote", other short term forces including the impact of issues, image of the party and image of the candidates could alter the voting pattern leading to "voting deviation" and partisan "realignments'. Apart from their partisanship, voters are therefore more likely to perceive and evaluate the performance of the party, the worth of the candidates and the kind of issues they both seek to address in deciding whether to vote and which party and candidate to vote for. Writing in the case of party image in the United States of America, Flanigan and Zingale noted that:

> In general, realignments appear to happen in the following way. At a time of national crisis, the electorate rejects the party in power, giving a decisive victory to the other party, a victory that includes not only the presidency but also large majorities in both houses of congress. Armed with this political mandate, the new party in office acts to meet the crisis often with innovative policies that are sharp departures from the past. If the administration's policy initiatives are successful in solving the nation's problems...then significant number of voters will become partisans of the new administration's party and continue voting for it in subsequent

elections, thus causing a lasting change in the divisions of partisan strength in the electorate. If on the other hand, the administration in power is not perceived as successful in handling the crisis, they in all likelihood will reject the party in the next election, and its landslide victory in the previous election will be regarded, in retrospect, as a deviating election.

The political efficacy school of thought postulates that the level of trust and confidence that citizens have about the impact of their political participation influences the level of participation especially the decision to vote. A low level of political efficacy may lead to political apathy or alienation. Almond and Verba (1965) demonstrated several decades ago that a sense of political efficacy (subjective competence) is positively related to a high degree of both party and organizational activism. They argued that the relationship between trust, defined as satisfaction with the political system and efficacy demonstrated that high subjective competence is positively related with the increased satisfaction with the political system and hence greater political participation. Dahl and Stinebrickner (2005) have noted that individuals do participate in politics depending on the following; the value they attach to the rewards to be gained; when they think the alternatives are important; when they are confident that they can help to change the outcome; they believe the outcome will be unsatisfactory if they do not act; they have knowledge or skills that bear on the question at hand; they must overcome fewer obstacles to act; and are mobilized by others to participate. Citizen voting participation can be severely affected if individuals do not find these factors on their side. Thus as Flanigan and Zingale (1998 p15) stated:

> … general attitudes of distrust and dissatisfaction with the government have a parallel in the declining confidence of individuals in their ability to participate effectively in the political process. A long trend in the individual's sense of political efficacy …. That is, the individual's belief about his or her ability to influence government.

The relationship between trust, political efficacy and political participation is shown diagrammatically below.

		Cynical	Trusting
Efficacy	**Efficacious**	Alienated Activists	Allegiant Activists
	Powerless	Alienated Apathetics	Allegiant Apathetics

Source: Seligson, M. A (1980p4)

As the diagram above shows, on the right hand side are those individuals who trust government; Allegiant Activist (that is, those who engage in exclusively institutionalized political

participation, presumably as a result of their high trust and high sense of political efficacy), and allegiant apathetics (those who support the system, but are lacking a sufficient sense of efficacy to induce them to participate). On the left hand side of the diagram are those individual with low trust; the alienated apathetics (the low trust, low efficacy individuals who are displeased with government but are not prepared to do anything to change it) and the alienated activists (those individuals with low trust but high efficacy, the ones who constitute ready tools for mobilized participation. Johari (2012) asserts that political alienation expresses itself in the following;

(i)   Political Powerlessness – which is defined as an individual's feeling that he cannot influence the actions of government, particularly the authoritative allocation of values;

(ii)   Political Meaninglessness - which implies that political decisions are perceived as unpredictable and without discernible patterns. The individual who finds himself in this situation is unable to make choices, because the outcomes of such choices are in themselves unpredictable

(iii)   Normlessness – here the individuals' perception that norms or rules of political relations are not observed, or that there is no adherence to the rule of law. There is the perception of a high level of deviating behaviour among political actors;

(iv)   Political Isolation – this refers to an individual's rejection of norms and goals that are widely held by other members of society;

(v)   Political Estrangement – this is a feeling of withdrawal that an individual has, arisen from the deplorable conditions of public life even as he plays his roles in the political process. Increasing discontent with current government policy and performance undoubtedly contributes to political cynicism.

Thus as Flanigan and Zingale (1998 p21-22) put it;

> The expectations an individual develops about how the political process functions often are not satisfied in reality. When clear expectations are not met in the behaviour of political leaders or in the experiences individuals have in the political process, disappointment, cynicism or hostility may result.

