

2011 Presidential Election and the Political Participation in Nigeria

ELECTION PRESIDENTIELLE 2011 ET LA PARTICIPATION POLITIQUE AU NIGERIA

Ayo Awopeju^{1,*}

¹ Department of Political Science, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The study examined the 2011 presidential election and the level of citizens' participation in Nigeria. The study showed the preparation, challenges and the conduct of 2011 election in Nigeria with a major reference to the presidential election. The study further observed that there was an average level of citizens' participation in the 2011 presidential poll. By embarking on comparative analysis, the participation of the electorates in the 2011 presidential election was low compared to the previous presidential elections Nigeria had in the era of fourth republic. It was revealed that incessant electoral fraud introduced into the electoral game by the politicians, loss of public confidence and 'do or die' syndrome might be responsible for low level of voters' turn out. The study also observed that the 2011 elections were just a watershed on the previous elections of the fourth republic. The study recommended that lapses of the 2011 elections should be taken care of by the INEC in order to further consolidating and deepening democracy in Nigeria.

Key words: Presidential poll; Political parties; Election; Electoral fraud; Democracy

Résumé

L'étude a examiné l'élection présidentielle 2011 et le niveau de participation des citoyens au Nigeria. L'étude a montré les défis de préparation, et la conduite des élections de 2011 au Nigeria avec une référence majeure pour l'élection présidentielle. L'étude a également observé qu'il y avait un niveau moyen de la participation des citoyens au scrutin présidentielle de 2011. En s'engageant sur l'analyse comparative, la participation des électeurs

à l'élection présidentielle de 2011 a été faible par rapport aux précédentes élections présidentielles au Nigeria avaient à l'époque de la IV^e République. Il a été révélé que la fraude électorale incessante introduit dans le jeu électoral par les politiciens, la perte de la confiance du public et 'ne meurent ou' syndrome pourrait être responsable de faible niveau des électeurs tourner. L'étude a également observé que les élections de 2011 étaient juste un bassin versant sur les élections précédentes de la quatrième république. L'étude a recommandé que les défaillances des élections de 2011 devraient être pris en charge par la CENI en vue de consolider et renforcer la démocratie au Nigeria.

Mots clés: Election présidentielle; Les partis politiques; Des élections; La fraude électorale; La Démocratie

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INTRODUCTION

Elections and democracy are inextricably linked in a state that operates on the basis of liberal democratic tenets. Elections are seen as the way to attain political power in democracies; this is because of the fact that democracy anchors on the articulation and aggregation of interests of the people. This logically implies that the survival of democracy depends much on functional and virile elections conducted by the state as at when due.

The importance attached to election in any democratic state is reflected by indices such as voter turn out, the level of interest it generates and, of course, its outcome is a function of how critical the election is perceived to be.

By critical here, we mean the extent to which, in popular perception, an election involves contestation for power of immense significance for the allocation of values among groups (Ollawa, 1989, Osaghae, 1997).

These indices of election are critical because “voters turn out” will enable electorates to have been sensitized and educated on their right to exercise the power of electoral franchise and to determine the direction of the state through their votes. Osaghae (1994) puts it more vividly when he looked at the power of electoral franchise attached to voter-turn out and submitted that “the higher the power is perceived to be, the higher the voter turn-out is likely to be, and these make the election more critical than others.” Secondly, the level it generates informed the electorate about what is likely to be the outcome whether it will be free, fair and credible and will be accepted by the international observers or otherwise. Thirdly, the outcome will bestow legitimacy on those elected into various political offices or resulted into violence.

The Nigerian state has had a quite number of elections in the past. The principal forms of electoral fraud or irregularities were perfected in the elections of 1964, 1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 and 2007. The levels of which these elections generate are stuffing of ballot boxes, killing or maiming of electoral opponents, vote buying, intimidation of electorates, widespread of irregularities, etc. The outcomes of many elections have been so fiercely contested that the survival of the country and democracy has been jeopardized. The conduct of periodic elections is not what really matter but democracy is measured by how it provides opportunity for political participation, political equality and the possibility of an alternative government besides ensuring, ultimately, widespread habit of tolerance and compromise among members of a community. All these make democracy to be consolidated and deepened in a state.

