



## **Political Alienation and Electoral Participation in Nigeria's Democratization Process: A Survey of Voter Behaviour in the 2019 General**

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### **Abstract**

The study aimed to ascertain the reasons, nature and implication of voter abstention in Nigeria's democratization process. The study posits that low voter turnout in Nigerian elections could be attributable to alienation and thus, sought to test the relationship between alienation and electoral participation focusing on the 2019 general elections. The study adopted the expo-facto research design. A sample of 1,200 respondents was chosen from the selected local government areas of the six zones using the stratified random sampling technique. The simple percentages and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient statistical technique were used to test and determine the degree of association intrinsic to the stated hypotheses. The findings from the study showed that the failure of elected political officers to fulfil electoral promises, electoral fraud, and violence, are responsible for voter alienation in Nigeria. Therefore, the study suggested that elected political officials should ensure good governance based on meeting the needs of the citizenry; fraudulent practices during elections should be penalized with appropriate sanctions and the governments at all levels should put on modalities to mitigate the incidences of violence during elections.

**Key Words:** Alienation, voter participation, democratization process, popular representation, 2019 elections.

**Citation of article:** Igiebor, G. O. (2023). Political Alienation and Electoral Participation in Nigeria's Democratization Process: A Survey of Voter Behaviour in the 2019 General Elections. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)*, 16(1):390-412

**Date submitted:** 18/02/2023 **Date Accepted:** 09/03/2023 **Date Published:** June, 2023



## Introduction

The factors that engender democratization and good governance in an enduring democracy are a robust electoral process and credible elections. An Election is a viable instrument for achieving adequate representation in government as well as the main instrument of political participation in democratic societies. There is however global evidence indicating low voter participation; signifying an emotional withdrawal, a detachment from public affairs and a reticent approach towards political activity (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1999, 2004). With this scenario voter behaviour, a subset of political behaviour has become a foremost challenge in advanced and developing democracies. In the past years, concerns have been raised that the continuous low turnout witnessed globally at all levels of elections, is an indication of the disengagement of eligible voters from the political process (International IDEA, 1999). In Nigeria, electoral participation has been on the decline. Since the Fourth Republic, the percentage of voter turnout has been reducing; the last general elections of 2019 recorded a dismal turnout of 34.75%(International IDEA, 2019). This scenario may endanger the legitimacy of the political process. However, the degree, form, and intensity of the citizens' involvement in electoral activities have been subjected to heated academic debates (Raciborski 2011). Scholars, however, concede to the fact that the attainment of a functioning and successful democracy would at least, require some level of involvement by the citizens to ensure the legitimacy of the political system (Dalton, 2007; Raciborski 2011). The consequent low levels of turnout by voters experienced worldwide and its implications for democratic sustenance have stimulated observations, comments, and investigations by commentators, political officials as well as scholars who try to find out the factors responsible (Franklin, 2004; Ellis, 2004).

Studies conducted in Nigeria regarding the subject had centrally focused on apathy as the reason for low turnouts. Some of these studies include ones done by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2012; Fagunwa, 2019; Iyanda, 2020 among others. Without prejudice to the studies mentioned, this research contends that aside from apathy which connotes the voter disinterest in political or voting activities amongst others, other variables could be responsible for the low voter turnout. The study argues that alienation which indicates the voter's feeling of incapacity to influence political and electoral outcomes responsible for low voter turnout in Nigeria.



### **The Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse of Political Alienation**

The term political alienation connotes the relative continuing sense of estrangement from or rejection of the prevailing political system by the individual citizen. Thus, “alienation can be conceived as the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks” (Seeman 1959: 784). The politically alienated person’s desire to vote, but their feeling of insignificance to the system restricts them. They feel that their interests are not respected and represented by political leaders (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010). The alienated are of the view that political leaders who hold offices are incompetent, self-seeking and corrupt; thus, they are suspicious, hostile, distrustful and skeptical of these leaders. They believe that the political process as a whole is fraudulent; a betrayal of public trust and a charade (Campbell et al, 1954).

