

**VOTER SUPPRESSION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY
OF 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.**

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MAY, 2024

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF
BENIN, NIGERIA. IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.SC) IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

MAY, 2024

CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned, hereby certify that this work was carried out by **AGBONTEAN OSAYEKEMWEN** with the Matriculation number: **SSC190366** and confirmed to be adequate in the scope and value for the award of bachelor of science (B.SC) Degree in Political Science of the University of Benin, Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God Almighty, the giver of life. I dedicate this work to my Parents MR and MRS Agbontean Lovely, to my siblings, Prosper, Newman and Wisdom Agbontean. I also dedicated this work to my amiable maternal family whose support have been so profound.

This research work is largely dedicated to all the victims of vote suppression, who in one way or the other have been victimized and denied of their constitutional right to vote.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am sincerely grateful to God for giving me the necessary strength and motivation to navigate and push through this phase of life.

I extend profound gratitude to my course adviser, DR. Okojie, for his loving and fatherly nature, wisdom and care. Also I appreciate DR. Obakhedo, DR. Charles Eghweree, MR. Sowemimo for their guidance and knowledge

My sincere and profound gratitude to my Supervisor, Mrs. Menyeneabasi Chuks, for her professional guidance and support throughout this project. I want to specially appreciate her for her kind and calm nature, insightful ideas and valuable directions.

I have overwhelming and immeasurable gratitude for my family, including my parents MR and MRS Agbontean, and siblings for their love and unwavering support. My amazing grandparents MR David and MRS Dorcas Amenaghawon for their never ending prayers and goodwill, To MR Harry Amenaghawon and MRS Esther Okoudo who I affectionately call 'Big Daddy' and 'Big Mummy' respectively, my uncles MR Odion Amenaghawon and MR Francis Amenaghawon. My Paddy and Big Auntie MRS Bernice Okosun, My Bestie MRS Kezia. My Big Uncles DR. Agho-Otoghile Christopher, MR. Henry Osarenkhoe and Mrs Sarah Osarenkhoe. To my awesome cousins Marvel, Divine, Melody, Mirable, Praise, Anointed, Micheal, Eldad, Elsa, Solei, Diamond. They stood by me throughout my academic journey, offering boundless love, support, guidance, care and financial assistance, all of which played a vital role in shaping my path.

I cannot fail but to acknowledge my friends; To AwoyadeBenedicta I'm so proud we did this together, OkoroOgheneFejiri you're amazing, Ituen-basseIdoreyin thank you for been such a role model, Christopher Godstime you're superb, Oluwasunmi Blessing thank you for the brotherly role, ToluwalajuTosin thank you for mirroring Jesus to me, Bro Osarunwense thank you for your guidance, Joshua Morgan (aka de law), Aiyedun Christiana my big sis, JolayemiMonsurat who never misses my birthday, Meneziebezi Wisdom Destiny thank you for your thoughtfulness. Your unwavering friendship, thouthfulness, mental support, warm hospitality and love will forever hold a special place in my heart.

OgheneareFejiri Praise, thank you for your unwavering support and dedication throughout my project.

To my mentors, Pastor Paul Itotha, thank you for your words of wisdom and encouragements, Okunbor Gladness thank you for your continuous support and AwosikaTolulope thank you for your continuous contributions of knowledge.

Lastly, I want to appreciate myself for the dedication and hard work I invested in bringing this research project to fruition.