Verba and Nie (1992) developed a model of voter participation- The standard Socio-Economic Model which attempts to coalesce the Sociological, Psychological and rational perspectives. According to this model, the social status of an individual –his job, education, and

income determines to a large extent how much such an individual participates. In addition, an individual's position in life, on the one hand, and institutions - such as voluntary organizations, party affiliation and type of community on the other, determine their political behaviour. The Model is represented diagrammatically below:

Fig. 1: Standard Socioeconomic Model of Political Participation

Social Circumstances
Attitudes

| Socioeconomic status | | "Civic attitude" | | The Individual decision to participate | The participation input How much? What kind? By whom? |

Position in the life cycle

Race

Group consciousness

Institutions

Voluntary association

Partisan ship

Party affiliation

Political ideology

Type of community
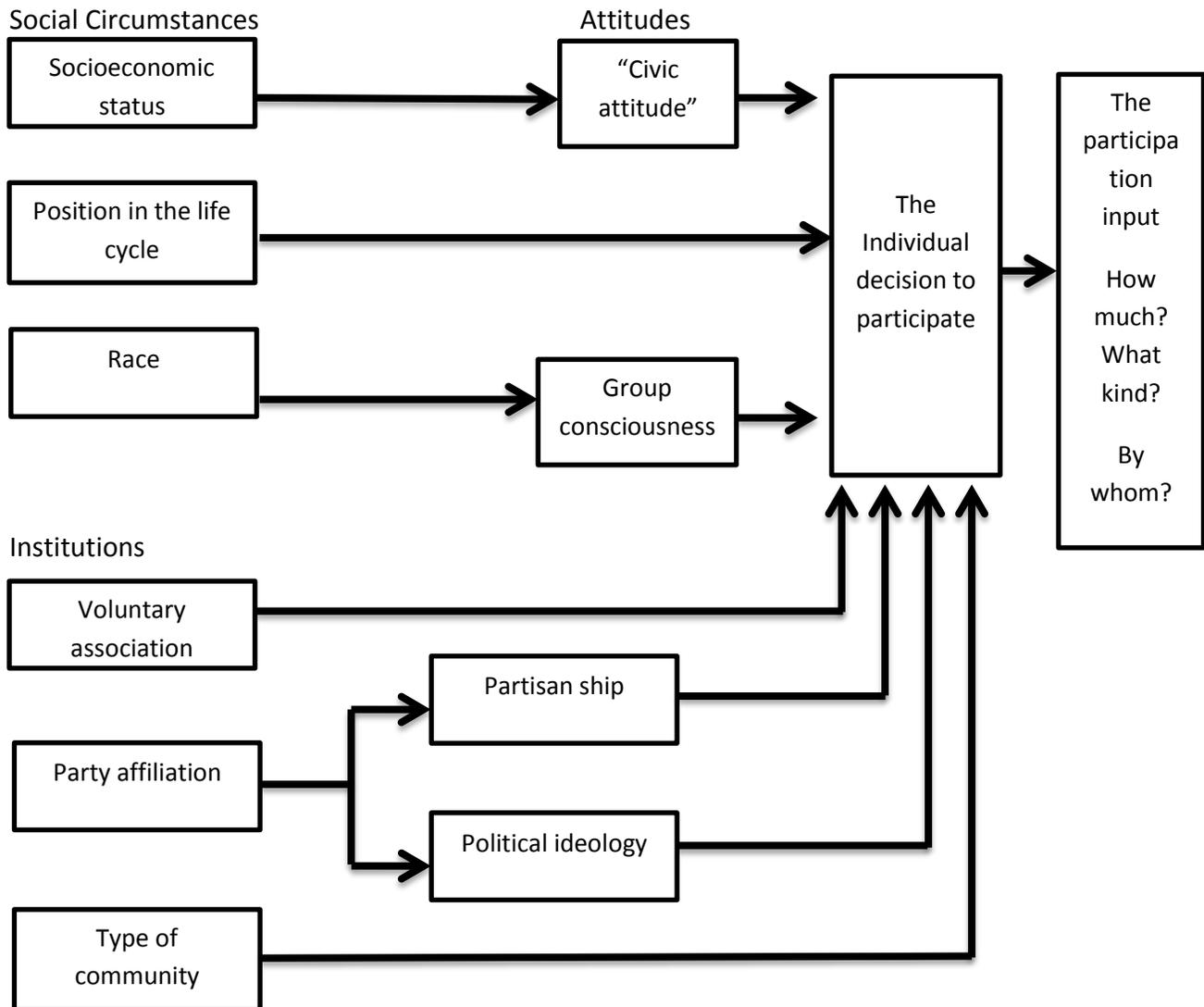
Source: Verba and Nie 1992

To conclude this section of discussion, we argue that scholars are agreed that political participation and voting behaviour is therefore influenced by diverse factors such as socio-economic, political, cultural, among others, whose interplay define the democratic process. Cumulatively, sociological forces, psychological factors and voters' rationality play important roles in determining voters' turnout and actual voting.