Political alienation has thus been categorized into two broad groups by Olsen (1968) vis-à-vis; political incapability (powerlessness) and political discontentment (disapproval or disappointment). He posits that the first case is compelled by the environment upon the individual, while in the second; it is a voluntary choice by them. Finifter (1970) outlines five variants of political alienation. These are:

1. Political powerlessness: A feeling of incapability to affect political/electoral outcomes and governmental actions by the alienated.
2. Political meaninglessness: The perception by the individual that political/governmental outcomes/decisions are unpredictably unclear.
3. Political normlessness: The perception that there is a clear and rampant deviation from norms and regulations intended to govern political and governmental outcomes.
4. Political isolation: A rejection of widely held/shared societal norms and rules of behaviour by the individual.
5. Political disappointment: A display of lack of interest by the individual in political/electoral decisions and activity because of the misdemeanour by the ruling political elites.

Political alienation as a theory, explains the voters’ perception towards the political and electoral system of a country. The theory as postulated by scholars such as Seaman (1959) and Finifter (1970) states that alienation connotes a relative sense of estrangement and isolation from the political process arising from the individual’s inability or incapacity to influence political decisions. The perceived feeling of powerlessness and incapacity to affect political and electoral decisions results in the frustration, discontentment, and isolation of the voter from the electoral



process. Seaman (1959) and Finifter (1970) aver that the politically alienated individual desires to vote but is constrained from doing so by the prevailing environmental factors. The argument is that certain compelling factor from the political environment results in the incapability and discontentment of voters in Nigeria which compels them to abstain from the voting process. Political powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and disappointment serve as alienating factors preventing or constraining people from participating

in the electoral process especially, voting during an election. Participating in an election would become hampered when people feel isolated, disappointed and or incapacitated to influence the political environment. Participation can only thrive where there is confidence in the electoral operating system and the outcome of votes cast. The issue concerning the abstention of Nigerian voters from the electoral process and the factors responsible is the contribution and knowledge gap the research aim to fill.

### **Electoral Participation**

Research on public participation in politics by scholars in the discipline of political science has focused conservatively on the participation of the electorates in the political system (Braddy, 1999; Van Deth 2001; Fawole, 2005; Glasgow & Alvarez 2005, Alechenu, 2012). Electoral participation can be viewed as citizens' legal acts in compliance with extant rules that allow the electorate to choose their representatives and to some extent, influence their actions in governance (Fawole, 2005; Glasgow & Alvarez 2005). Electoral participation has also been construed in terms of the activities undertaken directly or indirectly by the citizens to select their representatives and to support and/or influence the governance institutions at all levels (Braddy, 1999; Van Deth 2001). Participation in the political/electoral system is not only restricted to voting periods but also encompasses other important political activities that take place around the election timeframe in which the citizens attempt to influence political actions and governmental policies to their advantage (Höglund, 2009). This view of citizens' participation in the political or electoral process is all-inclusive in that it is not only limited to voting but also other political activities such as protests, boycotts and strikes. (Norris 2002a). Effective participation of the citizens in the electoral system is desired because it is a podium of interaction between the citizens and the political officials during electioneering and allows the citizens to take part in decision-making and governance. It is also essential for ensuring the credibility, legitimacy and stability of the political system.



### **Voter Turnout/Participation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019**

The voter turnout statistics in the 1999 general elections in Nigeria were not quite impressive. A total of 57,938,945 eligible voters were registered but only 30,280,052 of these figures cast their votes, which represent 52.26% of voters registered by the INEC. In 2003, a total number of 60,823,033 voters were registered while 42,018,735 voted to represent 69.08%. These figures show a slight increase in the number that registered as well as those who voted as

