

**LOW VOTER TURNOUT AND SUSTENANCE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: A  
STUDY OF 2010-2017 ANAMBRA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This work studies the implications of low voter turnout on sustenance of democracy in Nigeria, with an evaluation of the 2010-2017 governorship elections in Anambra State. There was grave concern over the low voter turnout recorded during the elections. Interrogating the implication of this phenomenon with a view to encouraging citizens' participation in democracy is the task of this study. The work therefore adopts rational choice theory as theoretical framework. Data is collected from secondary sources which include result sheet by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and is analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique. Accordingly, the study finds that low voter turnout is a trend in governorship elections in Anambra State. It equally finds that the trend represents distrust in the political system dominated by electoral violence, influence of money in politics as well as doubts over sincerity of the political class. To that effect, it recommends the entrenchment of good governance and effective government responsiveness at all levels of governance as a way of building citizens' confidence in democracy. It equally recommends reform in the nature of politics played in the state by way of elimination of electoral violence and influence of money in the electoral process.*

**Keywords:** *low voter turnouts, democracy, election, political participation, electoral process*

**INTRODUCTION**

Elections are very vital in any democratic dispensation (Obikeze and Obi, 2004). They are the most fundamental act of political participation in a democracy. In democracies, they help to secure legitimacy of the political system as well as representation of popular will.

The import of this assertion informs the position adopted by Ogunna (2003) that an election is a democratic institution established to ensure popular participation as well as promote political responsibility and accountability. In fact, he contends that election is an institution by which “self government” is achieved in modern large-scale States even as it, in itself, promotes the principles of equality, popular sovereignty and gives legitimacy to the government which it

produces. He therefore warns that change of government would be produced by the will of the stronger party in a violent struggle of contest for power and imposition of a large degree of personal political force in a State where there are no elections. Deeper reflection on this reveals that this kind of situation ultimately results in political chaos and confusion, with grave implications for stability in the affected State.

In order to give credence to the imperativeness of elections, Ofobuikwe (2003) identifies periodic, free and fair election as well as political competition and participatory mode as salient principles or institutional expressions of democracy. He goes further to assert and rightly too that for sustenance of democracy, citizens of a country must exhibit a sense of civic responsibility through political participation at all levels of governance such as local, state and federal so that the right caliber of people are elected to form the government of the day.

In underlining the critical role of citizens in sustenance of democracy through popular participation in elections, Kaufman (1963) is quite emphatic. He contends that deciding who will occupy the elective seats of government is a function only the electorate can perform, underscoring the point that even where there is only one effective party, it is not until a general election has been held that the victorious candidates are inaugurated.

To him and rightly too, who selects the rulers also shapes the character of public policies and programmes. That means that the electorate in a democracy solely determine which legally-qualified nominees will legitimately ascend to elective offices and this is critically important for sustenance of that democracy.

In spite of this critical fact, the 2017 governorship election in Anambra State recorded abysmal low voter turnout, just like in the preceding 2010 and 2013 gubernatorial elections.

However, certain questions arise from the worrisome incidence of low voter turnout in 2010-2017 governorship elections in Anambra State. For instance and going by the development, can one then say that majority of the people in the state do not care about democracy? Also, can it be said that certain democratic and governance shortfalls and infractions dampen the spirit of the electorate and discourage them from participating in elections?

On the other hand, can we say that there is high inclination for other alternatives to democracy by the people? Or are the people simply not interested in who governs them as well as their qualification and suitability for the office? Do we say that there is lack of knowledge by the citizens that sovereignty resides with the people in democracy? Or can it be that the people are lackadaisical in contributing towards making governments efficient and effective, and do not bother about effecting transitions that are violence-free and bloodless?

In short, the following questions bug the mind: Is low voter turnout in Anambra governorship elections a trend? What factors underlie the low voter turnouts? Does the low voter turnout in the elections have negative implications for sustenance of democracy in Nigeria?

Ultimately, this study sets to assess if low voter turnout is a trend in governorship elections in Anambra State, explore the factors that account for the low voter turnout, examine the implications of the low voter turnout on sustenance of democracy in the country, explain what needs to be done to encourage voter turnout and provide useful data that could guide further studies in the area of increasing participation in the country's elections. This is with the objective to assist in preserving and deepening of democracy, enthroning good governance and boosting people's interest in elections and democracy in the country.

Consequently, the next logical task is to establish the theoretical framework of this study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Rational Choice Theory forms the theoretical framework for this work.

### **The Rational Choice Theory:**

The theoretical background for an economic explanation of voting behaviour was propounded by Anthony Downs (1957) in his work on "An Economic Theory of Democracy". This theory is commonly referred to as rational choice theory and attempts to explain electoral behaviour. Assumption of the theory, among others, is that all decisions – those that are made by voters and political parties – are rational and guided by self-interest and enforced in accordance with the principle of maximization of action's utility.

The rational choice theory considers that what matters to voters is not ideology but concrete actions that governments take. According to the theory, the likelihood of citizens to vote is higher if their expectations regarding the critical importance of their vote and the expected benefits from voting are larger than the costs. Thus, voters are more likely to vote if they feel that their vote can make a difference. Put differently, the decision to vote is predicated on the belief that one's vote will be decisive, the opposite of which results in apathy.

Although what matters to voters are not the intentions or the political discourse of the parties, that is their ideology but their concrete actions, the theory argues that the comparison between ideology is only used if the votes already have previously-concrete indicators relating to actions carried out effectively. However, the underlying requirement that voters have accurate and detailed information about their interests and parties' proposals is the main weakness of this theory.

