

## ASSESSMENT OF VOTERS' BEHAVIOUR ON 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is on the assessment of voters' behaviour on 2019 general elections in Nigeria: the challenges of voter's behaviour in Nigeria are numerous, but ethnicity and personality of contestant is very much a challenge across Nigerian states when it comes to voter's behaviours. The methodology used in arriving at data used in this paper was purely secondary method of data collection, because the paper "itself" is descriptive research. The challenges affecting voter's behaviour in Nigeria with reference to Nigeria ranges from ethnicity, religion, level of illiteracy, personality traits and institutional challenges. The paper adopted the Elite theory of Mosca and Pareto for its theoretical frame work and posited by way of recommendation(s) that the government must improve the quality of education of its people to reduce the manipulation of their voter's behaviour during election especially general elections.*

**Keywords:** *Voter's Behaviour, Democracy, General Elections, Political Party, Election.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Nigeria is the largest country in Africa with majority of states and vast landmass when compared to other African States; it operates various forms of party system ranging from one party system, multiparty system irrespective of the forms of party system it operate one thing is common the practices and that is voting. Most scholars in the field of sociology and Anthropology want to equate voting to franchise; in all honesty there is a huge difference between both concepts in political science and or international Relations. This paper does not want to consider the difference of both term rather is a paper wants to consider the challenges of voters' behaviour in Africa with bias in consider voter's behaviour in Nigeria's General Election especially in the 2019 Elections.

It is however pertinent to consider the meaning of voting before providing clues to voting behaviour in line with challenges associated with it. Voting ordinarily is the act of choosing a representative through casting of ballot to the preferred candidate of the voter's chose. Politically voting is one of the Niles adopted by a country's electoral system in which ballots are used to define the choice of the voter out the candidate he/she prefers to an election. In modern democracy the presenters see voting as a radical actuality use by electorate to show discordance or concordance about a choice of candidate this makes the "principles" of franchise tick. As the voters who are also regarded as electorate are able to participate in the political process this helps the community or wider society where this voting is taking place.

Although voting is a civilised way of expressing consent or discontent within an institutional framework, when electorates are deprived of voting which is legitimate, electorate can choose illegitimate means in expressing discontent or content and in most cases in Africa especially in Nigeria violence is one sure way which electorate can express their participation and the aftermath of this process call violence is usually against legitimacy and justice with consequence(s) against the system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the years, there are many reasons that have accounted for voters' behaviour especially as it affects the 2019 General Elections, poverty, illiteracy, ethnicity, the roles of political partied and the role of the electoral umpire could have accounted for voters' behaviour in the 2019 General Elections.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this paper is to among others to;

- i. examine whether poverty, illiteracy, ethnicity is a factor that affects voters' behaviour.
- ii. examine the influence of political parties and electoral umpire on voters' behaviour.

## 2. Methodology

The descriptive methodology was adopted for this study, although the study did not raise any study question(s), but the topic provided clue to the direction for which it should go. Voters behaviour have to be empirically described with academic "ingredients" such as the type of voting, the electoral system, voter behaviours and the challenges or shortcomings on voters behaviour with particular case of Nigeria.

Secondary method of data collection was employ as various textbooks, journal and other scholarly materials both published and unpublished was relied upon to achieve description of the study under review.

The scope of the study was generally to consider the factor militating against voters' behaviour in Africa, with restriction to the challenges of voters' behaviour in Nigeria. The choice of Nigeria is due to the fact that apart from Nigeria been the largest population in Africa, Nigeria have various religions densely represented and the population of Nigeria is larger to some twenty Africa countries put together and above all Nigeria is seen as a country with great history and tradition, the essence of the scope is to reduce bias when conclusion and recommendation is been made.

## 3. Conceptual Analysis

The concept to be reviewed are general election, political party, democracy, election and voter's behaviour.