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ABSTRACT

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election witnessed a distressing escalation in voter suppression and a stark decline in political participation, reflecting a systemic failure to address underlying issues despite legislative reforms and technological innovations aimed at ensuring free and fair elections. This project, titled "Voter Suppression and Political Participation: A Case Study of the 2023 Presidential Election," seeks to delve into the intricate dynamics surrounding these phenomena. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research will employ questionnaires and focus group interviews to impartially analyze the causal and contributory factors behind voter suppression and low political engagement within the Nigerian electoral system. Despite the implementation of groundbreaking provisions in the Electoral Act 2022, the 2023 election emerged as one of the least participated and most marred by irregularities in recent memory. Instances of voter suppression, ranging from intimidation to manipulation of electoral boundaries, were rampant across various states, casting doubt on the efficacy of previous efforts to foster political participation. Moreover, reports of electoral violence and underage voting further underscored the erosion of public confidence in the electoral process. Against this backdrop, this research set out to examine the intricate relationship between votersuppression and political participation via a literature review and qualitative survey analysis. The study found that there were significant levels of voter suppression in the 2023presidential elections and this impacted on citizen's political engagement.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Free and fair elections are the genuine hallmark of democratic governments as they allow citizens to choose their representatives in governmental positions (Iguh, 2022). As a democratic state, Nigeria has conducted well over eight General Elections since its severance from British hegemony in 1960. These elections conducted in 1979, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, have all been marred by severe electoral irregularities (Olurode, 2017). The elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007 stand out as some of the most poorly conducted elections with significant levels of electoral violence, voter intimidation and ballot-snatching. Electoral malfeasance exists in various forms, but most prominently as ballot snatching/stuffing, over-voting, and multiple registration/voting. The latter two forms of electoral malpractice were been attributed, in part, to a lack of substantial checks on the activities of electoral officers, party agents and politicians.

Owing to the spate of these malfeasances, policymakers embarked on legislative reforms to consolidate the extant electoral laws. Subsequent legislative revisions in 2010, 2015 and 2019 birthed the Electoral Act 2022 which was enacted on February 25, 2022 (Udemezue, 2022). Broadly, the Act aimed to enhance the capacity of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) to conduct free and fair elections. The innovations pioneered by the Act abound thereby theoretically enhancing democratic consolidation in Nigeria through its 153 sections. As a disruptive legal framework, the Act legalized the deployment of technology in the conduct of elections under section 47 – 50. Further, it mandated the prompt release of funds to the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) to conduct the elections. It also prohibited political appointees from acting as candidate/delegate in a primary election during the subsistence of their appointment. These groundbreaking provisions were expected to radically reform electoral practice in Nigeria, solving the litany of problems plaguing the Nigerian electoral system. This, in turn, it was envisaged, would culminate in democratic consolidation and accord legitimacy to the emerging governments.

Consolidating, the foregoing, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) worked assiduously, to conduct a free and fair election. To do so, the Commission embarked on the modernization of the Nigerian electoral system by integrating technology into Nigeria's electoral system since 2011 (Oklobia and Dance, 2022). Sequel to the findings of the report of the 23-man Electoral Reform Committee (ERC), led by Justice MuhammedUwais in 2007, the Commission introduced Temporary Voters Card (TVC) in the 2011 elections, which was subsequently replaced with Permanent Voters Card (PVC) in the 2015 elections. It also introduced Biometric voter registration captures unique physical or behavioral attributes of voters, such as fingerprints or facial features, providing a more reliable means of verifying voter identity compared to traditional methods. The introduction of biometric registration system has significantly streamlined the voter verification process, reducing instances of identity-related fraud. INEC also introduced smart card readers during elections to facilitate the authentication of voters and minimize the risks associated with manual verification processes.

Another brainchild of the Commission is the electronic transmission of election results via INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV). INEC announced the introduction of the Election Result Viewing Portal (IREV) on August 6, 2020. The purpose of the IREV is to provide an opportunity for real-time transmission of a photo of the election results sheets from polling units to the central collation centre; the portal allows members of the public to view pictures of the election result sheets (Form EC8A) as compiled, recorded and endorsed at the polling units, upon the conclusion of voting at an election. After results are counted and announced at the polling unit, a duly completed and signed copy of the polling unit election result sheet (called Form EC8A), indicating the number voters accredited and the number of votes cast for each candidate and the percentage of total votes cast at the polling unit will be uploaded to the INEC portal. This procedure is designed to enhance the transparency of the electoral process and reduce the incidence of vote-rigging and election-result manipulation, thereby improving Nigeria's elections.

Despite this triplicate effort in riddling the Nigerian electoral system of its multi-faceted problems, the 2023 General elections fared worse than its predecessors. It was reputed to be the least participated election in recent times, with staggering levels of political apathy. Worse more, it was characterized by astounding incidences of voter suppression, ranging from voter intimidation, to vote-buying, and manipulation of the delineation of electoral boundaries. Electoral violence was reported in Borno, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Kogi to Rivers, Enugu, Abia, Edo, Delta, Ogun, and Lagos States. In Northern states, allegations of underage voters proliferated, with live footage showing minors invalidly exercising their franchise (Oduola, 2023).