Be that as it may, the theory is apt for the study, more so when viewed from the prism that decisions made by voters are rational and are guided by self interest, also that what matters to voters is not ideologies of parties but concrete actions which government takes.

Through this, understanding is gained as to why majority of Nigerian voters show high degree of apathy towards voting. For instance, the theory holds that the likelihood of citizens to vote is higher if their expectations regarding the critical importance of their vote and the expected benefit from voting are larger than the costs.

The implication of this is the corresponding reality that Nigerian voters are more likely to vote if they feel that their votes can make a difference, and thus develop apathy when they feel the contrary. Of course, the concept of difference here is directly linked to the provision of good governance by those elected into political offices.

Ideally and as aptly captured by the Rational Choice Theory, the disappointment as it relates to bad governance in the country goes to impinge on trust in democracy. This is implicitly manifested in boycott of polling stations by the majority of registered voters on election days.

This situation calls for serious concern and informs the thrust of this paper which investigates the trend of low voter turnouts in Anambra governorship elections, 2010 – 2017.

Having established the framework of analysis of the paper, the next task is to offer some clarifications on concepts that feature in the work so as to gain deeper insight into what they entail. We begin the task with the concept of democracy.

### **UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY**

Democracy as a form of government has its root in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC in Athens (Okolie, 2012). It is a contested concept which does not lend itself to any universally-accepted definition due to ideological, cultural and historical conceptualizations that underpin it (Audu, 2010). Despite the challenge, however, Audu contends that democracy is, today, considered as the most desirable form of government and man's best idea on earth for governance. To him, it is a form of government in which citizens in a State have political investment of political participation and trust, and essentially has to do with the ability of the people to control decision making.

An import of this perspective is clear. That is to the effect that this form of government has foundational underpinning which is centred on the will of the people as against that of the elite or the few. This explains why Kwasau (2009) posits that democracy could be conceived as the principles, ideas, political practices and responsibilities that guarantee civic pride and participation in public and private affairs.

A major take here is the notion of civic participation which democracy guarantees. It goes to emphasize rule by the people.

However, Audu cautions that the simple notion of the rule by the people does not and will not get us very far unless we understand the meaning of the people as defined in the original Greek. Accordingly, he notes that the Greek originally viewed the people as to mean the poor, disadvantaged or the many. This view is supported by Nass (2012) who aptly contends that the ancient Greeks used the word 'democracy' to mean government by many, in contrast to government by a few, and notes that the term comes from the Greek words 'demos' (meaning 'the people') and 'kratia' (meaning 'rule').

Certainly, Nass made an important point when he postulates that the idea of democracy is based, not upon the sovereignty of the parliament or the elected executives, but upon the sovereignty of the people as a whole, who have a moral right to govern themselves. It is in that light that Kwasau then notes that democracy is about establishing a government based on the free choice of parties and candidate by the electorate.

A critical evaluation of democracy ultimately reveals freedom and responsibility accorded the people to actively participate in the affairs of their State. It also reveals inherent propensity of effecting change in government through constitutional methods advanced by democracy.

Certainly, Nass (2012) brings out a perspective which is lacking in the others examined. He associates democracy with a process and in that regard argues that democracy is a process and not just the event of holding elections.

Ideally and as Okolie (2012) points out, democracy basically means participatory and consultative governance – governance characterized by popular rule where the views of all relevant people in the society or polity are articulated and harmonized to form the plank for collective decision-making and implementation. The major contention as advanced by him is that democracy is fundamentally associated with popular rule; rule by the people; collective decision-making and implementation; consultative and dialogue-based rule, and rule by the majority, among others.

Notably, the basic ingredients of democracy lacking in Africa forced Mbah (2009) to lament that the face of democracy today in the continent is one defined by coercion and intimidation. To him, it is a season of aggression and half-truths.

Same disillusionment apparently drove Kukah (1999) to equally assert that if one were to conduct a survey on what ordinary Nigerians imagined democracy means to them, there were many chances that one would be met with great derision. He goes further to lament that at the level of the daily lives of ordinary citizens, it is even doubtful whether the people are really interested, one way or the other, in what the intellectual ideals may really be, noting clearly that it is the manifestations of their collective cynicism towards the laudable concepts that he feels

ought to worry us. But the question that remains is, to what extent are elections important in a democracy?

### **ELECTION AS CRITICAL COMPONENT OF DEMOCRACY**

Elections are central to the existence, stability and development of democracies (Nwolise, 1988). As Kwasau (2009) posits, election is a necessary condition for democracy. Indeed, it is paramount, salient and central to democracy. And this explains why he argues that one of the most critical and salient features of any democratic process worldwide is the conduct of acceptable, free and fair elections.

To him and rightly too, whereas freedom of choice is at the very heart of democracy, elections are one of the key processes of democratic government. To that extent, he notes that election is simply a mechanism through which candidates are chosen to represent the people of a given country in the parliament, the executive and possibly into other areas of government as stipulated in the constitution of that particular country.

His caution is however instructive. He warns that wherever the conditions for the conduct of free and fair elections are lacking, as in Nigeria and many other third-world countries, democracy can never be entrenched.

A major take from the discourse is appropriately captured by Reynolds (2011). True to his assertion, the State asks for consent from the people for its rule. To that extent therefore, Reynolds argues that without national elections, there can be no democratization or any chance of an enduring self-sustaining peace process. In fact, he goes further to hint that elections are not only transition points but repeatable historical moments which usher in change, rebirth and renewal, and become critical to democratic development.