The 2015 General Elections

The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria which held on March 28th (for Presidential and National Assembly), and on April 14th (for the governorship and State Houses of Assembly) represent a renaissance in the democratic and electoral travelogue of the country. In sharp contrast to the electoral practice of machine politics (Ibeanu 2007) experienced in previous elections in which the ruling party had always won 'land slide victories' under perfidious and obnoxious circumstances to perpetuate itself in the corridors of power, this time around, there was a radical departure. In the new experience, the electoral firmament underwent a profound pleasant metamorphosis as the nation witnessed the occurrence of something unusual in the political playing field with the opposition party gallantly clinching a decisive victory, or to put it bluntly, resoundingly defeated the ruling party to formally bring to an end its sixteen years of stay in power.

Indeed, for the first time, transition elections made it possible for power to change hands at the Federal level from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressive Congress (APC), with the defeat of the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan by Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (rtd). The APC presidential candidate scored a total of 15,424,921 votes to beat the PDP presidential candidate who scored 12,853,162 votes. The APC also won for the first time, majority seats in both Chambers of the National Assembly – Senate and House of Representatives to eclipse the PDP's sixteen years dominance. The APC also won the Governorship election in sixteen States of the Federation, more than PDP's 13 States. In a display of statesmanship, the incumbent conceded defeat and congratulated the President-Elect (Jonathan 2015; Soyinka 2015). This helped to douse the political anxiety that had gripped the nation before and during the elections thereby bringing to futility, the "hypothesis of political Armageddon" regarding the impending political instability and breakup of the country in 2015, with the elections serving as a primary catalyst.

A similar feat was achieved in Benue State as the APC won the Governorship, Six (6) Federal Houses of Representative seats, and Two Senatorial seats, more than PDP's five (5) for House of Representatives and One (1) for the Senate. The result of the State House of Assembly saw the PDP win fifteen seats, more than APC fourteen (14) seats with Labour party clinching one seat. Below are the results of the various elections conducted in Benue State.

Table 2.   Summary of 2015 Presidential Election Results in Benue State

S/n	Name of LGA	No. of Regd. Voters	No. of Accred, Voters	Votes Received by Parties				No. of Valid Votes	No. of Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
				APC	PDP	Others				
1	Ado	59,888	10,946	2,328	7,382	273		9,983	559	10,542
2	Agatu	47,895	15,284	3,627	9,555	120		13,294	658	13,952
3	Apa	46,934	13,418	4,526	6,450	203		11,179	778	11,957
4	Buruku	92,862	42,564	23,397	15,407	478		39,084	639	39,723
5	Gboko	191,036	83,180	54,065	22,971	489		77,521	1,570	79,091
6	Guma	49,528	26,985	9,952	15,521	46		25,519	291	25,810
7	Gwer-East	78,684	36,537	19,873	14,363	118		34,354	793	35,147
8	Gwer-West	52,389	23,977	9,649	12,246	86		21,981	426	22,407
9	Katsina-Ala	104,749	47,883	13,059	27,094	238		40,391	870	41,261
10	Konshisha	91,228	44,818	34,344	6,957	193		41,494	754	42,248
11	Kwande	133,884	53,631	31,896	15,483	410		47,789	881	48,670
12	Logo	48,484	24,268	6,376	16,167	71		22,614	422	23,036
13	Makurdi	188,942	63,842	38,685	19,739	357		58,781	1,827	60,608
14	Obi	50,916	14,893	3,936	9,097	61		13,094	310	13,401
15	Ogbadibo	53,253	15,530	6,257	6,937	401		13,595	700	14,295
16	Oju	85,671	30,061	10,821	14,617	229		25,691	1,276	26,967
17	Ohimini	33,461	11,978	4,734	5,909	71		10,714	284	10,998
18	Okpokwu	58,237	19,215	4,757	12,103	444		17,088	1,041	18,129
19	Otukpo	103,757	35,362	13,702	17,591	340		31,633	1,420	33,053
20	Tarka	40,716	20,847	15,037	4,134	155		19,326	527	19,853
21	Ukum	101,324	37,117	15,639	16,774	141		32,554	1,970	34,524
22	Ushongo	83,775	37,573	20,958	13,160	489		34,472	793	35,265
23	Vande-Ikya	95,983	44725	26,343	14,080	690		41,113	1,078	42,191
	Total	**11,893,596**	**754,634**	**373,961**	**303,737**	**6,101**		**683,264**	**19,867**	**703,13**
Percentage Turnout 40.0% (Approx)										