The study intends to look at the 2011 presidential election and political participation in Nigeria. The statement of problem inherent in this study is that Nigeria has had electoral processes in the past. It is premature to state whether electoral process is necessary in the Nigerian body politic; this is because the electoral processes have been characterized by electoral fraud. The past regimes either maintain the status quo or completely break the electoral process in Nigeria. Nigeria is in the era of fourth

republic, elections in the past depicted the same trend. The questions are do we really need electoral process? If we need it, why does Nigerian polity experience incessant electoral fraud? What is the trend and level of participation of the Nigerian electorates in 2011 presidential election? What then is the assessment of the 2011 general elections by the international observers? These are the questions this study is saddled with to provide answers for.

Making use of the secondary data, the study is structured into five sections. Section one introduces the study, section two deals with the conceptualization of political participation and election, section three considers the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the conduct of 2011 elections. Section four examines the trends and patterns of citizens’ participation in 2011 presidential election in Nigeria, while section five deals with the conclusion and recommendation for the study.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Political Participation

Participation refers to the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers made accountable to the ruled. The term ‘political participation’ refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly and indirectly, in the formation of public policy. These activities are like casting vote, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, making financial contributions to political parties, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and other leading figures and the like. However, the most active forms of political participation are formal enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering votes, speech writing and speech making, working in campaigns and competing for public and party offices (McClosky, 1968). At its widest sense, Oke (2008) captured this definition to include casual political conventions that might exist in a club, and the intense activity of the members of fringe political groups. Such activities can be classified into various categories and the typology suggested by Milbrath (1965) shall be used in this study. According to him, some of the activities that constitute political participation are grouped into three broad activities, these are:

Holding public and party office
Being a candidate for office
Attending a caucus or strategy meeting
Attending a caucus or strategy meeting
Contributing time in a campaign

Gladiator Activities

Attending a political meeting or rally
Making a monetary contribution
Contacting a public official or political leaders

Wearing a button or showing a sticker
Attempting to influence another into voting in certain way
Initiating a political discussion
Voting
Exposing oneself to political stimuli

Milbrath (1965) posits further that some 60% of the population play spectator roles and only about 1 to 3% is fully involved, leaving about 7 to 9% in a transitional stage from which they may ascend or descend. He suggests that his ordering involves “a kind of internal logic, a natural progression of becoming involved in political activities” and that persons involved at one level are also likely to involve themselves at ‘lower’ levels. Central to this logic is the idea that ascending the hierarchy involves increasing costs in terms of time, energy and resources and at each level fewer people are able or prepared to make the necessary investments.

Rush and Althoff (1978) posit that political participation is the involvement of the individual at various levels in the political system. Political activity may range from non-involvement to office-holding. It is also important to stress that participation ‘may result in the motivation for increased participation, including the highest level-that of holding various types of offices-which involves the process of political recruitment.

Political participation according to Ikelegbe (2004), are the political activities of citizens, either as individual or groups intended or designed to influence the political process. It is the actual involvement of the citizenry to influence, directly or indirectly the ways, directions and methods of governance, or more specifically the output or outcomes of the political process. Ikelegbe (2004) goes further to opine that political participation involves three activities. First, it is a political activity. Second, the activity is directed at selecting rulers, influencing decisions of governments and the ways government governs. The third character of political participation is that it is voluntary. It refers to the voluntary activities by which members of the political community share in leadership selection and policy formulation.

Social scientists in the field of Political Science have explained reason why variations exist in participation from country to country over the years. Several explanations have been offered on micro-level, some on the macro-level. Micro-level characteristics are those that centered on the political individual and his or her beliefs, attitudes, and values. Such characteristics as resources-including income, education and perhaps employment or transportation- and psychological characteristics, including political attitudes and orientations, are clearly

Transitional Activities

Spectators Activities

of great significance in explaining why individuals behave as they do. Macro-level characteristics affecting political participation include many those factors including electoral rules, opportunities, costs in time, money and effort (Mahler, 2003).

Election Conceptualized

The concept of election is associated with so many meanings such that it is hardly difficult to say its exact meaning. In the 5th edition of the International Encyclopaedia of Social Science Vol.5, “Election” is defined as one procedure and preferences of a particular kind. The two features of this definition are **procedure** and **preferences**. By procedure, the concept it used to describe a special way of doing something. Preference connotes choice between alternatives. During elections the electorate is given the opportunity to choose between alternative programmes of contestants.