Accordingly, Ofobuike (2001) lends support to the imperativeness of elections in a democracy. Thus, he succinctly describes both periodic, free and fair election, as well as freedom of choice of candidates and programmes as constituting both principles and elements of democracy.

Also as Said (2000) notes, the discourse and theories on democracy, especially in its libertarian form, place election as a core variable that bears an organic linkage with the concept of

democracy. In the same vein, Nwaubani (2012) not only avers that the bedrock of sustainable democracy and by implication democratic culture is free and fair election which is guided by a transparent electoral process conducted within a competitive participatory political environment, but insists that election is one of the cardinal features of democracy and without it, democracy of any type or form cannot thrive successfully. According to him, elections and democracy are so intricately tied that both of them are today seen as important indicators of legitimacy which could be accorded any representative government. The import of this view is that election is an institutional mechanism that implements democracy. Thus, the basic understanding of election presupposes not just making choices regarding politically-elective leadership but endorsing of goals and other ideas as institutionalized in a democratic environment.

In his own account, Muazu (1995) advocates the position later supported by Kwasau (2009) and Nwaubani (2012) to the effect that in a democratic society, free and fair elections, coupled with viable electoral system, are required to ensure the sustainability of democratic culture. This aligns with the view held by Akinyemi (2001) when he states that free, fair and transparent elections is a component of democracy.

Anikeze (2011) also consents to the imperativeness of a free and fair election in a democracy. He first defines a free and fair election as a type of election where a voter is free to cast vote according to his or her wish without any intimidation, harassment, inducement or coercion. To him, a voter in a free and fair election is free to vote according to the dictates of his conscience.

The implication of this is, therefore, obvious. This includes the requirement that balloting is done in secret. It equally entails such conditionalities as unbiased electoral umpire, public counting of votes and instant announcement of the true results at the polling units after voting is concluded.

Anikeze (2011) also notes that having results which are capable of being challenged in courts is equally a critical feature of a free poll. It is his contention and rightly too that free and fair election creates sentiment of popular consent and participation in public affairs. This makes the people feel that they have been consulted and have indicated their wishes in the broad field of national policy and are therefore willing to accept the legitimacy of the power exercised by those put into positions of authority by the electoral system. This is outside his other contention that

free and fair election makes it possible for government to succeed another in an orderly manner, without violence or bloodshed.

A major take from the perspectives is that the functions of an election are properly identified. This is important so as to understand why participation in elections is crucial. To that effect, it is right to say that election provides the platform for ensuring that change of government is carried through in a smooth and peaceful manner. Besides, it provides an opportunity to evaluate the electoral processes and in the same gamut allows for assessment of the political leadership and even the enunciated policies of a regime.

Perhaps, the most forceful expressions of import of elections in a liberal democracy is captured by Joseph (1990) when he avers that renewal in democratic systems usually occur through elections and cautions that any political system which does not undergo such will ultimately atrophize and suffer decay.

Even the elite theory of democracy acknowledges elections as a positive, albeit insufficient step towards the struggle for popular democracy (Said, 2000). Said in further analysis on this argues that while elections may not approximate democracy and also offer little choice to the majority of the people, it is important that elections as an element of liberal democracy must not be scorned but taken seriously.

A concern, however, is the fear expressed by Mamdani (1987) quoted by Said (2000) that certainly, voting and elections will count for little in an atmosphere of crippling poverty, want and despair. Also, there is the concern that consensus, dialogue and the political collectivity were rather emphasized by African political traditions as opposed to the individualism, atomization and the majoritarianism of the western capitalist political system (Said, 2000). This could have effects on the general attitudes towards voting.

As Janda et al (2000) note, elections institutionalize mass participation in democratic government. As they rightly point out, the heart of democratic government lies in the electoral process and that whether a country holds elections - and if so, what kind, constitutes the critical difference between democratic and non-democratic governments.

As Janda et al put it, opportunity to vote for change encourages citizens to refrain from demonstrating in the streets. They note that this helps preserve government stability by containing and channeling away potentially disruptive or dangerous forms of mass political activity. This explains why they rightly assert that to have “government by the people”, the people must participate in politics and that conventional forms of participation like voting in elections come most quickly to mind.

Be that as it may, even though Janda et al believe that elections are a necessary condition of democracy, they however agree that they do not guarantee democratic government. They cite instance with the former Soviet Union which regularly held elections in which more than 90 percent of the electorate turned out to vote before the collapse of communism but the Soviet Union certainly did not function as a democracy because there was only one party.

Despite their argument, the fundamental fact is that majoritarian and pluralist models of democracy rely on voting and actively expect citizens to participate in politics. It is as a result of this that voting is regarded by Janda et al (2000) as a low-initiative form of participation that can satisfy all three motives of political participation – showing allegiance to the nation, obtaining particularized benefits and influencing broad policy. But we are challenged by the level of value which political participation has in democracy.

### **DEMOCRACY AND VALUE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

The practice of democracy tends to emphasize active participation in government by the people either directly or indirectly (Nwaubani, 2012). In fact, to him, democracy basically entails opportunities for political participation and above all the choice and possibility of an alternative government.

As he argues, although there are many ways individuals can participate in democracy including running for public offices, participating in marches, protests and demonstration among others, participation in competitive election is an important means of arriving at a reliable trend of positive democratic culture. This point is imperative and explains why Onu (2005) emphasizes that the citizen in a democratic state is the epicenter of development and central to the act of governance. This explains why he further asserts that the citizen’s participation is the hub and

driving force of democratic process. It is also in that light that he argues that democracy should be real and down to the roots.

Instructively, the position of Abba and Egeonu (2010) as regards what political participation entails as well as what serves as advantages of political participation is worthy of consideration. They see political participation as the voluntary activities of members of a society in the selection of rulers.