**i. General Election:** General election is a concept used in Nigeria to relate to the process of recruiting individuals to fill the positions of the President, Vice President, members of the House of Representatives and members of the Senate through the process of an election, supervised by the electoral empires called the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC).

**ii. Political Party:** Political parties are association of like mind individuals with common ideology coming together with the hope of contesting and winning elections for the purpose of driving the machinery of government to provide good and better life. It also an organised group of citizen, who act together as a political unit, having distinctive aims and objectives involving political questions in the state and acting together and seeking to obtain control of government Dibia (2005).

**iii. Democracy:** This simply means a form of government where the minority are accommodated to have their say, while the majority have their way in order to drive the will of leadership. Democracy is a majority rule for the benefit of the majority.

**iv. Election:** This is the process under democracy through which people or citizens exercise their freedom and inalienable right to organise their life and choose those whom they delegate their rights as representative. In other words, an election means “that sovereignty belongs to the people and those who serve in public offices must do so of the pleasure of the electorate” (Ikedi, 2010). Election is a legitimate process employed by the citizens in the recruitment of individuals to fill a particular office for the purpose of carrying out bureaucratic functions.

**v. Voter's Behaviour:** Voter's behaviour is the way an electorate behave before the election day and after the election day within and outside the voting area within an electoral context in a political system. Voter's behaviour can also be used to mean the rationality behind the conduct and attitude of a voter toward a particular electoral process and a political system.

Voting behaviour can simply be defined as the ability of individual(s) express in their content and or discontent within an institutional framework (Lipset, 1959). This is made possible in most societies because of the extension of franchise and the proliferation of interest groups such as trade unions and so on.

Voting behaviour are seen as all those attitude electorate display or tend to display in making choice on who to vote for or not to vote for and such attitude are define by several factor (Dibie, 2012) voter's behaviour is a form of electoral behaviour by a person, to make inference and prediction about an attitude concerning a voting decision, and the factors that influence the choice of this behaviour are sex, race, culture or religion (Olayemi, 2009). Voter behaviour is one of the germane issues in political participation in liberal democracies all over the world.

Again, voters behaviour pertains to individual to take actions or not to take actions in respect of participating in an elections that requires him to elect councillors, Local Government chairmen, state Assembly members, Governor, members House of representatives, senator and vice president and the president, under the supervision of Electoral umpire who regulates the pattern and choice to be used in such election (Dibie, 2012).

The relevance of voter's behaviour is as good as the importance for political participation in any democracy therefore the importance of positive voter's behaviour are;

- a. It allows for proper working of government and its institutional goals to be achieved.
- b. It allows proper opinions to be ventilated in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of governance.
- c. It allows representative of uniformity and congruity to be achieved within a society.
- d. It provides ground for the voters to demand for good governance, accountability and transparency.
- e. Voter's behaviour allows the population to be aware of the day - to - day management of their country as power belongs to them. (Marcus et al 2000)

If voter behaviour has been established as the individuals having the ability to express their content or discontent within institutional framework, it means that this is made possible in most societies of Africa because of the extension of formalise and the proliferation of interest group such as the trade unions, and other pressure groups and will society organisations present in Africa in nearly all the third world countries especially Africa the level of poverty, illiteracy, personality trait, ethnicity and religion influence voters behaviour have been influenced by ethnicity and the personality of the constant. (Sheriff, 2015) the least of factor that influence voter's behaviour is the party programmes, electorates in Africa through the practice of party democracy does not necessarily consider party programmes they have to be so because political parties are built around the influence of a personality instead of the other way round (Sheriff, 2015).

In most of the National Elections, ethnicity influence voter's behaviour in Nigeria, ethnicity and religion greatly influence the people's pattern of voting no wonder Nigeria is suffering from good leadership due to the poor nature of processes that is influenced by ethnic and religious affiliation. Nobody is saying that ethnicity and religion cannot throw up reliable candidate but what the presenters are saying is that when premedial sentiments influence voters behaviour it is difficult to "harvest" the best or one of the best candidate in an elections this have however being the reason for poor or bad leadership in Abuja especially in Nigeria (Mutiullah, 2014).