compared to the 1999 election figures. Thus, the voter turnout in 2003 increased by 16.8% compared to that of 1999. The general elections of 2007 recorded an increase in the number of registered voters which was 61,567,036; disappointingly, the total vote cast was 35,397,517, which represents 57.49%, about half the number of registered voters (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019). The voter turnout of 2007, however, reduced by 11.6% compared to that of 2003 (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019). In 2011, the number of registered voters increased to 73,528,040 but, only a slightly significant 39,469,484 eligible voters exercised their franchise, representing 53.68%. The voter turnout of 2011 witnessed a further drop of 3.81% in the number of voter turnout as compared to the 2007 elections. The 2015 general election was not different from that of 2011, the number of registered voters was 67,422,005; the total votes cast dropped significantly to 29,432,083 representing 43.65%, that is, less than half of the number of voters that registered (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019). This figure represents a further decrease of 10.3% as compared to the 2011 elections. The 2019 general elections recorded a total of 82,344,107 registered voters, with a voter turnout of 28,614,190 representing 34.75%. This figure represents a further decrease of 8.90% as compared to the 2015 elections (IDEA, 2015; Abdallah, & Krishi, 2019; Pulse.ng, 2019).

These analyses, therefore, show a gradual reduction in the rate of voter turnout since 1999. The overall voter turnout figures were in the 50 and 60 percentiles between 1999 and 2011 but reduced to 43.65% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019. Given that the credibility of these elections and the authenticity of the figures may be contestable, nonetheless, these figures are far from being impressive. Even though the voting-age population has been rising since 1999 (from 52.7 million in 1999 to 106 million in 2019), the voting-age turnout has been on the decline (International IDEA Data Base, 2015, 2019; Ojetunde, 2019; Pulse.ng, 2019). These scenarios are tabulated in table 1 below.

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

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	Voting Age Population Turnout	Voting age Population	Total Population
2019	34.75%	28,614,190	82,344,107	26.87%	106,490,312	208,679,144
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,033	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359

Source: International IDEA Data Base, 2015; 2019”

### The Argument

Several studies on voter abstention had concentrated on apathy as the major reason for low turnout. These include the ones conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2012- Voter Apathy and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria: A Research Report (Alechenu, 2012); Fagunwa (2019)- Voter Apathy and Nigeria Electioneering Process: A Synopsis On the 2015 General Elections; Iyanda (2020)- Assessing the Changing Nature of Voters Apathy in Nigeria A Comparison of Old and New Media; Agu et al (2022)- Voters Apathy and Revival of Genuine Political Participation in Nigeria; Ebegbulem&Adams (2022)- Electoral Apathy and its Implications for the Conduct of Credible Elections in Nigeria; and Ibeogu et al (2019)- Voting Apathy among the Nigerian Electorates in 2019 General Elections: The Role of INEC, Issues and the Way Forward.

The present study is not on apathy, and thus, not necessary to discourse on the listed studies above in detail. However, the study contends that the majority of non-voters in Nigerian elections cannot be classified under apathy to suggest that they all lack interest and knowledge of political activities. The author thus, introduced the variable of alienation to argue that Nigerian voters' are not majorly apathetic to the electoral system but could be disenchanted and frustrated with the system and its environment that constrained them from participation in voting activities. Therefore, alienation is projected as responsible for the abstention of voters from the electoral process. The study sought to test the relationship between the mentioned variables using quantitative research methodology. The variables - the bad governance,



electoral fraud and electoral violence were tested through statistical and qualitative analysis to establish a nexus or otherwise with alienation. Political alienation is the rejection of the prevailing political system by the individual citizen (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010). The politically alienated person desires to vote but is constrained not to do so by political and environmental variables. Thus, an individual who rejects the prevailing political and electoral system may decide not to participate in it. This action is not that of an apathetic citizen (indifference and lack of interest) but an alienated one. The investigation of alienation as a factor of voters' abstention in the Nigerian electoral process is a novel contribution to academic literature. The outcome of the study would thus provide a new perspective on academics.