Source: INEC 2015 Presidential Election (Summary of results), March 28

Table 3.   The 2015 Senatorial Election Results in Benue State

(Zone A)Benue North-East Senatorial District

S/n	Name of LGA	No. of Regd. Voters	No. of Accred, Voters	Votes Received by Parties			No. of Valid Votes	No. of Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
				APC	**PDP**	**Others**			
1	Katsina-Ala	104,749	48,159	13,152	30,124		43,387	736	44,123
2	Konshisha	91,228	44,818	34,376	7,191		41,650	554	42,204
3	Kwande	133,884	53,631	29,001	16,379		48,356	909	49,265
4	Logo	48,484	24,259	6,016	16,687		22,734	251	22,985
5	Ukum	101,124	37,117	13,425	19,315		32,806	879	33,685
6	Ushongo	84,202	37,769	18,956	13,314		34,308	977	35,285
7	Vande-Ikya	97,396	44,693	25,789	15,593		42,237	1,444	43,681
	Total	**661,067**	**290,446**	**140,715**	**118,603**		**265,478**	**5,750**	**271,228**

Percenatge Turnout 43.9%

(Zone B) Benue North-West Senatorial District   **APGA**

S/n	Name of LGA	No. of Regd. Voters	No. of Accred, Voters	APC	PDP	APGA	No. of Valid Votes	No. of Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
1	Buruku	92,862	42,776	23,534	15,906	80	39,520		
2	Gboko	191,421	83,180	53,316	25,036	120	78,472		
3	Guma	49,819	27,141	9,544	16,137	42	25,723		
4	Gwer-East	78,684	36,537	19,843	14,892	34	34,769		
5	Gwer-West	52,389	23,977	9,400	12,748	13	22,161	3,332	282,976
6	Makurdi	1,163,417	63,756	36,863	21,485	342	58,690		
7	Tarka	39,728	21,217	16,306	3,976	27	20,309		
	Total	**1,668,320**	**298,584**	**168,806**	**110,180**	**658**	**279,644**	**3,332**	**282,976**

Percentage Turnout 17.89%

Zone C Benue South Senatorial District

S/n	Name of LGA	No. of Regd. Voters	No. of Accred, Voters	APC	PDP		No. of Valid Votes	No. of Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
1	Daniel Donald Onjeh	539,347	166,633	50,115	-		149,653	3,845	153,498
2	David A. B. Mark			-	99,538				

Percentage Turnout 30.9%

Source: INEC 2015 Benue State Senatorial Election (Summary of results), 28
        March for Benue North-East, North-West and Benue South

Table 4.   **2015 Gubernatorial Election Results**

S/n	Name of Party	No. of Regd. Voters	No. of Accred, Voters	Votes Received	No. of Valid Votes	No. of Rejected Votes	Total Votes Cast
1	ACPN			1,431			
2	APA			1,595			
3	APC			422,932			
4	APGA	1,927,062	797,788	649	744,494	14,903	759,397
5	LP			2,653			
6	NNPP			767			
7	PDP			313,878			
8	SDP			589			
Percentage Turnout 41.40%							

Source: INEC 2015 Governorship Election (Declaration of results), 11th April

Voter Participation and Voter Behaviour in Benue State

The results of the elections have shown that even though APC had a field day in the elections, the polls were characterized by apathy and low voter turnout. Majority of registered voters did not come out to exercise their franchise. This can be seen from the difference between total numbers of registered voters and the total number of accredited voters for all the elections across the 23 local governments in the State. The presidential had a turnout of 40% (Approx) which means that 60% of voters did not turnout. In the governorship, only 41.40% turned out while 59.60% did not turnout. For the senatorial elections, zone 'A' recorded 43.9% turnout less than 57.1% who did not turnout. A similar trend was witnessed in zone 'B', where 17.89% turned out which is less than 82.11% who failed to turnout. In zone 'C', 30.9% of voters participated in the election with 69.1% voters absent.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 5:   INEC's contributions to voters' participation in the Election in Benue State

| S/n	Areas of Influence	Responses and percentages						Total	
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Partially	Percentage	Respondents	percentages
1	Voter Education	310	52.0%	98	16.0%	192	32.0%	600	100
2	Mobilization of Human and Material Resources	260	63.0%	180	30.0%	60	10.%	600	100
3	Electoral Security	160	27.0%	300	50.0%	140	23.0%	600	100
4	Trust in INEC to conduct free and fair elections	218	36.0%	286	48.0%	96	16.0%	600	100