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

There are so many theories that can be used to explain the challenges of voters' behaviour in Africa, especially in Nigeria, but for the purpose of this paper, the presenters shall be relying and adopting the ELITE theory; the choice of this is because elite theory vividly captures the

analyses and nature of power distribution in the society. There are so many theories that presented their view about the elite theory. But this paper shall be adopting also the views of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, (Sheriff, 2014). Elite theory has its origin in the work of two Italian sociologists, Vilfredo Pareto (1848 - 1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858 - 1941). They were the first to develop the theory, so they are regarded as the proponents of the Elite theory. Mosca and Pareto agreed that the personal qualities of the individuals in society separate rulers from the ruled, they owe their position to their superiority, their personal characteristics include the “weeping-up” of sentiment to influence the behaviour of voters. However these characteristics according to Mosca include organizational ability which politicians and public office seekers in Africa see as "mobilization" and talent which are the basis for leadership, in Africa what Mosca refers to as talent is seen as "smartness" the ability to manipulate the electoral process at the advantage of gaining voters' patronage or sympathy. To Pareto, being cunning, craftiness and intelligence are the pre-requisite for what the behaviour of voters are is the ability of those contesting elections to use their "cunningness" and “craftiness” to influence the choice of voter's behaviour in a particular way.

Apart from these natural endowments, other versions of elite theory argued that the hierarchical organization of social institutions allows an immunity to monopolise, this exactly is what is happening in Africa, these minorities manipulate, ethnicity, religion, illiteracy and poverty of the mass to influence the voters' behaviour in a particular electoral or political process (Bottorino, 1966). Although there are various types of Elites theory, they however share some similarities and differences, the "job" of this paper is not to venture into their differences and similarities rather to pin-point the salient issues discussed by Pareto and Mosca that help to shape this paper. Pareto in his analysis of elite rule in human society, placed much emphasis on the psychological traits as the basis of elite manipulation of voters' behaviour. There are two kinds of elite “the ruling elite and the ruled elites”, the behaviour of the ruled is the reason for the emergence of the ruling elite. And to continue to remain relevant the psychology of the voters needs to be manipulated, so for Pareto when one governing elite replaces another it is "circulation of elites"

For Mosca, he subscribes to this assertion, individual for elite rule, differ from one society to another thereby, the statement of the presenters that ethnicity, level of poverty and personality are the commonest attributes that pose a challenge to voters' behaviour in Africa. In Nigeria the factors in addition are religion, level of literacy which may differ from another African country as attributes that influence voter's behaviour. In some societies of Africa courage and bravery

in battle provide access to the elite. In other society it may be capacity and skill needed to acquire wealth (Haralambos, 1980). However, it will not be true to say that there no challenges militating against the choice of Elite theory by Mosca and Pareto, the challenge associated with their view as it relate to this paper are;

- i. Failure of Elite theory to provide yardstick for measuring the styles of the elite in grabbing power.
- ii. The emphasis centre mostly on power elite, little or nothing is said about the ruled manipulation which is the “meat” of the matter.
- iii. Elite theory is economical with the truth about the behavioural pattern of voters, it centre only on power distribution.

## 5. Body of Work

### The Challenges of Voter’s Behaviour

Whether uninformed voting behaviour and or informed voters behaviour, the threat against voter's behaviour in Africa are the same, even though the magnitude of such challenges against voter's behaviour differs from one country to another, however there six visible challenges militating against vote's behaviour in Africa and these are:

