



## Voters Apathy and Voters Education in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Fourth Republic (1999-2023)

UKPONMWAN OSAYANDE OMIGIE, JOYCE OKE IDAHOSA  
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

**Abstract.** Voters' apathy has emerged as a significant challenge to the democratic process in Nigeria, particularly during the Fourth Republic (1999-2023). This study examines the factors contributing to low voters' turnout and the implications of insufficient voters' education on civic engagement. Through a comprehensive analysis of electoral patterns, demographic trends, and the effectiveness of voters' education initiatives, this assessment highlights the critical role that informed participation plays in shaping a robust democracy. The findings reveal a complex interplay between voters' apathy and voters' education. Furthermore, the paper underscores the necessity for targeted educational programs from childhood to enhance civic awareness and motivate active participation in the electoral process. By exploring these dimensions, the study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and stakeholders committed to revitalizing democratic engagement in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Voters' Apathy, Voters' Education and Behaviour

### 1. Introduction

Representative democracy world over is built on active participation of eligible citizens in the electoral process. However, the practice of this exercise in both old and emerging democracy depends on the regime type in the polity concerned. Thus, the principle upon which democratic government rests is put at the risk of survival. In many democracies, (especially emerging ones), the participation of the citizenry in the electoral process is often hampered by nuance often put in place by the ruling elites. Since the return of democracy to Nigeria, the country as successfully conducted seven successive elections with not higher than 40% of the nation's population involve in selecting who governs them. This had been occasioned by a regular decline

in voters turn out in the nation. Today the Nigeria population is about two hundred and thirty five million, six hundred and forty thousand five hundred and forty nine (Countrymeterinfo 2025). Of this figure, only 27% of eligible voters decided who became Nigeria's president becomes in 2023 (Premiumtimesng, 2025), while the rest 73% were uninterested in the electoral process. This trend reflects the general pattern in the elections conducted so far in the fourth republic. From 1999 the nation has continually moved towards voter apathy in a geometric progression with eligible voters losing interest in the country's electoral process, Scholars have conducted research extensively to look at the reasons why voters' apathy is on the increase. A study conducted by Omoregie and Omigie opined that "electoral fraud is a major reason for voter apathy" Omoregie and Omigie (2024), They continued that, due to electoral fraud, citizens feel that their votes do not count and, as such, the best thing to do is to stay away from voting to keep their sanity. Ugbagu and Oyemaobi provided evidence from three consecutive elections in their study on South-east Nigeria. Ugbagu and Oyemaobi (2023) Their study discovered and attributed the reason for voter apathy in the region to the entrepreneurial nature of people in the region as one reason that has impeded their engagement. The second reason for voters' apathy in South-east Nigeria is that they feel suppressed, cheated, and neglected. As such, they prefer to focus on their business and forget about the electoral processes.

While this reason of theirs sounds convincing, it can only be taken as some of the reasons for voters' apathy in Nigeria. This study therefore focuses on the lack of proper voters' education as the reason for voters' apathy in Nigeria.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Voters' apathy has significantly permeated Nigeria's democratic landscape resulting in a consistent decline in voters' turnout in each election cycle. This trend has adversely affected the quality of leaders elected over time, paving the way for manipulation of voting outcomes. Presently, Nigeria is at the crossroads where the electoral process has become commercialized. The political class, recognizing that many citizens are disengaged from the electoral process, fostered a culture of vote monetization, (appealing to disillusioned individuals who increasingly view voting as a financial transaction rather than a genuine participation in democracy). As a result, many citizens approach elections not with a true desire to engage but rather to exchange their votes for monetary gain. This situation has led to a reality where elected leaders, (believing they have purchased their way into power), show little concern for the citizens. The consequences of this trend manifest in the form of inadequate basic amenities, broken promises and harsh, unresponsive government policies.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- What is the cause of voter apathy
- What are the effects of voter apathy
- What the relationship between voter apathy and voter education

### 1.3 Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

- To examine the possible cause of voters' apathy in Nigeria
- To analyze the effect of voters' apathy in Nigeria
- To access the relationship between voters' education and voters' apathy in Nigeria

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study deployed the social learning theory for its analysis. The social leaning theory as propounded by psychologist Albert Bandura, posits that learning takes place through observation, imitation, and modeling, and is shaped by factors like attention, motivation, attitudes, and emotions. It considers the interplay between environmental and cognitive elements that influence how individuals learn.

The theory posits that learning happens as individuals witness the outcomes of others' behaviours. The model

extends beyond behavioural theories, which argues that all actions are acquired through conditioning, as well as cognitive theories that emphasize psychological factors such as attention and memory. According to Bandura, individuals witness behaviour either directly through social interactions or indirectly by watching behaviour depicted in media. Behaviours that receive rewards are more likely to be copied, while those that face punishment are typically avoided.