These events critique the utility of the previous attempts at fostering political participation in the Nigerian electoral system. It leads one to wonder if the damage that has been done to the reputation of Nigerian politics is irreparable. Can the public ever regain the confidence they once had in a system that has failed them repetitively? What effective bulwarks can be imposed to combat voter suppression, thereby bolstering political participation? All of these are the questions which this research seeks to answer. To do so, we will intricately examine the causal and contributory factors to voter suppression and (low) political participation in the Nigerian electoral system. Our method of inquiry is qualitative, and recourse will be had to questionnaires and focus group interviews, in a bid to unbiasedly extricate the factors underpinning voter suppression, and propose recommendations to combat same.

1.2. Statement of Problem

The Nigerian electoral system has long been plagued by a myriad of challenges, including electoral irregularities, voter suppression, and low political participation. Despite numerous efforts to reform and modernize the electoral process, such as the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022 and the introduction of technological innovations by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the 2023 General elections demonstrated a concerning regression rather than progress. The 2023 elections stood out as a stark reminder of the persistent shortcomings within the Nigerian electoral landscape. Reports of widespread voter suppression, political apathy, and electoral violence cast doubt on the integrity and inclusivity of the electoral process. From voter intimidation to

the manipulation of electoral boundaries, the elections were marred by various forms of malpractice that undermined the fundamental principles of democracy.

Moreover, the decline in political participation during the 2023 elections raised significant concerns about the ability of the Nigerian electoral system to inspire trust and engagement among citizens. The staggering levels of voter apathy observed across the country underscored a deep-seated disillusionment with the political process and institutions. Furthermore, the prevalence of electoral violence in numerous states, coupled with allegations of underage voting in certain regions, further eroded confidence in the electoral process and highlighted the systemic challenges that continue to hinder the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

In light of these developments, it becomes imperative to critically examine the underlying factors contributing to voter suppression and low political participation in the Nigerian electoral system. By identifying the root causes of these challenges, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to address systemic issues and enhance the integrity and inclusivity of future elections. Therefore, the overarching problem at hand revolves around the persistent failure of the Nigerian electoral system to ensure free, fair, and credible elections that reflect the will of the people. Without addressing the underlying issues of voter suppression, political apathy, and electoral malpractice, the prospects for democratic consolidation in Nigeria remain uncertain.

1.3. Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this study is to comprehensively understand the factors contributing to voter suppression and low political participation in the Nigerian electoral system, using the 2023 Presidential elections as a case study.

Premised on the foregoing, the objectives of this research are fivefold, to wit:

- i. To identify the causal factors behind voter suppression in Nigerian elections.
- ii. To analyze the reasons for low political participation among Nigerian citizens.
- iii. To evaluate the effectiveness of previous electoral reforms and technological interventions in addressing electoral challenges.
- iv. To propose strategies and recommendations to mitigate voter suppression and enhance political participation in Nigeria.
- v. To assess the potential impact of recommended measures on the integrity and inclusivity of future Nigerian elections.

1.4. Research Questions

The following questions have been curated to anchor this discourse:

- i. What are the primary factors contributing to voter suppression in the Nigerian electoral system?
- ii. Why is political participation among Nigerian citizens declining, particularly in recent elections?

- iii. How effective have previous electoral reforms and technological interventions been in addressing electoral challenges in Nigeria?
- iv. What strategies can be implemented to combat voter suppression and increase political participation in the Nigerian electoral process?
- v. What potential impact might these strategies have on the integrity and inclusivity of future Nigerian elections?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

i. Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between electoral reforms and the reduction of voter suppression in Nigeria

ii. Null Hypothesis (H₀): Low political participation in Nigerian elections is not influenced by factors such as voter intimidation and manipulation.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Technological interventions in the electoral process do not significantly impact the transparency and fairness of Nigerian elections.