Source: *2015 Post-election survey*

Table 5 above shows the areas in which the Independent National Electoral Commission contributed in enhancing electoral participation. A total of 310 respondents representing 52% agreed that the electoral body carried out voter education while 98 constituting 16% said it did not while 192 (32%) noted that it partially did. In respect of mobilization of human and material resources, 260 respondents representing 63.0% scored the body high while 180 respondents accounting for 30% and 60 respondents representing 10% disagreed and partially accepted respectively. A total of 300 respondents (50%) noted that INEC did not provide enough security although 160 (27%) admitted that security was provided while 140 (30%) partially agreed. Meanwhile, a sample of 218 (36%) respondents said it had confidence in INEC's capacity to conduct credible elections. However,286 respondents (48%) in contrast, feared that the electoral body would be unable to conduct credible polls.

Table 6.   Factors that InducedRespondents' Voting Participation.

S/n	why people voted	Responses and percentages						Total	
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Partially	Percentage	respondents	percentage
1	Party Image	120	20%	350	58%	130	22%	600	100
2	Candidates	400	67%	110	18%	90	15%	600	100
3	Party Identification	40	7%	440	73%	120	20%	600	100
4	Change party in power due to poor performance	500	83%	60	10%	40	7%	600	100
5	Use of card reader by INEC	460	76%	66	11%	74	12%	600	100
6	Zoning system	360	60%	40	7%	200	33%	600	100

Source: 2015 Post-election survey.

Fig. 2. A Graph showing factors that induced voting participation

Factors that Induced Respondents' Voting Participation
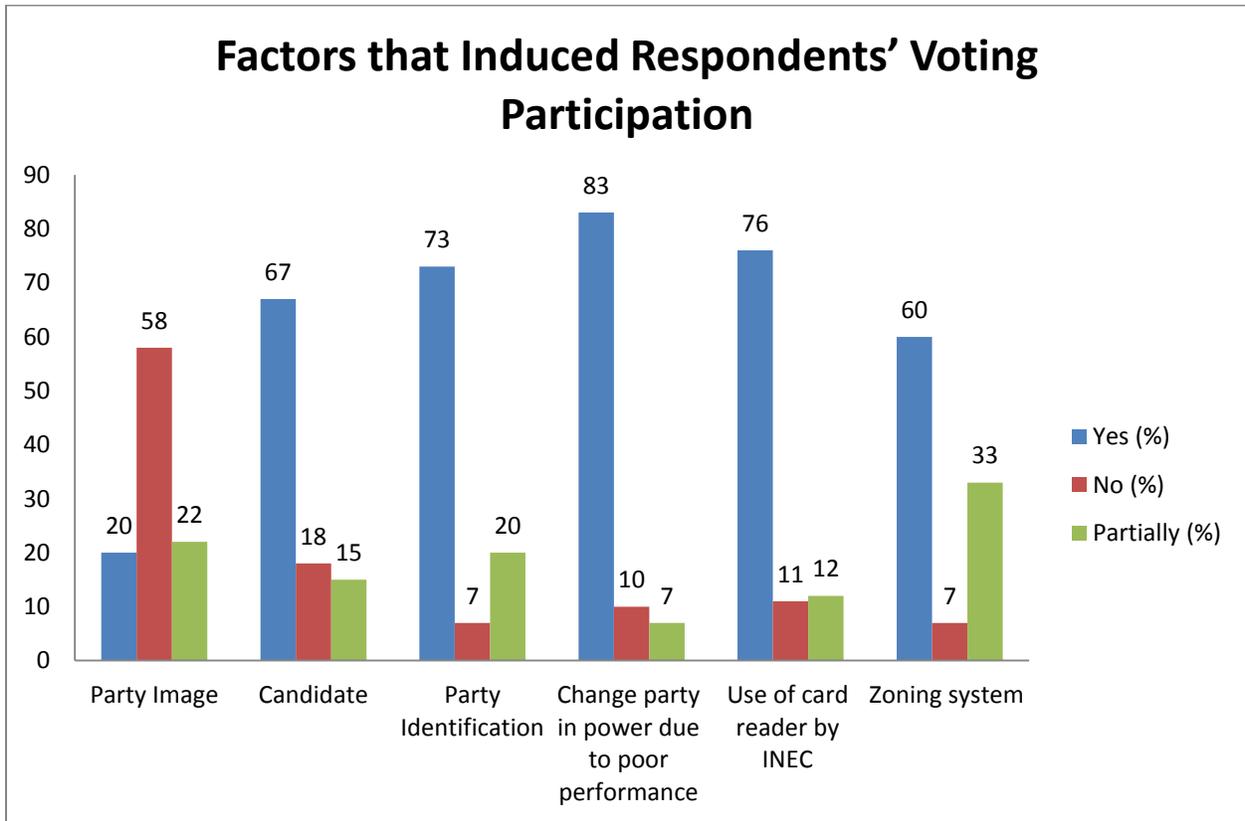
As table 6 and Fig. 2 above have shown, there were several factors that induced voters' participation in the 2015 general elections in Benue State. A total of 120 respondents (20%) agreed that they were influenced by party image while 350 (58%) disagreed that party image influenced their decision and 130 respondents (22%) said they were influenced partially. On party identification, 40 respondents constituting (7%) accepted that it influenced them while 440 (73%) and 120 (20%) disagreed and partially accepted respectively. Image of candidates featured prominently as a motivating factor with 400(67%), respondents agreeing to have being influenced by it while 110 (18%) and 90 (15%) disagreed and partially accepted. The desire to change the party due to poor performance was a major impetus for voting participation with 500 (83%) respondents having acquiesced that it influenced them with only 60 (10%) and 40 (7%) disagreed and partially accepting respectively. Many voters indicated that the use of Card readers also encouraged their participation. 460 (76%) respondents affirmed while 66 (11%) respondents and 74 (12.4) respondents disagreed and partially affirmed respectively. A perception of the fairness of zoning arrangement also influenced prospective voters. A total of 360 (60%) respondents opined that they voted due to their satisfaction with the zoning arrangement, while 40 (7%)