Interrogating this definition reveals what is striking: its emphasis on the voluntary component of the concept which is obviously lacking in the perspectives offered by Onu (2005) and Nwaubani (2012). But despite the fact that it is voluntary, Abba and Egeonu (2010) argue that a person's involvement in politics shows his or her level of political participation. In fact, they identify (general) election as one of the avenues for political participation, noting that it offers the citizens the opportunity to participate in politics through casting of votes.

But the critical question remains, what are the advantages of political participation? Put differently, why is political participation important?

Abba and Egeonu outline what the merits of political participation are. To them, political participation ensures public confidence in the works of the government, generates legitimacy or support for the government, makes for political stability and reduces the amount of coercion or force the government has to use to obtain compliance from the citizens.

A close look at the strengths of political participation shows that it is extremely crucial and necessary for the survival of democracy in a given State. In fact, that explains why Ogunna (2003) hints that political participation is a corollary of self government. He lists three types of political participation to include full, partial and passive. But the third type which represents a process in which citizens are interested in political process only at the level of being observers is most worrisome.

Cautiously, Mill (1972) quoted in Mackenzie (2009) warns that to forgo political participation, even if a truly benevolent despot were to dominate the political scene, would be a disaster for our sense of ourselves as rational, moral and religious beings. In fact, in his defense of 'public

voting’, Mill argues that it is the duty of each elector to put their own selfish interests to one side and to consider the interest of the public. According to him, for all the hard work of being in politics, the benefit of political participation to individuals is that each will feel an ever greater sense of freedom as he/she becomes more involved and more able to take control over their lives. The benefit to society, as he points out, is that free individuals will pursue intellectual, moral and spiritual projects that will lead to the progress of all in society.

On the other hand, Mbah (2009) offers definitive thought on political participation of citizens in democracy. As he notes, citizens’ participation is said to be good for the citizens because defenders of democracy believe that getting involved in decision-making will expand the horizon of voters by giving them more awareness about issues of the day in the polity. According to him, in contemporary democracies, the most fundamental characteristic of any democratic system is the idea that citizens should be involved in the making of political decisions, which can be either directly or indirectly, that is through representatives of their choosing. In fact, he contends that citizens’ involvement in political decision-making was regarded as an essential instrument of good life, especially in the ancient Greek city state where equal opportunity was meant for all freemen.

Despite the underpinning relevance of political participation of citizens in democracy and in voting in particular, elections in Nigeria appear burdened. This leads to the next discourse on the challenges to elections in the country.

### **CHALLENGES TO ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA AND CAUSES OF ELECTORAL APATHY**

The conduct of elections in Nigeria has been beset by varying degrees of irregularities ranging from uncertain legal and constitutional terrain through the outright manipulation of the electoral process to the production of predetermined results (Kwasau, 2009). In fact, as Nwaubani (2012) observes, lack of democratic culture is still visible in Nigeria today. He maintains that in Nigeria, free and fair elections and by implication democratic culture can be affected by electoral malpractices and attendant lack of electoral reforms.

Earlier, Chukwu (2007) observes that one of the greatest obstacles confronting free and fair elections in Nigeria is the independence and integrity of electoral bodies. On the other hand, Elekwa (2008) observes that in the 1983, 2003 and 2007 national elections, the ruling party in each case exploited some lapses in the constitution and relevant electoral laws to compromise the integrity of electoral bodies through political interference and inadequate funding.

Still, elections in the country are equally challenged by machine politics or god-fatherism (Jinadu, 2007; Ibeanu, 2007). Machine politics represents the highest stage of primitive accumulation of votes and deliberate mortgaging of electoral mandate through the imposition of a “preferred candidate” especially through massive electoral intimidation, corruption, violence and other related malpractices. God-fatherism, on its own, describes an organization controlled by a boss or a small coterie of leaders which subject party organization and public officials to its will. Obviously, a manifest feature of the machine politics as described earlier is the unfortunate eroding of trust in elections and general lack of interest to participate in the process by voters who rather choose to distance selves from what is an obvious predetermined electoral outcome.

Another prominent feature of electoral malpractice in Nigeria as highlighted by Nwaubani (2012) is political corruption and as he observes, electioneering campaigns, party nominations and other related electoral procedures were fraught with bribery, fraud and outright financial corruption. Truly, despite the attempt and other provisions in the various electoral acts on the issue of money politics, political corruption has remained a very disturbing and contentious aspect of the electoral system and politics in general in Nigeria.

To Nwaubani, while the various electoral bodies have failed to enforce the provisions which mandate all political parties to submit to electoral commission statement of their assets and all liabilities, detailed annual statement and analysis of their sources of funds and accounts thereby encouraging excessive and massive use of money, elections remain rather very perplexing.

The consequent effect of this situation is aptly captured by Kwasau (2009) who laments that the Nigerian political structure demonstrates an increasing decline in the people’s interest in the political processes. The consequent effect of this, if not checked, is continuous drop in the

interest for popular participation in elections which can breed bad governance and ultimately lead to collapse of democracy in the country.

To lay credence to this, Nass (2012) laments that in African bastardized democratic practice, this very important feature of democracy, that is election, is often subverted, and this puts the whole system into question. As he rightly observes, the almost consistent ability of those in government not to lose elections has continued to cast doubt on democratic process in Africa. This is in contrast to the belief which he equally upholds that regular election as a democratic process is supposed to provide occasions for periodic submission of the leaders to the verdict of the electorate, and thus ensure accountability and transparency on the part of the leaders.