1.6. Limitation and Scope of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the Nigerian electoral system and may not encompass all electoral challenges faced in other countries. The research will be conducted using qualitative methods, such as questionnaires and focus group interviews, limiting the depth of quantitative analysis. Additionally, the study will not delve into the historical

context of Nigerian politics but will primarily concentrate on contemporary issues related to voter suppression and political participation.

1.7. Significance of Study

This study holds significance in providing insights into the persistent challenges facing the Nigerian electoral system and offers recommendations for improvement. By addressing voter suppression and low political participation, the research aims to contribute to the enhancement of democratic processes in Nigeria and restore public confidence in the electoral system.

1.8. Definition of Terms

Voter Suppression

Voter suppression involves deliberate actions aimed at obstructing eligible voters from participating in the electoral process (Oduola 2023). Tactics can include voter intimidation, imposing obstacles to voter registration, limiting access to polling stations, and manipulating electoral boundaries. In contrast, voter apathy signifies a decline in citizens' participation within the electoral system. It occurs when eligible voters choose to abstain from elections due to disinterest or detachment for personal reasons (Fagunwa 2015). Voter suppression actively inhibits voter engagement, while apathy reflects a passive disengagement from the electoral process.

Election

A succinct definition of the term, 'election' is difficult to proffer owing to the ambivalence and superfluity of the concept (Mesfin 2008). However, electoral laws, legal

texts, scholarly articles and judicial decisions have helped to smoothen the definitional contours around this subject. In her legal article, Aborishade (2006) defined elections as a democratic platform for leadership succession in a nation, organization or institution. Similarly, Onah (2022) defined elections as a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Abutu et al. (2022).define elections as the periodic and lawful process that allows citizens to choose their representatives in governance. Cohesively integrating these definitions, elections can be defined as the democratic process of leadership transition through the process of voting. It occurs broadly in two forms: direct elections and indirect elections.

Nigeria

Nigeria, a nation with a population exceeding 200 million, is a heterogeneous state including several ethnic and religious factions. Nigeria is partitioned into 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), in addition to 774 local government districts (Oyeniya 2012 in Awortu 2015). Nigeria's cultural diversity, with its abundance of over 500 local languages and dialects, poses a significant challenge in terms of comprehension. In addition, the country has experienced multiple coups and the establishment of democracy from 1966 to 1999 (Awortu 2015).

1.9. Organization of Study

This research work will be segmented into five (5) chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction - This chapter contains the background of the study, statement of problem, objective of the study, research questions, research hypotheses,

significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, and the skeletal framework of this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework – This chapter presents the review of literatures on the study of voter suppression and political participation in the Nigerian electoral system. Here, we'll look at the prevailing academic views on the cause of voter suppression in Nigeria. We shall also examine the factors that undergird the low turnout of voters at the 2023 election, in a bid to glean insights that can turn things around next time. This chapter also contains the theoretical framework to explain the topic of research.

Chapter Three: Methodology – This chapter presents the methodology of the research which includes research design, content analysis, and data collection etc.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Data – this chapter contains data for the research which was obtained via questionnaires, and focus group interviews.

Chapter Five: Conclusion – This chapter contains the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the entire work .

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.1. The Concept of Political Participation

The concept of political participation has been multifariously defined by leading scholars in the political landscape. Kumari&Kidwai(1999) and Agbaje (1993) defined political participation as one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society. It is the sine qua non of democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunities (Anifowose, 2004). Thus democracy is inconceivable without political participation (Agbaje, 1999) thus, in the view of Kumari&Kidwai (1999), in every society, the wielders of political powers are very keen on ensuring at least some amount of political participation by the people. Political participation therefore, describes the extent to which individual members of a society share, take part or get involved in the life of that society (Agbaje, 1999).