### **Stating the Problematic of Voter Abstention**

Democracy requires the psychological involvement and active participation of people in the electoral process since societal goals are determined and executed through discussions, popular opinion, and commitment to the political system. Thus, citizens' engagement in the democratic process gives it legitimacy and direction (Dalton, 2002). Voter abstention is already a global phenomenon. It has become a major problem in developed and developing democracies (International IDEA 1999; 2006). The various elections in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic, have witnessed a gradual but steady decline in turnout that has negatively impacted the democratization process (Agu, Okeke & Idike, 2013). For example, the 1999 general elections recorded a 52.3% turnout of registered voters. In 2003, the turnout was 69.1%; 58% in 2007; 53.7% in 2011; 43.6% in 2015, and 34.7% in 2019 (Pulse. ng. 2019). These declining turnouts may erode the credibility of elections, legitimacy, and popular representation, which are the hallmarks of democracy. Low voter turnout trends in Nigeria call for concern because it indicates a country's levels of democratic development.

### **Research Questions**

The research seeks to unravel the following issues:

1. What is the impact of unfulfilled campaign promises/governance on voter abstention?
2. What is the impact of electoral corruption on voter abstention?
3. What is the impact of electoral violence on voter abstention?



Following the research questions, the study objectives are to:

- (i) Find out the reason(s) why many eligible voters do not vote in elections in Nigeria;
- (ii) Ascertain the nature of abstention concerning voting activities and determine if alienation plays a role;
- (iii) Examine the implication of low voter turnout for Nigeria's democratization process.

### Statistical Hypotheses (Ho)

1. There is no relationship between unfulfilled campaign promises/governance and voter abstention.
2. There is no relationship between electoral corruption and voter abstention.
3. There is no relationship between electoral violence and voter abstention.

### Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post facto and the descriptive analytical approach in the presentation and analysis of data. The population of the study is the Nigerian State covering the six Geopolitical Zones. The National Population Census of Nigeria in 2006 puts the figures of the Nigerian population at one hundred and forty million, four hundred and thirty-one thousand, seven hundred and ninety (140,431,790), (Nigerian Data Portal, 2006). A sample size of thousand two hundred (1,200) respondents was sampled from the selected Six (6) Local Government Areas of the Geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

The sample size of one thousand two hundred (1200) respondents was arrived at by adopting the formula of Taro Yamane which he developed in 1967 to calculate sample sizes from a given population (Yamane, 1967). The adoption of a 5% error margin and a 95% level of confidence, in calculating the population of one million, four hundred and ninety- seven thousand, one hundred and fifty- seven (1, 497, 157) yielded a sample size of 400. To account for possible attrition, reduce the level of error, and increase sample representativeness, and the confidence level, the number of subjects was increased to 1,200 (that is  $400 \times 3$ ). This action became imperative since the sample of 400 represents the minimum standard sample required for the study to produce a 95% confidence level in line with Yamane's formula. The questionnaire comprised of closed-ended question sets was utilized for the study. The stratified random sampling technique was employed to select three zones from the six geopolitical zones; two





states each from the three selected zones, and one local government each from the selected states; making a total of six Local Government Areas. The systematic sampling technique was then employed to select households from the selected Local Government Areas. Consequently, the questionnaires were administered to the voting-age population in each of the selected households.

**Table 2** Tabulation of the selection process- 1

Geopolitical Zones	Selected Zones	Selected States	Selected Government Areas	Local
<b>North- East</b>				
<b>North- West</b>				
<b>North- Central</b>	North- Central	Plateau Kogi	Jos South Dekina	
<b>South- East</b>				
<b>South- West</b>	South- West	Oyo Ekiti	Ibadan South West Ekiti West	
<b>South- South</b>	South- South	Rivers Delta	Degema Ughelli South	

Source: Compiled by the Researcher”

**Table 3** Tabulation of the selection process- 2

Selected Local Government Areas	Population	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
<b>Jos South</b>	311, 392	250	21
<b>Dekina</b>	260, 968	209	17
<b>Ibadan South West</b>	283, 098	227	19
<b>Ekiti West</b>	179, 600	144	12
<b>Degema</b>	249, 461	200	17
<b>Ughelli South</b>	212, 638	170	14
<b>Total</b>	1, 497, 157	1, 200	100

Source: Nigeria Data Portal, 2006)/Researcher”

In Tables 2 and 3 above, the sample size was arrived at by multiplying the population figure of each local government area by the total sample figure divided by the total population of the six



selected local government areas. The percentage of the sample size was derived by multiplying each sample size by 100 divided by the total sample size figure.