Already, Mamdani (1987) quoted by Said (2000) cautions that voting and elections will count for little in an atmosphere of crippling poverty, want and despair. Also, Mbah (2009) after obviously observing the negative circumstances which surround the critical element of democracy in Africa laments that the face of democracy today in the continent is one defined by coercion and intimidation. To him, it is a season of aggression and half-truths.

In the same vein, Said (2000) points negative condition of elections when he laments that elections and the electoral process, apparently, constitute the major victims in the tendency towards democratic retreat. He observes that the precepts, structures and processes of elections are mostly characterized by reckless manipulations, politics of brinkmanship and subversion, such that the role and essence of elections in a democracy in terms of expressing popular will, engendering political changes and the legitimization of political regimes are highly circumscribed.

The picture is, obviously, alarming and portends a dangerous drift, away from democracy, its merits as well as the entirety of what it represents. As such, Said (2000) laments that the tendency in the present conjuncture is to inveigh against elections and regard it less as a catalyst but more as a devalued element and a fading shadow of the democratic process in Africa.

## **GAP IN LITERATURE**

In the literature reviewed, the importance of election as a core variable which bears an organic linkage with the concept of democracy is established, as in Said (2000), Onu (2005) and Nwaubani (2012) as well as the fact that elections institutionalize mass participation in democratic government, just as opportunity to vote encourages citizens to refrain from demonstrating in the streets, thereby helping in preserving government stability by containing and channeling away potentially disruptive or dangerous forms of mass political activity (Janda, 2000).

Also, there is caution given by Joseph (1990) to the effect that any political system which does not undergo elections will ultimately atrophy and suffer decay. To put it simple, available scholarly publications dwell on importance of elections in a democracy as well as on other exogenous factors which could cause apathy.

Nonetheless, there is yet no available literature that presents an empirical trend of the decline of voters' interest in Nigerian election over a period of time. No published scholarly attention has been sustained and up to date on the cyclic decline in voter turnout in Nigeria's political environment.

Consequently, this paper seeks to fill this gap with a study on low voter turnout in Anambra 2010-2017 governorship elections, presenting an analysis that covers the 21 local government areas of the state.

Equally instructive is the observation that no literature has undertaken a study on the declining trend of voters' participation in elections, focusing solely on a particular state typified by Anambra State which in itself is reputed to have engineered the concept of staggered election in Nigeria as far as gubernatorial election is concerned. This study therefore seeks to achieve this and by extension complement the already existing scholarly work in the field of voters' disinterestedness in elections in the country.

### **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

The documentary instrument is used to collect data for this work. This secondary source of data collection is opted for since the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as the statutory government institution responsible for conducting (governorship) elections in the country, already has data in the area of concern of this study, which is data on the number of registered voters and the number of accredited voters for the 2010, 2013 and 2017 governorship elections in Anambra State. Other data that are useful for this work are also already available in other election reports by civil society groups as well as in textbooks and newspapers. Thus, the documentary technique proves apt for the data generation since the study is a qualitative research.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data generated for this research work is analyzed by adopting qualitative descriptive approach.

### **LOW VOTERS' TURNOUT AS TREND IN ANAMBRA GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS**

Findings of this research indicate that low voter turnout is not a one-off phenomenon but a persisting trend in Anambra governorship elections. In the elections examined, it was discovered that total turnout in terms of accredited voters never got up to 30 percent. This is most glaring when the number of the accredited voters is examined alongside the number of registered voters in each of the elections.

In 2010 governorship election in the state, registered voters stood at 1.84 million while accredited voters were 302, 000, representing 16 percent turnout. In 2013, the figure for registered voters was 1, 770, 127 while accredited voters were 465, 891. This represents 26.3 percent turnout. Again, the percentage turnout for the election showed less than 30 of the entire registered voters. In fact, out of the 465, 891 accredited voters, only 442,242 eventually voted. CDD (2017) quoted the Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room as having noted during the November 2013 governorship election that voters' turnout was as low as five percent in several polling units. A table on the outcome of the election is presented below.

**TABLE 1: ANAMBRA STATE GOVERNORSHIP CONCLUDED ELECTION, NOVEMBER 30, 2013. SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

S/N	LGA	CODE	No OF REG.	No OF ACCRD.	No OF VALID	No OF REJECTED	TOTAL VOTES
			VOTERS	VOTERS	VOTES	VOTES	CAST
1	AGUATA	01	100,083	24,974	23,430	758	24,188
2	AYAMELUM	02	57,196	20,327	17,950	629	18,579
3	ANAMBRA EAST	03	60,818	25,869	23,514	927	24,441
4	ANAMBRA WEST	04	42,060	14,647	12,682	587	13,269
5	ANA OCHA	05	76,528	22,935	21,942	418	22,360
6	AWKA NORTH	06	44,159	13,436	12,046	664	12,710
7	AWKA SOUTH	07	118,117	26,845	23,884	1,428	25,312
8	DUNUKOFIA	08	45,332	14,933	13,546	399	13,945
9	EKWUSIGO	09	59,014	17,847	16,570	676	17,246
10	IDEMILI NORTH	10	173,832	24,093	21,675	797	22,472
11	IDEMILI-SOUTH	11	84,019	20,157	18,827	593	19,420
12	IHALA	12	111,531	25,392	22,821	1,382	24,203
13	NIJOKA	13	70,519	23,902	22,194	916	23,110
14	NNEWI NORTH	14	112,358	31,848	29,009	1,085	30,094
15	NNEWI SOUTH	15	57,093	18,409	16,856	531	17,387
16	OGBARU	16	133,717	30,116	27,250	1,146	28,396
17	ONITSHA-NORTH	17	117,332	27,423	24,746	1,032	25,778
18	ONITSHA -SOUTH	18	123,833	24,831	22,558	750	23,308
19	ORUMBA NORTH	19	61,327	19,510	18,409	680	19,089
20	ORUMBA SOUTH	20	46,100	16,449	15,317	571	15,888
21	OYI	21	75,159	21,948	20,028	1,019	21,047
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,770,127</b>	<b>465,891</b>	<b>425,254</b>	<b>16,988</b>	<b>442,242</b>

**SOURCE:** <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ANAMBRA-SUMMARY-OF-RESULTS-AND-DECLARATION-for-website.pdf> Sourced on January 15, 2018 at 3: 15pm.