The social learning theory has three basic elements that are core to its application. They are: (A) the concept suggests that individuals can acquire knowledge by watching others. (B), it emphasizes that mental states within a person play a crucial role in this learning process. (C), this theory acknowledges that learning something does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour. Applying this theory to voters' apathy and voters' education, just like the theory posit that learning is transmitted, according to Agbebaku (2000) political culture are concerned with orientations towards political activities, these political activities are transmitted from infancy to adulthood.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research methodology, it made use of secondary data which included textbooks, journals, newspaper publications and official elections results

## 4. Voter's Apathy in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria

Voter apathy refers to the disinterest exhibited by eligible voters towards participating in elections or the electoral processes within a country, Omoregie & Omigie (2024). The term originates from the Greeks, literally meaning "without feelings." It indicates a lack of enthusiasm among the populace for the electoral process, (especially in terms of voting). Although there are various interpretations of apathy, it generally signifies the absence of interest. Broadly speaking voters' apathy denotes a lack of engagement in elections. Yakubu (2012), defines it as "the indifference of electorates towards electoral processes like voting." Similarly, Cloud (2010) describes it as a scenario where eligible voters abstain from participating in public elections.

However, Agaigbe (2020) argues that it extends beyond mere indifference; it reflects voters' insensitivity to electoral processes, (especially voting), stemming from disenfranchisement in the political arena, ignorance, and insufficient education. It is important to recognize that 30% of

disenfranchisement of Nigerian voters is not a result of self-disfranchisement but rather a reaction to the fraudulent nature of the electoral process, including electoral fraud and a lack of electoral education, Omoregie & Omigie (2024). The consequence of this is low voters' turnout. Statistics indicate that voter turnout has consistently declined since the 2003 election, which recorded the highest level of voter participation since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The 2003 elections experienced a turnout of 67% while the 2007 elections saw a decline to 57% followed by 54.53% in 2011, 40% in 2015, and a further drop to just 34.06% in the 2019 elections, in the recent off-season election in Osun State, out of more than 1,955,657 registered voters, slightly over 800,000 voters participated on Election Day. Prior to the 2023 general elections, politicians, political analysts, and influential leaders urged Nigerians to refrain from political disputes and come out on Election Day to vote for their preferred candidates based on their conscience. Leading up to the 2023 general elections, there were significant efforts to encourage Nigerians to engage actively in the electoral process. Registration periods were extended to enable citizens to register for their Personal Voter's Card (PVC) to participate in the elections. All these measures were aimed to promote greater political engagement and voters' turnout for the elections.

Analyzing Nigeria's political history, several factors have contributed to voters' apathy; Omoregie & Omigie (2024) identify electoral fraud as a key contributor, while Obiora in Nwankwo (2008) suggests that the loss of trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has led to the observed voters' apathy in Nigeria. Many political

analysts believe that votes do not truly matter, claiming that the outcomes of most Nigerian elections are essentially pre-ordained, that the electoral process is fraught with violence, and that the political class is unworthy of their positions due to their perceived insincerity regarding electoral promises and the continual failure of political parties and candidates to fulfill their electoral promises.

While the issues mentioned above are valid, it is crucial to understand that all problems leading to voter's apathy stem from an erroneous political culture developed since the inception of the country's representative democracy. The nation has consistently lacked political, electoral, and, democratic culture, by hastily adopting representative democracy without adequately educating citizens about its principles. Citizens are misled into believing that winners can be declared in elections irrespective of their participation, while politicians often lack an understanding of what representative democracy involves and are primarily focused on winning elections by any means necessary.

This enduring pattern has resulted in a situation where average politicians in the country presume that electoral malpractice, vote-buying, ballot box stuffing and snatching are the only ways to secure electoral victory. Collectively, this has led to increased disillusionment and despair among Nigerians regarding the current state of affairs, where leaders seem confused and as such citizens are disinterested in turning out for elections. The following Table 1 below illustrates the extent to which voter's apathy has deeply permeated Nigeria's representative democracy, there by leading to electing leaders who lacks integrity, capability and capacity.