Primary data formed the nuclei of data collection for analysis and contingency tables were the mode of data presentation. Simple percentages and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the generated quantitative data. The simple percentage technique helped to ascertain the data percentages for easy analysis while Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses that were postulated from the research questions. The choice of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient statistical technique hinges on the fact that it measures or quantifies the strength as well as the direction of association intrinsic in the stated variables; thus, is appropriate for measuring the stated quantitative research questions and hypotheses. The "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" (SPSS) was used in computing Pearson's Correlation coefficient. The data were analyzed using the descriptive-analytical technique in a systematic manner that yielded an adequate understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Data collection and analysis**

For this study, a total of one thousand two hundred (1200) questionnaires were administered, out of which one thousand, and sixty (1060) were completed and returned by the respondents. Out of the 1060 respondents, the majority of them were males representing 57.1% while the females represented 42.9% of the sample. The age distribution shows that 50% of the respondents were between 18- 25 years; 38.2% were 26- 40 years old and 11.8% were 41 years and above. This shows that the majority of the respondents who took part in the study constitute the youthful and virile age necessary for political participation. Also, 26% of the sampled respondents were married, 69.3% were single, and 3.3% of the respondents were divorced while 1.41% belongs to the "others" category. Moreover, 0.94% of the respondents were primary school certificate holders; 21.7% were post-primary certificate holders; 34.4% were OND/NCE certificate holders and 43.0% were post-graduate certificate holders. This distribution shows that the majority of the respondents had basic education and thus were equipped to make informed responses useful to the study. Furthermore, 22.2% of the respondents belonged to the paid employment cadre; 32.5% were self-employed while 45.3% were unemployed. Finally, 60.4% of the respondents were Christians; 31.6% were Muslims; 7.07% belonged to African Traditional Religion (ATR) and



0.94% belonged to “other” religion. Thus, the distribution indicates that the respondents cut across the religious divide.

## Results

Statistical Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance and voters’ abstention.

### Statistical Hypothesis 1

The results show a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ( $p < .005$ )-see Table. The direction of the relationship is positive. There is a very strong positive relationship between unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance and voters’ abstention, meaning that these variables tend to increase together. Hence, the increase in unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance leads to a corresponding increase in voters’ abstention during elections. There is a strong nexus between unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance and voters’ abstention during electioneering. Thus, as the political officials’ level of unfulfilled promises/bad governance increases, the citizens become more alienated from the political system leading to the low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between electoral corruption/fraud and voters’ abstention.

### Research Hypothesis 2

The analyses reveal that a statistically significant relationship exists between the two variables ( $p < .005$ ) -see Table. The direction of the relationship is positive. There is a weak positive relationship between electoral corruption/fraud and voters’ abstention, meaning that these variables tend to increase together. Therefore, the increase in electoral corruption/fraud leads to a corresponding increase in voters’ abstention during elections. Thus, as the political officials, political parties and INEC officials engage in the negative practice of manipulation

of election results, the citizens become more alienated from the political system leading to a low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis 3: There is no relationship between electoral violence and voters’ abstention.



### **Research Hypothesis 3**

There exists a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ( $p < .005$ ) -see Table. The direction of the relationship is positive. There is a very strong positive relationship between electoral violence and voters' abstention. This means that the variables tend to increase together. The increase in one variable affects the other variable. Consequently, the increase in electoral violence leads to a corresponding increase in voters' abstention during elections. There is a strong linkage between electoral violence and voters' abstention during the electoral process. Thus, as the level of electoral violence increases, the citizens become more alienated from the political system leading to a low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria.