- i. **The Level of Poverty:** Africa is seen as one of the most backward continents in the world, one of the reason(s) deduced for this assertion is the level of povertyness of the people, and poverty of the African voter tend to affect his behavioural pattern, such voter may likely cast his ballot for those candidate(s) that are willing to satisfy their lack and this certainly have influence negatively money polities in Africa. In Nigeria's 2019 General Election most parties and their candidates were unable to sell their candidacy through manifestoes of their party rather most politicians in Nigeria's 2019 General Elections took advantage of the level of poverty and began to distribute money to electorate, some electorate sold their permanent voter card (PVC) forty-eight hours before the elections as low as two thousand naira (N2,000) to be returned back to them after the elections. And this impacted negatively to the choice of candidate that emerges victorious by the end of the election. The impact of this is that credible and disciplined leadership are denied as the voting culture and pattern where disrupted, there by laying negative precedent

for looters to emerge at the detriment of good leadership in Nigeria and by large Africa (Ujo, 2022).

ii. **The Challenge of Illiteracy:** Ignorance and uneducatedness of majority of the voters in Africa is one that has made their choice during elections very parochial and uninformed. The level of education of voter in Africa provides the opportunity for voter to behave or react in certain manner. Illiteracy does not provide the leverage for an electorate to assimilate party's manifestos whether to enable him arrive at informed decision on how to vote, who to vote and reason(s) for choosing a particular party candidate and the voter's behaviour most often are manipulated by overzealous politicians who may want to exploit them. Some politicians on the day of voting try to persuade the voters not to show up that there is no need, and that elections have been won and lost, because these voters are "deformed" by their level of illiteracy they tend to stay away and persuade the likes of them to boycott the elections. That is why in so many African countries the level of voter boycott and apathy is on the increase which tends to undermine the basic tenants of democracy around Africa (Zoaka, 2022).

iii. **The Challenge of Ethnicity:** Countries in Africa and built on clanship, kingradeship and caliphate system where this system are not present family and cultural tie exist, this have largely affected voters behaviour, voters tend to show attitude toward their ethnic and cultural lineage so much that credibility, efficiency and meritocracy are sacrificed on the 'alter' of ethnicity. Electorates in Africa at time boycott election on the basis that someone from their cultural or ethnic lineage is not a contestant for such an election in most cases this account for a particular character to be exhibited, people are behaviourally patterned to support candidates from the ethnic group during and bafter election not minding the competence or incompetence of such candidates the statement you often hear is that this "person is our won we have to support him". This election is our turn "let our son go there" and the implication of this is that most time true representation suffers, and that is why in most African countries someone can be president for between 20-35 years he tend to bend the rules to favour his re-election and this action is justified by "ethnicity" (Schekkan & Repucci, 2019).

iv. **The Challenge of Religion:** In most national elections organized by countries of Africa, religion influences the pattern of voting. And the most pronounced religion is Christianity and Islamism, that is not say that other religion does not exist, but it is very difficult to find the most top political offices in most African countries not been occupied either by those of Christian faith or Islamic faith. Religion is mostly used in Africa electioneering process to influence the voting



behaviour of the people and that is why most leadership in Africa are divided along ethnic and religious line. Islamic followers often lay claim to certain leadership position as their right according to their Quar'an that they must occupy those position on the other hand those that practice Christianity will always say that the Bible pronounce that they are the head and not the tail, they also want to lay claims to certain position even without organizing an election and these believe shape and tend to reshape voter's behaviour along these religious sentiments and bias (Diamond, 2015).

v. **The Challenges of Personality Traits of Contestant:** Voter's behaviour are influence by the personality of the persons going into the elections, it has become a challenge for most electorate to maintain party supremacy over choice of candidate, today in Africa the level of party indiscipline, party disloyalty and anti-party is on the increase due to the challenge mentioned above. Party "faithful" and voters do not want to solely believe in party democracy. Their choice, attitudes, character and disposition on how they behave voting wise have been influence by the personality of the individual going in for elections (Kingsley, 2019).

vi. **Institutional Challenges:** The institutions involve in managing the electoral process is also a factor that can influence the choice of voters to behave in certain way, for example, the appointment of electoral umpire, security personnel and other election officials can influence voter behaviour in protesting and / or boycotting the election and this have become a noticeable trend in most election in Africa like in Libya, Egypt after the Arab Spring recently in Ethiopia, Somalia, Southern Sudan, Zimbabwe, elections where, boycotted to register their grievance against the institutions constituted to Conduct the elections (Zoaka, 2022).