Elections can, also, be described as a procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. The most important role of the elections deals with the select of leaders in local, state and national government. Elections also promote public accountability. “The threat of defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to conduct themselves in a responsible manner and take account of popular interests and wishes when they make their decisions.” (1993-1998 Microsoft Corporation). Dowse and Hughes (1983) captured election to be a procedure recognized by the rule of an organization, be it a state, a club, a voluntary organization or whatever, where all, or some, of the members choose a smaller number of persons to hold an office, or offices, of authority within that organization.

According to Omonijo *et al.* (2007), election is the act of choosing public officers to fill vacant posts by vote, it is an act of choosing those that govern a state; it may be conducted periodically. Elections are central the institution of democratic representative governments. The reason is that, in democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections.

INEC PREPARATION, CHALLENGES AND THE CONDUCT OF 2011 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Before the 2011 general elections, Nigerians and international community were looking towards Nigerian government to conduct credible elections that would be accepted by the world at large. This is because transition from a civilian regime to another civilian regime has always been a high stake politics in Nigeria. Experiences in the past have shown that electoral fraud has been a recurring decimal in the Nigerian electoral process. The 2003 and 2007 general elections were so flawed to the extent that international community and the elections observers tagged the elections to be full of irregularities.

In order to guide against these irregularities and these incessant electoral fraud, Nigerian government started the credibility of electoral process by yielding to the calls of Nigerians to remove the Chairman of the Nigerian Electoral Umpire, i.e. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Maurice Iwu. He was replaced by Prof. Attahiru Jega, a Professor of Political Science and former Vice-Chancellor, Bayero University, Kano. Jega was appointed among the strong and respected contenders in the nomination list which included Barrister Bukhari Bello and Prof. Nuhu Yakub. What are factors aided Jega's appointment? Two factors readily come to mind. First, he is a Nigerian of high integrity and has distinguished himself in his present and past callings. Second, he has demonstrated courage and statesmanship and also not involving himself in any partisan political affiliation.

Immediately he assumed office, Prof. Jega acknowledged that 2007 elections were flawed with irregularities. He introduced measures in order to have credible election in year 2011. He noticed that the electoral register needed to be revised and also released time table for the conduct of the elections. Having released the time table for the elections, the federal government released N75 billion for the execution of the voters' registration. In order to achieve that the INEC in December, 2010 awarded a multibillion naira contract for the supply of 132,000 units of Direct Data Capturing Machines (DDC) to be used for the exercise. The hiccup in the exercise was that within 45 days to the commencement of the registration of voters, INEC was yet to sign the contract for the supply of the DDC machines to be used for the exercise (Alechenu & Soriwei, 2010).

To worsen the above challenge encountered by the INEC, the DDC machines in some states of the federation were stolen. It was further compounded by the voter registration exercise. People were frustrated and some people described the exercise as a "hiccup of a new process" (Falola & Josiah, 2011). In the words of Jega "many Nigerians have already written off the exercise as a failure and they are already working towards that answers"

(Ogunwale, 2011). The DDC machines were rejecting fingerprints of the prospective electorates. As a result of this, complains were coming from various quarters that people could not register. The exercise had suffered a set back because INEC was proposing to register 70 million eligible voters within two weeks by using 120,000 composite electronic voter registration equipment. (Alechenu & Soriwei, 2010). In 8-10 days, 22,175, 623 voters were registered in 35 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja (Alli, 2011). This is against the wish of the commission which projected 70 million eligible voters. The implication of this is that 31.6% of the projected prospective voters were registered. A proportion less than 50% of the projection. Having looked at the projection of the registration, Prof. Jega requested for N6.6 billion of 7-day extension of voter registration from the federal government. According to Jega, "the cash will go into paying allowances to corps members, who are registration officials, and for the logistics of the exercise" (Alli, 2011, p.2). When he was projecting the eligible voters to be registered if the exercise was extended for one week, he poignantly asserted that:

The commission had registered 28.5 million eligible voters as at Saturday. The figure will rise to 45 million by Saturday and 65 million, if it is extended by one week-till February 5. 250, 000 persons were registered on January 15, the first day of the exercise...the commission was legally constrained to extend the exercise because the 60-day time ceiling had already been fixed in the Electoral Act (Alli, 2011).

The registration exercise was extended for one week as requested by the commission. It was carried out in various states including Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The commission was able to registered 73,528, 040 eligible voters, the figure that was just above the projection of the commission.