### **Discussion**

#### **Interpretation of Statistical Hypothesis 1**

The research result shows that a strong significant relationship exists between unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance and voters' abstention. The relationship is positive which means that the political officials' low level of governance is responsible for the alienation of citizens from the political system; leading to the low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria. The result shows that a majority of the respondents rate the fulfilment of electoral promises by political officials as unsatisfactory. That means that the political officials have failed to keep to electoral promises hence; electoral promises are just propaganda meant to induce voters to vote for them during elections. Consequently, many Nigerians decide not to participate in the electoral process because they believe that the political office has been hijacked by political elites and godfathers; therefore, electoral promises would not be fulfilled. They opined that the failure of political officials to keep to electoral promises is one of the reasons they would not vote on Election Day. Therefore, the outcome of the research results shows that unfulfilled campaign promises/bad governance by political officials have negative effects on voter participation in the electoral process of Nigeria.

#### **Interpretation of Statistical Hypothesis 2**

The result shows that there is a weak significant relationship between electoral fraud and voter abstention. The relationship is positive, which means that the political officials' political parties and INEC officials' negative practice of manipulating election results is responsible for citizens' alienation from the political system; thus, leading to a low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria.



The research result shows that a majority of the respondents are of the view that many Nigerians do not vote during elections because they feel that their votes will not count due to manipulation by electoral and political officials. They opined that they do not have confidence in the INEC to conduct credible elections in Nigeria and that votes cast in previous elections amounted to nothing because of fraud and manipulation, it is thus, a waste of time to go out and vote. Therefore, the outcome of the results shows that electoral corruption/fraud has negative effects on voter participation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

### **Interpretation of Statistical Hypothesis 3**

The result shows that there is a strong significant relationship between electoral violence and voter abstention. The relationship is positive, which means that the high incidences of electoral violence are responsible for citizens' alienation from the political system; thus, leading to a low-level turnout of eligible voters during elections in Nigeria. The research result shows that a majority of the respondents opined that the electoral process in Nigeria is enmeshed in violence and insecurity, thus, it obstructs the free and fair electoral process and scares people away from voting because of the loss of lives during elections. Consequently, they affirmed that many Nigerians who want to vote during elections decide not to for fear of violence. They opined that the fear of violence is one of the reasons registered voters may decide not to vote on Election Day. Therefore, the outcome of research results shows that electoral violence has negative effects on voter participation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

### **Findings of the Study.**

The findings of the study are summarized thus:

1. Voter abstention in the Nigerian electoral system is mainly due to alienation.
2. Voter alienation in the Nigerian electoral process is a factor of bad governance.
- 3.
4. The failure of elected political officers to fulfil electoral promises and work for the interest of the citizenry concerning policy formulation and implementation is responsible for voter alienation in Nigeria.
5. Voter alienation is a factor of electoral fraud perpetrated by political officials, parties, and INEC officials, which undermines the votes cast by the Nigerian electorates during elections.



6. Electoral violence as perpetrated by political opponents and parties during elections affects electoral participation and therefore, is responsible for voter alienation in the Nigerian political system.
7. The electoral process (registration and voting) in the Nigerian political system is cumbersome and thus, discourages many citizens from registering for elections as well as voting.

Findings from the study revealed that the data validate the research questions and postulated hypotheses. The findings are in two categories- major and supporting findings.

#### Major findings

1. Unfulfilled promises and bad governance by political officials are responsible for the alienation of voters and low turnout during elections in Nigeria.