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the preview made in this paper, voter's behaviour is a form of democratic societies. And this work have phenomenon of democratic societies. And this work have agreed that votes behaviours in Africa are fraught with challenges, these challenges range from levels of poverty, illiteracy, ethnicity, religion, personality, quality and institutional challenges. In pluralist societies in most African states, the participation of a large mass of people in government is not only unnecessary but cumbersome and undesirable. But this would appear to be the case, if democracy in Africa operates as they suggest, with the elites in Africa representing the interest of the masses or the majority then there must be challenges militating against the electorate in achieving a decent or acceptable voting behaviour.

The religion elites, traditional elites, economic elites and political elites have manipulated several sentiments to undermine the best of voter's behaviour and that is why Africa as a continent is greatly suffering from "bereavement" of good and accountable leadership. This paper could not have come better than now, when Africa in respective of the region is suffering from under development, squalor, poor leadership and backwardness and poor voter's behaviour is one of the reason(s) why it has to be so. In Nigeria's general election of 2019 all the challenges highlighted have been exploited to favour one particular candidate or another.

In Nigeria and most of the less developed societies of Africa, the paucity of statistical data make it impossible for the presenters to figuratively present the level of voters behaviour the poverty condition, ethnic consideration and religious sentiment created by the political and economic elites are parts of the challenge that as effected voters attitude toward political participation in Africa as it affect Nigeria.

However, having established those factors that pose as a challenge to voters behaviour, this paper want to provide suggestions by way of recommendation that will help mitigate those challenges highlighted, and they are:

- a. In other to deal with the challenges of poverty, government should through social safety Net be able to deal with the issue of poverty. Through provision of jobs to it citizens, for those who cannot be provided, job governments in Africa should be able to provide stipend to carter for their immediate needs like feeding, clothing and shelter. To coordinate this, there should be a commission set-up to be called National Commission for Social Safety Need (N.C.S.S.N) while retaining other poverty Alleviation programmes that has been put in place.
- b. The challenge of illiteracy is one that has negatively influence voter's behaviour in Nigeria, the paper is suggesting that countries of Africa must massively invest in education of the African voters, infact, African countries should adopt the Cuban style of Education that is TRAIN ONE, TO EDUCUATE ONE programme. This programme if adopted will reduce the level of illiteracy in African voters, who have exhibited wrong behaviour of voting over the years.
- c. All clauses that are pro-ethnic in nature should be removed from our electoral have interest forms for election from the electoral umpire and political parties as this help to promote ethnicity. On the part of the voters political parties that do not reflect national

spread not be registered to recruit leadership of the country. This will help to down-play the challenges of voter's behaviour in political participation.

d. Political parties must be proactive to ensure that religion is not use as a spring board during their campaign and jingles. Electoral umpire must be firm and decisive in dealing with issues relating to elections during party registrations, pre-party and party elections, heavy sanctions and fines must be imposed on defaulting political parties, individual(s) and group with strong sentiments on religion.

e. Electoral umpire, political parties and the security agencies must be able to "weed out" candidate that hide under personality traits to undermine the electoral process through vote buying, sponsorship of violence and distributing of money and materials before, during and maybe after the elections in other to negatively influence voters behaviour. By legislation or Act of National Assembly, this can be achieved.

f. Political parties, pressure Groups, the media, the international communities etc. must be allowed to make an input into the Electoral Management Board, and by extensions the Electoral Commission in other to deal with institutional challenges by checkmating the activities of institutions like the security agency that contribute to poor voters behaviour as the inclusion of the afore mentioned will create and build voters confident and improve their behaviour.

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