THE ANALYSIS, TREND AND PATTERN OF CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

The 2011 elections were in three phases. The first was the National Assembly Election, the second was Presidential Election and the third was the State Houses of Assembly and Gubernatorial Elections. The elections were conducted on April 9, 17 and 24 respectively. The focus of this study is to examine the level of citizens' participation in presidential election and also to determine the credibility or otherwise of the 2011 elections. The study will at this stage examine the Nigerian presidential election and the level of citizens' participation in Nigeria.

The Nigerian electorate went to the polling units to exercise their electoral franchise to elect the President that would govern the country for another four years. The INEC, a midwife of the process and an umpire on the play turf conducted elections in 119,973 polling units

nationwide. The major political parties that contested the presidential election were: The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and Congress of Progressive Change (CPC).

The results were collated based on the figures got by the Residential Electoral Officers of the states. The outcome of the presidential election showed that the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan won. The analysis of the result is shown below:

| State | PDP | CAN | CPC | ANPP | Others | Total | Reg. Voters | Voter Turnout | PDP Margin | CPC Margin | ACN Margin | ANPP Margin | Other Margin |
|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|---------|---------|------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Abia | 1,175,984 | 4,392 | 3,743 | 1,455 | 2,759 | 1,188,333 | 1,524,484 | 77.95% | 98.96% | 0.31% | 0.37% | 0.12% | 0.23% |
| Adamawa | 508,314 | 32,786 | 344,526 | 2,706 | 19,374 | 907,706 | 1,816,094 | 49.98% | 56.00% | 37.96% | 3.61% | 0.30% | 2.31% |
| Akwa Ibom | 1,165,629 | 54,148 | 5,348 | 2,000 | 5,270 | 1,232,395 | 1,616,873 | 76.22% | 94.58% | 0.43% | 4.39% | 0.16% | 0.43% |
| Anambra | 1,145,169 | 3,437 | 4,223 | 975 | 3,435 | 1,157,239 | 2,011,746 | 57.52% | 98.96% | 0.36% | 0.30% | 0.08% | 0.30% |
| Bauchi | 258,404 | 16,674 | 1,315,209 | 8,777 | 11,030 | 1,610,094 | 2,523,614 | 63.80% | 16.05% | 81.69% | 1.04% | 0.55% | 0.69% |
| Bayelsa | 504,811 | 370 | 691 | 136 | 685 | 506,693 | 591,870 | 85.61% | 99.63% | 0.14% | 0.07% | 0.03% | 0.14% |
| Benue | 694,776 | 223,007 | 109,680 | 8,592 | 11,654 | 1,047,709 | 2,390,884 | 43.82% | 66.31% | 10.47% | 21.29% | 0.82% | 1.11% |
| Borno | 207,075 | 7,533 | 909,763 | 37,279 | 15,996 | 1,177,646 | 2,380,957 | 49.46% | 17.58% | 77.25% | 0.64% | 3.17% | 1.36% |
| Cross River | 709,382 | 5,889 | 4,002 | 2,521 | 4,547 | 726,341 | 1,148,486 | 63.24% | 97.67% | 0.55% | 0.81% | 0.35% | 0.63% |
| Delta | 1,378,851 | 1,310 | 8,960 | 2,746 | 6,712 | 1,398,579 | 2,032,191 | 68.82% | 98.59% | 0.64% | 0.09% | 0.20% | 0.48% |
| Ebonyi | 480,592 | 1,112 | 1,025 | 14,296 | 5,865 | 502,890 | 1,050,534 | 47.87% | 95.57% | 0.20% | 0.22% | 2.84% | 1.17% |
| Edo | 542,173 | 54,242 | 17,795 | 2,174 | 4,808 | 621,192 | 1,655,776 | 37.52% | 87.28% | 2.86 | 8.73% | 0.35% | 0.77% |
| Ekiti | 135,009 | 116,981 | 2,689 | 1,482 | 5,697 | 261,858 | 764,726 | 34.24% | 51.56% | 1.03% | 44.67% | 0.55% | 2.18% |