The results show that a majority of the respondents are of the view that voter alienation is the result of the failure of political officials to fulfil electoral promises and deliver good governance. For instance, the majority of the respondents, that is 92.5% rate the fulfilment of electoral promises by political officials as unsatisfactory; 90.1% are of the view that political offices have been hijacked by political godfathers and as a result, electoral promises are not fulfilled; furthermore, 93.4% of the respondents are of the view that the political officials do not care about the citizens' interest while 93.4% of the respondents state that many eligible voters do not vote during elections in Nigeria in reaction to bad governance by political officials.

2. Electoral fraud and corruption by political officials, political parties and electoral officials are responsible for the alienation of voters from the political system and low turnout during elections.

Data from the study show that the majority of the respondents are of the view that voter alienation is the result of fraudulent electoral practices in the Nigerian political system. For example, 71.2% of the respondents stated that they lack confidence in the INEC to conduct free

and fair elections in Nigeria; 76.9% opined that they will not continue to vote if they feel that their votes will not count while 92.4% stated that many Nigerians do not vote because they believe their votes will not count due to manipulation and fraud by political candidates, political parties and electoral officials.

3. Electoral violence is responsible for voter alienation from the political process of Nigeria.

The results show that a majority of the respondents stated that electoral violence is responsible for the alienation of voters and low turnout during elections. For instance, the majority of the



respondents, that is 94.8% are of the view that the registration and voting process in Nigeria is largely insecure and prone to violence; 94.3% opined that many eligible voters do not vote during elections in Nigeria because of the fear of violence while 83% stated that if they envisage the outbreak of violence in an election, they will not go out to cast their votes.

#### Supporting Findings

1. Cumbersome electoral process (registration and voting) is responsible for the alienation of voters and low turnout during elections in Nigeria.

The results show that the majority of the respondents stated that the very stressful and rigorous registration and voting processes in Nigeria discourage eligible voters from voting during elections. For example, the majority of the respondents, that is, 87.3%, state that the registration and voting processes in Nigeria are very cumbersome and thus can discourage voters from participating in the elections. They opined that the unusually long hours spent in the queue either during voter registration or voting are very stressful and discouraging.

From the findings of the study, the majority of the respondents showed interest in the political and electoral processes. They are therefore willing to cast their votes during elections but are inhibited by some environmental factors in the political system which caused them to become alienated from the political and electoral process. These factors represent the major and supporting findings of the study already discussed above. To buttress the above point, the majority of the respondents that is, 85.4% opined that elections are important in Nigeria; 72.2% are of the view that elections can help to pick the right leaders in Nigeria; 60.4% stated that they registered for the 2019 general elections; a majority of the respondents said they are eager and willing to vote during elections only if the election is free and fair while 83% were not mobilized to register for the 2019 general elections but did so willingly and of their own accord. It can thus be concluded that the low turnout of eligible voters in the Nigerian electoral process is the result of the political alienation of voters by inhibitive factors in the Nigerian political

process. With these findings, the research objectives (finding out the reason(s) why eligible voters do not vote in elections as well as ascertaining the nature of abstention in the Nigerian political system) outlined for the study have been achieved.



## Contribution to Knowledge Production

Generally, the findings of the study epitomize contribution to existing academic knowledge as the variables of political alienation- unfulfilled campaign promises, electoral violence, and electoral fraud are significant determinants of low voter turnout in Nigerian elections.

Specifically, the following are the major contributions of the study to academic knowledge.

1. The empirical study of political alienation using surveys and especially, quantitative data for analysis is novel in Nigeria (to the best of my knowledge).
2. The study revealed that political alienation is a determinant of voter abstention in the Nigerian electoral process. Until now, studies have focused on political apathy as the main cause of low voter turnout in Nigeria.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Credible elections are relevant in achieving an enduring democracy and democratization process, and in essence, good governance. Electoral participation serves as the instrument for the attainment of a viable and representative government in democratic societies. Voting then becomes the contact linkage between the representatives and the citizenry and provides the foundation for discussions, deliberations, and citizens' engagement in the operation of the political system. Consequently, if turnout declines, the primary linkage between the citizen and the political system may become weakened, threatening the legitimacy of the democratic system. Citizens' participation in the process of governance is necessary to accomplish an equitable and civilized society. These tenets will not be achieved if a majority of eligible voters continue to stay away from voting during elections. This situation calls for concern, especially as it is worsening.