respondents did not give any consideration to it. A total of 200 (33%) respondents noted that they were partially influenced by the zoning arrangement in the State.

Table 7: **Voting Behaviour**

S/n	Voters behaviour during elections	Responses and percentages					
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Partially	Percentage
1	Did voters comply with voting procedure?	408	68.0	152	25.0	40	7.0
2	Were voters orderly during accreditation?	462	77.0	66	11.0	72	12.0
3	Were voters orderly during voting?	398	66.0	98	16.0	110	18.0
4	Were voters orderly during sorting, counting and declaration of results ?	410	68.0	90	15.0	100	18.0
5	Did voters accept the results of the elections?	448	75.0	72	12.0	80	13.0

Source: *2015 Post-election survey.*
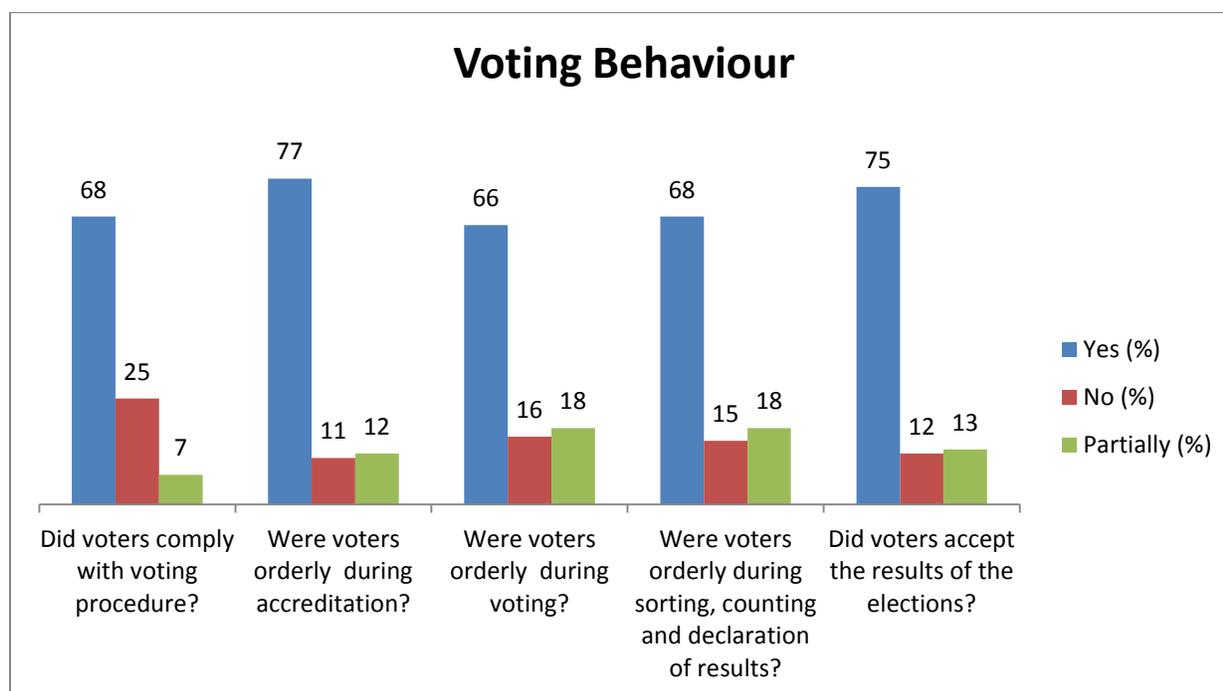**Fig. 3 A Graph showing behaviour of voters**