| Enugu | 802,144 | 1755 | 3,753 | 1,111 | 5,246 | 814,009 | 1,303,155 | 62.46% | 98.54% | 0.46% | 0.22% | 0.14% | 0.64% |
| FCT | 253,444 | 2,327 | 131,576 | 3,170 | 7,577 | 398,094 | 943,473 | 42.19% | 63.66% | 33.05% | 0.58% | 0.80% | 1.90% |
| Gombe | 290,347 | 3,420 | 459,898 | 5,693 | 10,661 | 770,019 | 1,318,377 | 58.41% | 37.71% | 59.73% | 0.44% | 0.74% | 1.39% |
| Imo | 1,381,357 | 14,821 | 7,591 | 2,520 | 3,561 | 1,409,850 | 1,687,293 | 83.56% | 97.98% | 0.54% | 1.05% | 0.18% | 0.25% |
| Jigawa | 419,252 | 17,355 | 663,994 | 7,673 | 32,492 | 1,140,766 | 2,013,974 | 56.64% | 36.75% | 58.21% | 1.52% | 0.67% | 2.83% |
| Kaduna | 190,179 | 11,278 | 1,334,244 | 17,301 | 16,961 | 2,569,963 | 3,905,387 | 65.81% | 46.31% | 51.92% | 0.44% | 0.67% | 0.66% |
| Kano | 440,666 | 42,353 | 1,624,543 | 526,310 | 39,356 | 2,673,288 | 5,027,297 | 53.17% | 16.48% | 60.77% | 1.58% | 19.7% | 1.07% |
| Katsina | 428,392 | 10,945 | 1,163,919 | 6,342 | 29,934 | 1,639,532 | 3,126,898 | 52.43% | 26.13% | 70.99% | 0.67% | 0.39% | 1.83% |
| Kebbi | 369,198 | 26,171 | 501,453 | 3,298 | 23,979 | 924,099 | 1,638,308 | 56.41% | 39.95% | 54.26% | 2.83% | 0.36% | 2.60% |
| Kogi | 399,816 | 6,516 | 132,201 | 16,491 | 6,758 | 561,782 | 1,316,849 | 42.66% | 71.17% | 23.53% | 1.16% | 2.94% | 1.20% |
| Kwara | 268,243 | 54,432 | 83,603 | 1,672 | 8,804 | 414,754 | 1,152,361 | 35.99% | 64.68% | 20.16% | 12.64% | 0.40% | 2.12% |
| Lagos | 1,281,688 | 427,203 | 189,983 | 8,941 | 37,229 | 1,945,044 | 6,108,069 | 31.84% | 65.90% | 9.77% | 21.96% | 0.46% | 1.91% |
| Nasarawa | 408,997 | 1,204 | 278,390 | 1,047 | 4,889 | 694,527 | 1,389,308 | 49.99% | 58.89% | 40.08% | 0.17% | 0.15% | 0.70% |
| Niger | 321,429 | 13,344 | 652,574 | 7,138 | 24,682 | 1,019,167 | 2,175,421 | 46.85% | 31.54% | 64.03% | 1.31% | 0.70% | 2.42% |
| Ogun | 309,177 | 199,555 | 17,654 | 2,969 | 14,360 | 543,715 | 1,941,170 | 28.01% | 56.86% | 3.25% | 36.70% | 0.55% | 2.64% |
| Ondo | 387,376 | 74,253 | 11,890 | 6,741 | 6,577 | 486,837 | 1,616,091 | 30.12% | 79.57% | 2.44% | 15.25% | 1.38% | 1.35% |
| Osun | 188,409 | 299,711 | 6,997 | 3,617 | 13,980 | 512,714 | 1,293,967 | 39.62% | 36.75% | 1.36% | 58.46% | 0.71% | 2.73% |
| Oyo | 484,758 | 252,240 | 92,396 | 7,156 | 26,994 | 863,544 | 2,572,140 | 33.57% | 56.14% | 10.70% | 29.21% | 0.83% | 3.13% |
| Plateau | 1,029,865 | 10,181 | 356,551 | 5,235 | 9,285 | 1,411,117 | 2,259,194 | 62.46% | 72.98% | 25.27% | 0.72% | 0.37% | 0.68% |
| River | 1,817,762 | 16,382 | 13,182 | 1,449 | 5,341 | 1,854,116 | 2,429,231 | 76.33% | 98.04% | 0.71% | 0.88% | 0.09% | 0.29% |
| Sokoto | 309,057 | 20,144 | 540,769 | 5,063 | 34,775 | 909,808 | 2,267,509 | 40.12% | 33.97% | 59.44% | 2.21% | 0.56% | 3.82% |
| Taraba | 451,354 | 17,791 | 257,986 | 1,203 | 10,731 | 739,065 | 1,336,221 | 55.31% | 61.07% | 34.91% | 2.41% | 0.16% | 1.45% |
| Yobe | 117,128 | 6,069 | 337,537 | 143,179 | 18,202 | 622,115 | 1,373,796 | 45.28% | 18.83% | 54.26% | 0.98% | 23.0% | 2.93% |
| Zamfara | 238,980 | 17,970 | 624,515 | 46,554 | 14,660 | 942,679 | 1,824,316 | 51.67% | 25.35% | 66.25% | 1.91% | 4.94% | 1.56% |
| Total | 22,495,187 | 2,067,301 | 12,214,853 | 917,012 | 504,866 | 38,199,219 | 73,528,040 | | | | | | |