The need for this study becomes imperative since the level or degree of voter turnout serves as a parameter for measuring popular will, credibility, and legitimacy of elected officials. Besides, they are vital to political socialization and serve as the bedrock for democratic stability. It is

hoped that the relevant institutions and stakeholders would take cognizance of the findings of the study and the recommendations hereafter to positively address the voter alienation challenge.





Consequent to the research findings, the following suggestions as solutions to voter alienation in Nigeria are made.

1. The elected political officials should ensure good governance based on meeting the needs and demands of the citizenry. The qualities of good governance like transparency, accountability, rule of law, fairness and equity in resource distribution and opportunities for capacity development should be ensured. The citizens' basic needs such as food, shelter, water, adequate power supply, access roads as well as sustaining and enduring market structure should be built and maintained.

2. The electoral system of Nigeria as it is presently cannot engender confidence in the electorates. Thus, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) should institute credibility in the electoral process.

The INEC should be independent to manage the electoral process. Political interference from political leaders and rulers should be discouraged. Also, the political parties and electoral candidates should be sensitized to ensure fair play and a level playing field in party primaries and other election activities. The use of electronic transmission should be encouraged and mandatory to reduce electoral fraud and manipulation. Fraudulent practices during elections should be penalized with appropriate sanctions.

3. The federal and state governments should mitigate the incidences of violence during elections by putting in place preventive and control mechanisms. This could be ensured by designating adequate security personnel to man elections in Nigeria. Security personnel should be charged with the responsibility of forestalling violence and preventing any actions that negate the electoral regulations that often lead to violence during elections. Also, adequate intelligence and monitoring teams should be assigned to cover all election centres (both urban and rural) as well as to monitor the activities of security personnel at various polling centres.

4. The federal and state governments should put up modalities to lighten the often stressful registration and voting processes to encourage more participation in the electoral process. These can be done, by ensuring that the various electronic gadgets for registration and voting are in good working condition, using well-trained and experienced staff and re-delimitation of registration and polling units to reduce the population for effective management. The

registration and voting centres should open on time, and electoral materials and officials should arrive at polling units at the stipulated time.



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## APPENDIX

### Statistical Hypothesis 1

Questionnaire: Are you of the opinion that the majority of Nigerians are willing to vote during elections, but do not because they believe that political office has been hijacked by political godfathers and therefore electoral promises would not be fulfilled?

	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	955	90.1
No	105	9.9
Total	1060	100

Source: Field Survey: 2019”.

### Correlations



	Voters' abstention	Unfulfilled campaign promises/ bad governance
Voters' Pearson Correlation	1	.802**
abstention Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	1060	1060
Unfulfilled Pearson Correlation	.802**	1
campaign promises/ Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
bad governance N	1060	1060

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### StatisticalHypothesis 2

Questionnaire: Are you of the opinion that many people of voting age want to vote but do not because they believe that their vote will not count due to manipulation (fraud) by electoral officials/political parties?

	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	980	92.4
No	80	7.6
Total	1060	100

Source: Field Survey: 2019”.

### Correlations

	Voters' abstention	Electoral corruption/ Fraud
Voters' Pearson Correlation	1	.211**
abstention Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	1060	1060
Electoral Pearson Correlation	.211**	1
corruption/ Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Fraud N	1060	1060

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### StatisticalHypothesis 3

Questionnaire: Are you of the opinion that many Nigerians of voting age are eager to participate in the electoral process but do not because of fear of violence on Election Day?

	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	1000	94.3



No	60	5.7
Total	1060	100

Source: Field Survey: 2019”.

Correlations

		Voters’ abstention	Electoral violence
Voters’ abstention	Pearson Correlation	1	.955**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1060	1060
Electoral violence	Pearson Correlation	.955**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1060	1060

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).