Table 7 and Fig.3 above indicate that voters complied with the voting procedure. A total of 408 respondents constituting 68% of the sampled population agreed to that effect while 152 respondents representing 25% and 40 representing 7% respectively disagreed and partially accepted. Voters were also orderly during accreditation, voting, sorting, and counting of results. As the data show, 462 (77%), 398 (66%) and 410 (68%) affirmed while 66 (11%), 98 (16%) and 90 (15%) respondents disagreed with 40 (7%), 72 (12%) and 100 (17%) respondents having partially accepted. The results of the elections were also accepted by the voters. 448 respondents representing 75% of the sampled population agreed while 72 of them representing 12% and 80 respondents accounting for 13% of the sampled population objected and partially agreed. This has been represented in the above graph.

Table 8. Low Voter Turnout

| S/n | Reasons for low turnout | Responses and percentages | | | | | | Total | |
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Partially	Percentage	respondents	percentage
1	Anticipated rigging	546	91.0	20	3.3	34	5.7	600	100
2	Insecurity	442	73.7	-	-	158	26.3	600	100
3	Other activities	346	58.0	104	17.0	150	25.0	600	100
4	Dissatisfaction with representative performance	580	96.0	-	-	20	3.3	600	100
5	Lack interest in the elections	360	60.0	120	20.0	120	20.0	600	100

Source: field survey work, 2015

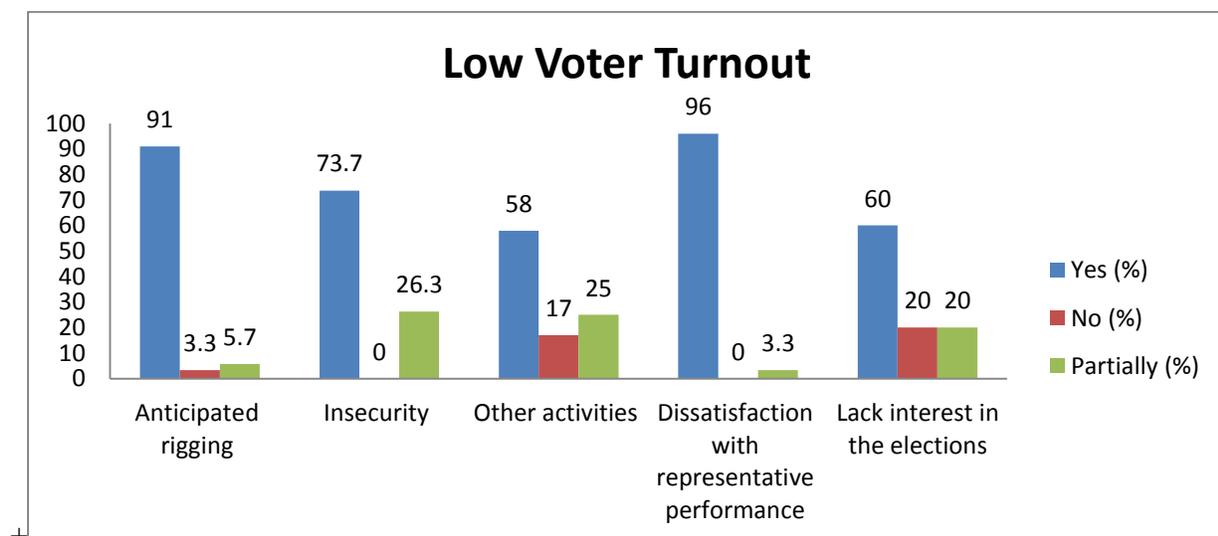**Fig. 4. Graphical illustration of Low Voter Turnout**