Source: Nigerian Election Coalition (2011)

Looking at the above table, the total number of registered voters was 73,528,040. The table further depicted that Lagos state had the highest number of registered voters of 6,108,069 which represented 8.31%. Followed by Kano, Kaduna and Katsina with population of 5,027,297 (6.84%), 3,905,387 (5.31%) and 3,125,898 (4.25%) respectively. Bayelsa had the lowest number of registered voters of 591,870 (0.81%), followed by Ekiti, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Cross River states

respectively with the registered voters of 764,726 (1.04%), 943,473 (1.28%) and 1,148,486 (1.56%).

Also, the voters' turnout showed that Bayelsa had the highest percentage of voters' turnout with 85.61%. Followed by Imo, Abia, River and Akwa Ibom states respectively with the percentages of 83.56%, 77.95%, 76.33% and 76.22%. Comparing the number of registered voters and the percentages of voters' turnout of these states, one can deduce that it is an antithesis that Bayelsa

state that had the lowest registered voters had the highest percentage of voters' turn out. Factor responsible for highest turn out in Bayelsa was that President Goodluck Jonathan is from Bayelsa state. As the "son of the soil," Bayelsa people ready to rally round him. States such as Kano, Kaduna and Katsina that had large number of voters' registration had average percentage of voters' turn out. Lagos was even worse compare to Kano, Kaduna and Katsina states. The analysis showed that Lagos state had the second to the last voters' turn out in the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. The reason adduced to Lagos' case was as a result of the fact that opposition party (ACN) controlled the state.

It has been noted that the trend that determines election in Nigeria may be not just be registration of figures, even though Nigerians have perfected how to fill up the volume. Actual turn out may be the key. A comparative analysis of citizens' participation in presidential election since 1999 to 2011 showed that on the aggregate, 57,938,945 voters were registered in 1999, those who actually voted in the presidential election were 30,280,052 representing almost 60 % of those on the roll. In 2003, 60.82 million were on the voters register and 42, 018, 735 electorates were said to have cast their ballots. Thus, about 70% of those on the roll were said to have actually participated in the presidential poll. In 2007, 61 million were registered, while 35.41 million voted. In percentage terms, 58% of those registered turned out for voting during the presidential election. The 2011 presidential election results showed that the average turn out of voters was put at 52.9%.

Based on the foregoing, a comparative analysis of the elections from 1999 till 2011 showed that there was an increase in the level of participation in 2003 compared to 1999. The level of participation increased by 10%. Factor that could be responsible for this was the fact that Nigerian electorates doubted the sincerity of the military to relinquish power in 1999. So when they noticed the Nigeria's state had really democratized, then the level of participation increased in 2003 so as to exercise their electoral powers. In 2007 and 2011 presidential elections, there was decrease in the level of electoral participation. The level of participation dropped from by 12% in 2007 and by 2011 it slipped further down by 5.1%. The main factors responsible for these were that of election rigging that characterized 2003 elections and the "do or die" syndrome introduced into the electoral game in 2007 elections by the ruling party, PDP. Secondly, electorates had lost confidence in Nigeria's electoral process because they thought the same trend would continue in 2011 election.

Apart from presidential poll, the level of citizens' participation in 2011 general elections in Nigeria was low. According to Prof. Attahiru Jega, only 35% of the 70 million qualified voters participated in the general

election. This is due the fact that the entire electoral process was shoddily handled. Apart from electoral apathy displayed, the elections were scuttled by problems like poor-printed ballot papers and non-availability of essential materials, including the result sheets (The Punch, June 15, 2011).