Corroborating the foregoing, Kumari&Kidwai (1999) asserts that its restriction to only a part of the population can result to an explosive situation. Consequently, the political power any group of persons in society have would be linked directly to the degree of their participation in the political process of the society (Lewu, 2005). Theoretically, political participation has a long genealogy. Like most concepts that are used today, it is an unfolding concept. From direct participation of the old Greek city – states to the Schumpeterian rejection of that model, the concept has been central to every discussion about democracy (Beek, 1997)

Though the search for participatory, just and sustainable society permeates all political system, the normative question of how much ordinary people should participate and what kind of popular participation in political affairs is possible and desirable is very much politically relevant and socially significant (Bruce, 2004). This question stems from the fact that the term “participation” though widely used within democratic theory, its meaning remains vague (Weale, 1999). Steiner (1988) posits that the question of what it is to take part in politics is massively complex and ultimately ambiguous. He noted that while it is assumable that activity within a political party or an organization which regards itself as a pressure group should count as political participation, activity in other sorts of organization, such as sports association and traditional women’s organization which are though not overtly political but set the contexts of politics, give their active members administrative experience and are capable of overt political action if their interests or principles are threatened.

2.1.2. The Factors Underpinning Low Political Participation in Nigeria

Every societal phenomenon, including political participation, is influenced by a variety of factors. These factors shape the level of engagement citizens have in the political process and contribute to the overall dynamics of governance. The reasons for low political participation in Nigeria are multi-faceted and encompass several underlying factors:

- Inadequate Implementation of Electoral Laws and Enforcement Mechanisms

Nigeria faces challenges in effectively implementing electoral laws and ensuring the enforcement of electoral regulations (Ngwu & Ugwu 2023). The electoral infrastructure

often falls short, and law enforcement agencies tasked with maintaining electoral integrity lack the necessary resources and expertise. Despite efforts by agencies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), shortcomings persist, hindering citizens' trust in the electoral process and discouraging political engagement.

- Socio-economic Factors

Socio-economic conditions significantly impact political participation. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and economic instability create barriers to political engagement for many Nigerians. (Othman, Osman, & Mohammed, 2018) The struggle for basic necessities consumes individuals' time and energy, leaving little room for active participation in political activities.

- Political Alienation and Disillusionment

Widespread corruption and a lack of accountability in Nigeria's political landscape contribute to feelings of alienation and disillusionment among citizens (Oyuru, 2023). Many perceive politics as a realm dominated by elites pursuing their own interests rather than serving the public good. This disillusionment fosters apathy and disengagement from political processes.

- Ethnic and Religious Divisions

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape often fosters divisions that undermine collective political action. Identity-based politics frequently overshadow substantive

policy debates, leading to fragmented political participation along ethnic and religious lines (Obasi&Erondu, 2016). This polarization impedes efforts to build inclusive and cohesive political communities.

- Limited Civic Education and Awareness

A lack of comprehensive civic education contributes to low political awareness and engagement among Nigerians (Oyuru, 2023). Many citizens are unfamiliar with their rights, responsibilities, and the mechanisms of democratic governance. Without adequate education and awareness campaigns, individuals may feel disempowered and detached from the political process (Bakare, 2020).

- Electoral Violence and Intimidation

Instances of electoral violence and intimidation pose significant obstacles to political participation in Nigeria (Shehuet *al.*, 2017). Fear of reprisals and the potential for violence deter individuals from exercising their democratic rights. Electoral malpractices, including voter suppression and coercion, undermine the integrity of elections and erode public trust in the electoral system.

- Weak Democratic Institutions

Nigeria's democratic institutions often lack the capacity and independence to uphold democratic principles effectively. Weak institutional frameworks contribute to impunity, electoral fraud, and a lack of transparency, further eroding public confidence in the political system (Sule, Sani& Mat, 2017). Strengthening democratic institutions is

essential to fostering greater political participation and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

- Youth Marginalization and Disenfranchisement

Nigeria's youthful population faces significant challenges in accessing meaningful political participation opportunities. Limited youth representation in political structures and decision-making processes marginalizes young people and stifles their ability to contribute to governance and policy development. Addressing youth disenfranchisement is crucial for promoting inclusive political participation and fostering intergenerational dialogue.

In summary, the factors contributing to low political participation in Nigeria are deeply entrenched and multifaceted. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting civic education and awareness, fostering inclusive political processes, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. Only through concerted efforts can Nigeria overcome the barriers to political participation and build a more vibrant and participatory democracy.