Table 8 and Fig.4 above have shown, there were several reasons behind the low voter turnout in the 2015 General Elections in Benue State. The dissatisfaction with the performance of representatives in government ranked top as 580 (96.7%) of the respondents affirmed with only 20 (3.3%) partially agreeing and nobody outrightly disagreeing. The fear that votes will not count due to anticipated rigging followed closely with a total of 546 respondents representing 91% agreeing while only 20 respondents (3.3%) disagreed and 34 respondents (5.7%) partially accepted. A total of 442 respondents (73.7%) respondents were afraid of insecurity and violence, 158 (26.3%) opined that they were partially affected. 360 respondents (60%) respondents did not turnout for election because they had no interest in it, while 120 respondents (20%) were partially affected by lack of interest in the elections.

Conclusion

Political participation and voting behaviour serve as critical ingredients in a democracy. Apart from guaranteeing the life expectancy of a democratic system, these democratic elements enable individuals to select their leaders at elections, thereby fulfilling their civic obligations as patriotic citizens. In the 2015 General Elections in Benue State, political participation and its corollary, voting behaviour was significant not only because it was central to the change of power from the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), to the All Progressive Congress (APC) both at the National and State level in the case of Benue, but because it restored credibility, legitimacy and trust in the democratic process in Benue State and Nigeria at large.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), played key roles in voting participation through voter education and mobilization of human and material resources for the elections. A large number of voters were also encouraged by INEC's assurances of credible polls. The Commission's performance in the area of provision of electoral security was largely below the mark and this accounted for some pockets of electoral violence in some areas.

Several factors accounted for the voting participation in the elections. The factors that had more influence on voters were; the credibility of the candidates, the desire to change the party in power due to poor performance, the use of the Smart card reader and fairness of the zoning arrangement. Party image played the least impact in voters' decision to vote.

Voting behaviour in the election was generally in conformity with INEC's electoral guidelines. Voters were orderly during accreditation, voting, sorting, counting, and declaration of results. Voters also largely accepted the outcome of the election without resorting to post-election

violence. Inspite of all these, the election was characterized by low voter turnout with the anticipation of rigging, insecurity, dissatisfaction with the performance of elected representatives, general lack of interest in the election, and people's valuation of the rewards of other activities on the election day, as reasons for poor outing for the elections.

In concluding this paper, the thoughts of Dahl and Stinebrickner (2005) relating political participation with anticipated positive outcomes indeed find expression and relevance in the analysis of the Benue situation. Declining confidence in the performance of the PDP government greatly influenced the direction of the voting in the 2015 General Elections. This becomes the governance challenge the new government is expected to address as meeting the socio-economic needs of the people is at the heart of quality leadership and good governance.

Recommendations

It should be borne in mind that inspite of the commendable outcomes of the 2015 General Elections in Benue State; there still exists gray areas that must be addressed in order to sustain the credibility of elections in Nigeria. Consequently the following recommendations have been made;

The Independent National Electoral Commission needs to improve in the area of electoral security. The electorates, election officials and sensitive election materials require adequate security during elections. This will ensure the confidence of the electorate in terms of their safety being guaranteed.

Government much more than ever before needs to evolve credible strategies to improve the resource base of the State in order to address the socio-economic requirements of the people as postulated by Johari (2012). This is the essence of recruiting leadership at elections and this is the basis for which leadership is able to garner legitimacy and acceptability.

Political parties should be encouraged to improve on their public images through the entrenchment of internal democracy and good governance when elected into power. Many registered voters did not turnout for the elections due to the fact that, they were not satisfied with government performance by the party in power. As major institutions in the democratic process, political parties can enhance political participation when they deliver on their mandates through good governance.

The Independent National Electoral Commission can also encourage increased political participation by improving on its use of the election technology of Smart Card Readers in future elections to minimize the delays that were witnessed during elections due to technical hitches. In addition, the Commission should in conjunction with the National Orientation Agency, the Media,

Non-governmental Organizations and Community Associations improve on voter education with particular focus on vote casting to reduce the number of rejected ballots in subsequent elections. A situation where a total of 19,867 rejected votes, constituting (28.3%) of total votes cast for presidential election in Benue state is not healthy for the majoritarian electoral system in Nigeria.

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