Despite the reduction in the level of citizens' participation in 2011 presidential election and general elections compared to previous elections in the fourth republic, the assessment of 2011 General Elections by Nigerians and the international community still showed that the 2011 elections were improvement on the previous fourth republic elections. The European Union election observation mission to Nigeria has described the 2011 general elections as a foundation for further democratic development. Chief observer of the Mission, Mr. Alonjz Peterle who presented report at a news conference in Abuja said the electoral process was a remarkable departure from the past. He noted that the legal framework, general performance of the INEC and other stakeholders, provided for the 2011 general elections and the overall democratic foundation for further democratic development. He said, "Overall, the 2011 elections marked an important improvement compared to all polls observed previously by the EU in Nigeria" (Alechenu, 2011).

The post election situations showed that the 2011 general elections were relatively fair and fairly credible. The 2011 elections scored a number of firsts in many respect. For one, it was the first (concluded) election where the electoral umpire was not vilified. It was also an election that the President received a national not a regional mandate. On the down side, it was an election which attracted a sad reminder of the fact that some individuals and groups still resorted to violence as a means of venting their anger (Alechenu, 2011). The party that dominated the northern states (CPC) demanded for cancellation of results in 22 states especially the states from South South, South West and South East zones including FCT, Abuja. The post election tension in northern states after the results of the presidential election had been announced depicted violence and resulted into burning of houses, maiming and killing of people. The former Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Hafiz Ringim captured the post election situation by positing that:

A total of five thousand, three hundred and fifty six persons (5,356) were arrested for electoral offences in the course of the elections. *Out of this number, two thousand, three hundred and forty one (2,341) were arrested for various election related offences while three thousand and fifteen (3,015) were arrested for their involvement in the post election violence* (Ringim, cited in Alechenu, 2011).

The offences revolving around: thuggery, violation of restriction of movement on election days, bearing arms and criminal charms at polling centres, snatching

and destruction of ballot boxes, unlawful possession of voters' cards, inciting violence and murder. Nevertheless, there should be mechanism of addressing these electoral offences. According to Electoral Act of 2010, electoral offenders must be dealt with in order to avert the reoccurrence of this violence in the future. This will drive the fear into the minds of electoral perpetrators to introduce electoral fraud in the electoral game in the future.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the 2011 presidential election and political participation in Nigeria. The study revealed that there was an average level of citizens' participation in the 2011 presidential election. The study further observed that there was low level of participation in presidential election compared to the past presidential elections in the era of fourth republic. Chief factors according to the study might be the "do or die" syndrome, lost of public confidence on election and election rigging that characterized the electoral process in Nigeria. The study also revealed that the 2011 elections in Nigeria were fairly free, fair and credibly judged by the international observers and local monitors of elections. Although there were lapses. Despite these lapses, Nigeria must further deepen her electoral process for eligible voters to cast their vote and being counted. This will aid electoral participation of the eligible voters in the future presidential elections and general elections. What are the things that must be done?

One, the INEC should organize public enlightenment to sensitize the voters to participate in the elections. This can be done through intense campaign through the radio, television and other mass media. This will give the electorate an insight that government belongs to the people and that exercising electoral franchise gives the citizens popular sovereignty to determine the direction of state.

Two, the Nigerian state should provide the citizens living abroad the opportunity to vote during national elections. This can be done through e-voting. There are 115 countries globally where Diasporas can vote today (The Punch, June 15, 2011). Sierra Leone has just passed The Diaspora Voting Act of 2011 which confers voting rights on its citizens living abroad. This is a good gesture which Nigeria can emulate.

Three, the INEC should immediately come out with a four-year strategic plan that will resolve the embarrassing hiccups observed in the April, 2011 poll. It is commendable that the INEC acknowledged the lapses in the 2011 elections. The commission must take a step of improving subsequent ones. The step taken must be a right step towards laying the foundation for a just and truly democratic society. This is because April polls were almost scuttled by problems like poorly-printed

ballot papers and non-availability of essential materials, including result sheet. These problems must not be repeated in the subsequent elections in Nigeria.

Four, the electoral system should be upgraded to meet future challenges. Nigeria ought to take a cue from the nations where electoral systems are better organized. In many democracies, voters are automatically added to the rolls when they reach legal voting age. This will increase political participation as well as consolidate democracy in Nigeria.

Finally, the civil society groups should continue to play their strategic role in the election process. The INEC should ensure that the important milestones in election management are met in a timely manner before 2015. Ultimately, the process of improving the nation's electoral system will be determined by the strong will of Nigerians to strengthen democracy.

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