**Table 1:**

Year	Registered Voters	Invalid vote	Valid vote	Total Vote
1999	57,938,945	431,611	29,848,441	30,280,052 52%
2003	60,823,022	2,319,620	39,012,071	41,331,691 67%
2007	61,567,036	0	35,397,517	35,397,517 57%
2011	67,422,005	1,259,506	38,209,978	39,469,484 54.53%
2015	73,528,040	844,519	28,587,564	29,432,083 40%
2019	84,004,084	1,289,601	27,324,583	28,614,190 34.06%
2023	93,469,008	939,278	24,025,940	24,965,218 26.70%

Sources: Authors compilation (2025)

### 5. Conceptualizing Voter's Education

Voter education refers to the knowledge that equips the electorates with the necessary information to make informed choices when selecting candidates who will govern them, (Oduola, Hassan and Sawaneh 2020). It encompasses vital aspects such as when and where to register and cast votes (ECI, 2016). While the

definition provided above includes some elements of voters' education, it however narrowed the concept down to a sectional or seasonal perspective. In this study, we explored voters' education as a comprehensive concept that involves instilling democratic norms, values and rules in the citizens of a given nation. Beginning with fostering a political culture grounded in democratic principles and

practices, where free, fair, credible and participatory elections are emphasized. It teaches citizens their civic rights and obligations within the political system from an early age. Thus, voters' education entails the process of instilling in citizens, starting from childhood, the importance of participating in governance and the electoral process, recognizing voting as both a civic right and responsibility essential for the sustenance of democracy. Without proper voters' education, voters' apathy and issues such as election rigging, vote commercialization, and ballot stuffing and snatching, which are unfortunately prevalent in Nigeria will be the order of the day.

### **6. The Relation between Voters' Apathy and Voters' Education**

The relationship between voters' apathy and voters' education, are both significant and reciprocal, warranting comprehensive analysis within the context of civic engagement and democratic participation. Voter's education is fundamental to fostering active civic involvement; any deficit in this regard could precipitate widespread apathy among the electorates. It equips citizens with essential knowledge regarding their civic rights and responsibilities, thereby enhancing their understanding of the electoral process intrinsic values. When individuals are informed about the ramifications of their participation in elections, they are more likely to develop a sense of civic duty and engagement. Conversely, the absence of such educational initiatives can contribute to a lack of awareness regarding the electoral process and its effects on governance, resulting in heightened disengagement and indifference. A robust framework of voters' education promotes a political culture that values participation and upholds democratic norms and practices. This educational approach can effectively inspire citizens to engage in electoral processes. In contrast, a populace that lacks understanding of the electoral mechanism and democratic principles may become disillusioned with the political systems perceiving it as irrelevant or corrupt, ultimately exacerbating voters' apathy. Moreover, voters' education plays a crucial role in mitigating issues such as election rigging and vote commercialization. When voters possess a clear understanding of the significance of free and fair elections and recognize the tactics that undermine democratic integrity, they are more likely to engage in the political process actively and hold elected officials accountable. In the absence of this understanding, apathy can prevail, allowing fraudulent practices to persist unchallenged. It is important to emphasize that voters' education, should not be confined to isolated efforts during election cycles, as it necessitates an

ongoing commitment. By instilling democratic values from a young age, individuals are more likely to cultivate a lifelong habit of voting and civic participation. In the absence of such education, individuals may develop an apathetic mindset as they mature, (viewing political engagements as unworthy of their time and efforts). The interconnectedness between voters' apathy and voters' education, underscores the vital importance of informed and engaged citizenship in sustaining a healthy democracy. Thus, the provision of comprehensive voters' education represents a significant intervention that can diminish apathy, resulting in increased electoral participation and enhanced accountability in governance.

### **7. Discussion of findings**

Finding from this study reveals that lack of proper voters' education, could be a catalyst to propel voter's apathy. According Agaigbe (2020), voter apathy extends beyond mere indifference. It reflects voter's insensitivity to electoral processes, (especially voting), stemming from disenfranchisement in the political arena, ignorance, and insufficient voter's education. On the other hand, Oduola, Hassan and Sawaneh (2020), see voter's education as the knowledge that equips the electorate with the necessary information to make informed choices when selecting candidates who will govern them. It encompasses vital aspects such as when and where to register and cast votes (ECI, 2016). Omoregie and Omigie (2024), see voters' apathy as the disinterest exhibited by eligible voters towards participating in elections or the electoral processes within a country. From their definition of voters' apathy, one can deduce that lack of knowledge of a particular situation or event can bring disinterest towards such event or situation. From the foregoing analysis, lack of proper and early childhood voters' education, is identified as the major cause of voters' apathy in Nigeria. This finding is in line with objective one of the study which seeks to examine the possible cause of voters' apathy in Nigeria.

Voters' apathy has caused Nigeria lots of embarrassing situation. Apart from the fact the last general election, a country which population about 250 million citizens, million, (country Meterinfo 2025), only 26.7 of registered voters decide who became the President becomes, (Suleiman 2023). While the rest 73.3% of total registered voters are uninterested in electoral process and voting, leading to voters' apathy. Findings from the study reveals that voters' turnout have been on the downward trend since 2003 with every subsequent election affected by voters' apathy. This trend has negatively impacted the quality of leaders in the country. Today Nigerians are

seriously paying for their lack of interest in politics, electoral process and governance. Voters' apathy has affected the country governance to the extent that in a country that is blessed with intellectually gifted citizens, incompetent leaders are at the center of affairs. This aligns with Plato's assertion that "One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors". These findings address objective two of this study which sought to analyze the effect of voters' apathy, from the analysis above it shows that voter apathy has affected Nigeria in every facet.