Adjustment by researcher.

A close look at the level of turnout in some local government areas as presented in the table is much appalling. In Idemili North for instance, out of 173, 832 registered voters, only 24, 093 turned out to vote. In Ogbaru, only 30, 116 out of the 133, 717 registered voters turned out for the election. Same low turnout was recorded in Awka South where 26, 845 out of 118, 117 registered voters turned out; in Aguata, 24, 974 out of the 100, 083 registered voters; in Ihiala, 25, 392 out of 111, 531 registered voters; and in Onitsha South 24, 831 out of 123, 833. In short, in all the 21 local government areas, same low turnout prevailed; level of turnout was clearly less than half of the number of the registered voters. Table 2 presents further details on the election, including percentage of turnout.

**TABLE 2: FURTHER DETAIL AND PERCENTAGE TURNOUT ON  
2013 ANAMBRA GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

S/N	CONTESTANT	GENDER	PARTY	VOTES RECEIVED	REMARKS
1	OKEKE CIKA JERRY	M	AA	249	
2	CHUKWUEMEKA NWANKWO	M	ACCORD	185	
3	DR. IFEATU EKELEM	M	ACD	490	
4	ENGR. ANTONY ANENE	M	ACPN	899	
5	COMRADE AARON IGWEZE	M	AD	180	
6	CHIEF ANAYO A. ARINZE	M	ADC	699	
7	PATRICK C. IBEZIAKO	M	APA	1,607	
8	SEN. (DR.) CHRIS N. NGIGE	M	APC	95,963	
9	CHIEF WILLY M. OBIANO	M	APGA	180,178	ELECTED
10	CHIEF AUSTIN NWANGWU	M	CPP	879	
11	CHIJIJOKE G. NDUBUISI	M	DPP	632	
12	CHRISTIAN I. OTTI	M	ID	205	
13	CHIEF DENNIS N. OGUGUO	M	KOWA	321	
14	PATRICK I. UBAH	M	LP	37,495	
15	PASTOR SIMON C. OKAFOR	M	MPPP	155	
16	OKONKWO EMEKA WEBSTAR	M	NCP	264	
17	PRINCE LEONARD UCHENDU	M	NNPP	696	
18	TONY NWOYE	M	PDP	97,700	
19	EZEEMO G. CHUKWUNENYE	M	PPA	5,120	
20	HON. BASIL IWUOBA O.I	M	PPN	325	
21	ONUORA B. ONYEACHONAM	M	SDP	235	
22	BARR. OKOYE G. MGBODILE	M	UDP	153	
23	PROF. BENEDICT N. AKANEGBU	M	UPP	624	

<b>PERCENTAGE TURNOUT</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
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**SOURCE:** <http://www.inecnigeria.org/?inecnews=anambra-governorship-election-results> Sourced on January 15, 2018 at 1:32pm. Adjustment by researcher

As is shown on Table 2, percentage turnout for the election stood at 26.3.

To show that low voter turnout is a trend in governorship elections in Anambra State, the result of 2017 election was not different as is shown on Table 3:

**TABLE 3: INEC FINAL RESULTS FOR 2017 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

Registered voters – 2,064,134  
 Accredited voters – 457,311  
 Rejected votes – 26, 457  
 % Votes cast – 21.74 (Reason: not all accredited voters voted)

Total votes cast – 448,771  
 Valid Votes – 422,314  
 % Turnout – 22.16

S/N	LGAs	REGISTERED VOTERS	ACCREDITED VOTERS
1	Njikoka	88, 793	28, 346
2	Dunukofia	63, 861	18, 632
3	Awka South	149, 279	36, 114
4	Ayamelum	60, 034	23, 837
5	Anaocha	89, 515	25, 474
6	Orumba South	63, 149	16, 528
7	Ekwusigo	73, 800	20, 196
8	Aguata	121, 009	27, 883
9	Onitsha North	127, 865	20, 806
10	Ogbaru	149, 070	16, 049
11	Idemili South	94, 197	14, 205
12	Oyi	89, 157	19, 931
13	Orumba North	79, 022	18, 339
14	Awka North	54, 390	16, 119
15	Onitsha South	145, 876	14, 634
16	Ihiala	124, 588	29, 999
17	Anambra East	72, 886	29, 299
18	Nnewi South	72, 431	18, 658
19	Anambra West	61, 012	15, 628
20	Idemili North	178, 938	25, 254 or 14.11%
21	Nnewi North	115, 662	21, 880

**Source:** <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/249944-anambradecides2017-live-updates-ince-official-results.html> Sourced on January 12, 2018 at 6:55pm. Tabulation by researcher.