Finally, the relationship between voter apathy and voter education is both significant and reciprocal, warranting comprehensive analysis within the context of civic engagement and democratic participation. Voters' education is fundamental to fostering active civic involvement. Any deficit in this area can precipitate widespread apathy among the electorates. It equips citizens with essential knowledge regarding their civic rights and responsibilities, thereby enhancing their understanding of the electoral process intrinsic values. When citizens are informed about the ramifications of their participation in elections, they are more likely to develop a sense of civic duty and engagement. Conversely, the absence of such educational initiatives can contribute to a lack of awareness regarding the electoral process and its effects on governance, resulting in heightened disengagement and indifference.

### 8. Conclusion

This study concludes with the assertion that for Nigeria to get it right politically and move beyond its current political and economic gridlocks, and to prevent the coming generation from partaking in the chaotic democratic system bedeviling the nation today, there is a serious need to initiate a holistic voters education beginning from our primary education where the principle of governance and representative democracy will be taught with the rules of engagement entrenched.

### 9. Recommendations

Voter education should be given the right place in our primary education. Incorporating voter education into primary education is essential for fostering informed and responsible citizenship. By introducing the principles of voting and civic engagement at an early age, we can ensure that students understand the importance of participation in democracy and are equipped with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions as future voters. This foundational education can promote active engagement in society

and empower children to take part in the democratic process as they grow older.

Enlightened people with the right attitude to democratic principles must as a matter of urgency engage in voluntary and serious voter education. It is essential for individuals who are well-informed and committed to democratic principles to prioritize the importance of voters' education. Engaging in voluntary and comprehensive efforts to educate voters is a critical step that needs to be taken urgently.

Nigerians must wake up from their slumber and see the need to participate in governance and electoral process. It is essential for Nigerians to recognize the importance of actively participating in governance and the electoral process. Engaging in these areas is crucial for ensuring that their voices are heard and represented.

INEC and political parties should take the responsibility for a comprehensive process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the various political parties must acknowledge their responsibility in ensuring a thorough and comprehensive electoral process. It's essential for both entities to work collaboratively to uphold the integrity and effectiveness of elections.

### References

- Agaiye, M. F. (2020). Voter Turnout in the 2015 General Elections: The Benue State Experience. Being a Draft Paper sent to The Electoral Institute, INEC 2023, from [https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-retrieved-10<sup>th</sup> July 2025](https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-retrieved-10th-July-2025)
- Agbebaku, P.E. (2000) Topic in Political Science. Sylva Publisher inc Akure, Ondo State ISBN 978-35538-0-1
- Cloud, D. (2010). Definitions, statistics and causes. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Statistical Report on Vote Buying in 2019 Election.
- Countrymeter (2025). Nigeria population 2025, retrieved from <https://countrymeters.info> on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2025
- Independent National Electoral Commission (2019). Election Result. Retrieved from <https://www.inecnigeria.org/election-results/>
- Independent National Electoral Commission (2023). Registered Voters and PVCs collected for the 2023 General Election. <https://www.inecnigeria.org/>

- Nwankwo, O.B.C. (2008). *Fundamental Issues in Political Science*. Enugu Quintagon Publishers.
- Qosim Suleiman (2023). Only 27% of eligible voters decide who becomes Nigeria's President retrieved from, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/> On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2025
- Rome Igbinerediauwa Omoregie & Ukpomwan Osayande Omigie (2023), Electoral Fraud and Voters' Apathy in Edo State 2023 House of Assembly Election. *Fuwukari Journal of Social Sciences (FUWJSS)* Vol.3 No. 1 March, 2024
- Saheed, Olasunkanmi Oduola, Hayatullah Boladele Hassan& Banna Sawaneh (2020) and Credible Election in Nigeria: Issues and challenges of 2019 General Election. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*. Volume XI No 11.1 Quarter 2020 ISSN: 0976-1195
- Ugbagu, Innocent Uchechukwu& Magnus, Chijindu Onyemaobi (2023). and Political Participation in the South East: Evidence from three Consecutive Elections <https://Journals.npsa-se.org.ng/index.php/SEPSRarticleview/30/29>. Retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> July
- Yakubu, A. Y. (2012). Democracy and Political Apathy in Nigeria (1999-2011). *Eujournals Online*, 38-48. Retrieved 12<sup>th</sup> July 2025