As can be seen from the table, voters that participated in the poll were less than a quarter of the entire registered voters. In fact, the percentage turnout was even lower than that of the 2013 as it stood at 22.16 percent where percentage of actual votes cast was 21.74 percent as not all the accredited voters eventually voted, just like in the preceding election of 2013. As a matter of fact, out of the 2, 064,134 registered voters for the 2017 governorship election, only 457, 311

were accredited voters. And as noted earlier, not all the 457,311 eventually voted as total votes cast were 448,771.

A review of performance per local government area in the election shows a disturbing trend. Take Idemili North for example. Whereas a total of 5, 106 more eligible voters registered between the 2013 and 2017 governorship elections (178, 938 registered for 2017 poll as against 173, 832 of 2013), the difference between accredited voters for 2017 and 2013 elections stood at paltry 1, 161. For the 2017 election in the local government, out of the 178, 938 registered voters, only 25, 254, representing 14. 11 percent turned out to vote.

In Ogbaru and despite the fact that candidate of the largest opposition political party in the state, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Oseloka Henry Obaze comes from the local government area, only 16, 049 voters turned out to vote, out of the 149, 070 registered voters. In Anambra East where the eventual winner of the election (Willie Obiano of All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA) and the first runner-up, Tony Nwoye of All Progressives Congress (APC) come from, only 29, 299 out of 72, 886 registered voters turned out to vote. Also at Ihiala with voting strength of 124, 588 registered voters, only 29, 999 turned out; Onitsha South 14, 634 out of 145, 876; Awka South 36, 114 out of 149, 279 registered voters; Aguata 27, 883 out of 121, 009; Onitsha North 20, 806 out of 127, 865 registered voters and Nnewi North 21, 880 out of 115, 662 registered voters.

The implication of the reviewed figures for the 2010-2017 governorship polls is clear: low voter turnout in Anambra governorship poll is a trend. When that fact is weighed across Nigeria, PremiumTimes (2018) affirms that voter turnout has remained a challenge to the Nigerian political process, disclosing that in 2001, Nigeria, with 50.3 percent, was one of the countries with the lowest level of voter turnout in the world, ranked 157<sup>th</sup> of 169 countries. According to it, since then, voter turnout in elections has been declining with the lowest being the 2015 election which recorded just 43.65 percent and a much lower voting age turnout of 32.11 percent.

## **FACTORS THAT ACCOUNT FOR LOW VOTERS' TURNOUT IN ANAMBRA STATE**

PremiumTimes (2017) notes that the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) claimed credit for the low voter turnout for the 2017 governorship election in Anambra State. It reports that many Anambra residents were not able to vote due to discrepancies in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) voters registers and the failure of many card reader machines. It equally reports that 2007 governorship election in same state (which though is outside the scope of this research) was marred by allegations of massive rigging.

The particularity of the low turnout in the 2017 governorship election was, however, confusing to the political class. Take an example. The PDP candidate, Oseloka Obaze was quoted by PremiumTimes as having expressed that, “You can explain the situation in the cities that people travelled to the villages to vote. But in the villages, there seemed to be a mix up”.

The newspaper quoted the director, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Idayat Hassan as having raised alarm that the low voter turnout during elections in Anambra State raises critical questions on what democracy means to the people in the state and country, and how they judge the system. Noting that some of the issues include questions of trust in the government by the people, the newspaper quoted Hassan as having cautioned that if the trend does not change, then it means the country is still faced with lots of challenges going forward. She noted that the threat by IPOB, unusual security presence in the state in the run-up to the elections as well as the nature of politics may have played roles in the poor turnout of voters during the elections as some people could have become afraid of violence and political fracas at polling units among contesting political parties.

Emphatically she said, “If Idemili North, one of the most populous local governments in the state with about 180, 000 people had only 25, 000 people or 14 percent turnout, then this tells a story that the appetite of the people for democracy is going lower and something needs to be done about it. It is not just the civil society or media that need to take urgent action, but also the politicians as well. People need to be concerned about the level of governance and the paraphernalia that goes into policy making”.

Still, the newspaper quoted the governorship candidate of the United Progressive Party (UPP) and former Minister of Aviation, Osita Chidoka as having said that he lost because he would not play the usual money politics. According to him, he rejected god-fatherism and money politics and did not attack anybody before, during and after the campaigns, further noting that voters on the election day traded their votes because they doubted that the politicians would truly represent their interest.

He said, “While our message resonated with the people, they doubted that the political class cared about them. They voted for the highest bidder. I insisted we will not pay for votes. The decision not to pay ended our good run. We accept the voters’ decision. We also heard our people by their turnout and transactional approach. We lost to superior financial firepower”.

On the other hand and according to PremiumTimes, APGA and APC both admitted knowing that voters were induced with money and other gifts during the 2017 Anambra governorship election. This admission on its own and coming from political parties invariably shows and reinforces the factors which account for low voter turnouts in successive governorship elections in Anambra state.

## **SUMMARY**

This work was necessitated by the problem of low voter turnout in Anambra governorship elections. Mainly, the worry is three dimensional. The first is whether the low voter turnout in Anambra governorship elections is a trend. Then what factors account for this phenomenon? Thirdly, does the low voter turnout in the elections have negative implications for sustenance of Nigeria’s democracy? The three concerns form the problems of the study. Thus, the research sought to provide answers to the questions by focusing on 2010-2017 governorship elections in the state.

To provide the answers, the documentary method was used in collecting data for the work. Thus, data was collated from secondary sources. These sources include data sheet of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), independent report by electoral advocacy group,

textbooks, journals and newspaper. Analysis of the data was done using qualitative descriptive approach. This entails presentation and analysis of the data in form of written report.

The work found that low voter turnout is a trend in Anambra governorship elections, a phenomenon which signifies that the appetite of the people for democracy is consistently going lower. In fact, it was found that percentage turnout in the 2010-2017 governorship elections in the state studied in this work never got up to 30, when the number of the accredited voters was examined side by side the number of registered voters in each of the elections.

The data analyzed revealed that the 2010 governorship election recorded mere 16 percent turnout while the turnout for 2013 and 2017 elections stood at 26.3 and 22.16 respectively. It was found that although turnout for 2013 was about 10 percent higher than the preceding election, that is 26.3 percent as against 16 percent, the turnout fell by four percent in successive 2017 election, that is 22.16 percent as against 26.3 percent.

Other finding includes the fact that the low voter turnout is an offshoot of distrust in the government by the people. It was discovered that the apathy raises critical questions on what democracy means to the people of the state that double as citizens of the country and how they judge the system.

Other factors fuelling the failure by most of the registered voters to turn out to vote in elections, according to the findings of this research, have to do with the nature of politics played in the state which manifests in forms of political violence, influence of money politics and doubts about the political class' sincerity to represent the interest of electorate when eventually voted into office.

## **CONCLUSION**

The overall objective was to evaluate low voter turnout in Anambra State governorship elections vis a vis its influence on the sustenance of the country's democracy. The research work established that the apathy raises critical questions on what democracy means to the people and how they judge the system. It revealed distrust in this system of government as well as in the

political class by the people which explains why they boycott voting adjudged as the most fundamental act of political participation in a democracy.

The underlying fact is that the majority of the people who constitute the registered voters but who fail to turn out to vote at elections do not care about democracy which has not yielded the desired fruit of good governance. The concomitant worry is that the (persisting) decline in the people's interest in the political process affirmed through boycott of elections can breed bad governance and ultimately lead to collapse of democracy in the country.

The first specific objective of the research work was to assess if low voter turnout is a trend in governorship elections in Anambra State. In examining this, governorship elections for the period 2010-2017 were considered. And the finding is that low voter turnout has become persistent with each election. It remains so, regardless of whether the incumbent governor is seeking re-election (as in 2017 when Willie Obiano sought for a second term in office) or not (as in 2013 when the then outgoing Peter Obi was not eligible for another term in office). Same is the case when a separatist group, for instance the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which has strong structural base in the state, urged for a boycott (as in 2017 election) and when there was no such threat (as in the other elections). Also, the trend persists when the number of political parties for the election is comparatively less (as in 2010 and 2013 elections) and when the number is high (as in 2017 when a total of 37 candidates sought for votes. In the face of this persisting factor, it then becomes imperative that necessary action is taken in order to reawaken voters' interest in elections

The second objective was to explore the factors that account for low voter turnout in Anambra governorship elections. This is predicated upon the fact that the lack of interest in elections by the eligible voters does not happen for nothing. Thus, the trend of low voter turnout in elections is being engineered by the nature of politics played in the state. This manifests in forms of electoral violence as well as the influence of money in politics of the state. Besides, the voters doubt the sincerity of the political class to represent their interests when eventually voted into offices. This means that something needs to be done about the nature of politics being played in

the state while the political class needs to build up confidence of the electorate in the electoral system by representing the voters' interest when voted into office.

The third objective was to examine the implications of the low voter turnout on sustenance of democracy in the country. The first among the implications is that elections are being regarded as a devalued element of the country's democratic process. Also, the low voter turnout impinges on the emergence of right candidates after elections and this ultimately breeds bad governance in the country. Good governance is a necessary element of democracy. The costliest implication, obviously, is that the persisting low voters' turnout during elections can lead to the collapse of the country's democracy. With this, it can therefore be concluded that low voter turnout during elections poses great danger to Nigeria's democracy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the conclusion highlighted above, the following recommendations can be made. There is need for the entrenchment of good governance and effective government responsiveness at all levels of government in the country's political environment. This can work effectively when the political class works assiduously to protect the interest of the electorate when voted into office. This entails making the people the central focus of governance and meeting the yearnings of the people. Good governance, outside of the responsive component, also encompasses accountability, openness, inclusiveness and prudence. These essential components need to be injected and sustained in the political system in order to guarantee the interest of the people in democracy. After all, this is what democracy entails.

Besides, there is equally the need for a reform in the nature of politics played in the country's political system. As established by the findings of the research, politics as it is being played in Anambra State is dotted with such negative propensities such as electoral violence and overbearing influence of money. Such electoral violence is the reason for the usual heavy deployment of armed security forces before, during and even after elections. This situation creates an atmosphere of fear around voters and discourages them from going out to vote on election days.

On the other hand, the level of involvement of money in electoral process, particularly the act of using money to induce voters should be brought to check. In order to achieve result in this regards, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) needs to enforce the provisions of the 2010 electoral act (as amended) which mandate all political parties to submit to the commission statement of their assets and all liabilities as well as detailed annual statement and analysis of their sources of funds and accounts. The commission should also ensure that political parties do not exceed the maximum limit of expenditure during elections, while ensuring that politicians and political parties that engage in excessive and massive use of money for elections, including the illegal act of vote-buying are punished accordingly.

Closely related to this is the need to ensure that the electoral body is free from external manipulations and interferences. This recommendation is predicated upon the fact that where such a critical umpire is partial, with its credibility doubtful, the people will, concomitantly, not show the level of interest expected of them in elections conducted by the tainted commission. The end result, therefore, is that majority of voters will fail to turn out to vote in the elections. In other words, their interest in elections will atrophize and this is a big threat for democracy in the country. The import of this recommendation, in essence, is that the electoral commission needs to be truly independent. It should be strengthened to effectively play credible roles in elections in the country.

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