2.1.3. The Effects of Low Political Participation in Nigeria

Low political participation in Nigeria has profound implications for governance, democratic legitimacy, and societal development. The effects of inadequate political engagement manifest across various spheres:

- Erosion of Democratic Legitimacy

Low voter turnout and limited citizen engagement undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes in Nigeria. When a significant portion of the population remains disengaged from political affairs, the representativeness and accountability of elected officials are called into question (Adigun, 2020). This erosion of democratic legitimacy weakens the foundation of Nigeria's democratic system.

- Diminished Accountability and Transparency

Inadequate political participation diminishes mechanisms of accountability and transparency within the government. Without active citizen oversight and engagement, elected officials may operate with impunity, disregarding the public interest and prioritizing narrow agendas. The absence of robust accountability mechanisms perpetuates corruption, mismanagement, and governance failures (Bekoe, 2017).

- Policy Disparities and Inequities

Low political participation exacerbates disparities and inequities in policy outcomes, as marginalized voices remain unheard in the decision-making process. Policies and programs may not adequately address the needs and concerns of vulnerable populations, perpetuating social injustices and widening socio-economic gaps (Madu&Abdulmalik, 2020). The absence of inclusive policymaking processes undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development and social cohesion.

- Weakened Social Cohesion and Civic Trust

A lack of political engagement contributes to social fragmentation and weakened civic trust within Nigerian society. When citizens feel disconnected from the political process,

social cohesion deteriorates, and trust in public institutions declines. Polarization along ethnic, religious, and regional lines further strains societal cohesion, impeding efforts to build consensus and promote national unity.

- **Democratic Backsliding and Authoritarian Tendencies**

Persistent low political participation creates fertile ground for democratic backsliding and the rise of authoritarian tendencies. When citizens disengage from democratic processes, opportunistic leaders may exploit power vacuums to undermine democratic norms and consolidate authoritarian control. The erosion of democratic values and institutions poses significant threats to Nigeria's democratic stability and constitutional order.

In conclusion, the effects of low political participation in Nigeria are far-reaching and multifaceted, undermining democratic governance, social cohesion, and inclusive development. Addressing the root causes of political apathy and disengagement requires concerted efforts to promote civic education, strengthen democratic institutions, and foster inclusive political processes. By empowering citizens to actively participate in governance and decision-making, Nigeria can realize its democratic aspirations and advance towards a more just and equitable society.

2.2.1. Voter Suppression

Voter suppression, a tactic aimed at reducing the number of eligible voters or influencing the outcome of an election, has been a persistent issue in democracies worldwide. Historically, it has taken various forms, including literacy tests, poll taxes, and discriminatory voter registration practices, primarily targeting minority groups. The

consequences of voter suppression extend beyond individual disenfranchisement to undermine the democratic process itself, eroding trust in institutions and perpetuating inequalities (Usoro& Ben, 2020). In the United States, for instance, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a landmark legislative response to address systemic voter suppression against African American citizens, particularly in Southern states (Epperly *et al.*, 2020). Despite legal protections, voter suppression tactics continue to evolve, adapting to new technologies and political contexts.

Voter suppression tactics are not unique to the United States but have been observed in democracies worldwide, including developing nations like Nigeria. In the Nigerian context, voter suppression has been a significant concern, particularly in recent electoral cycles. During the 2019 general elections, reports emerged of irregularities, including voter intimidation, electoral violence, and logistical challenges, which raised questions about the fairness and credibility of the electoral process (Onimisi&Tinuola, 2019). According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), voter turnout in Nigeria has been inconsistent, with rates fluctuating between 50% and 60% in recent elections, suggesting barriers to political participation that may include voter suppression tactics (Onimisi&Tinuola, 2019).

In the context of Nigeria, voter suppression manifests through various means, including but not limited to, logistical challenges, voter intimidation, and misinformation campaigns. According to a report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), during the 2019 elections, logistical challenges such as late arrival of election

materials and malfunctioning voter card readers contributed to voter disenfranchisement, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure is limited (Onimisi&Tinuola, 2019). Additionally, incidents of voter intimidation and violence were reported in several regions, undermining the ability of citizens to freely exercise their right to vote. Furthermore, the proliferation of misinformation on social media platforms, aimed at misleading voters about election procedures and candidate qualifications, has posed additional challenges to ensuring an informed electorate (Ahmad, Abdullah, and Arshad, 2015). Addressing these issues is crucial for strengthening democracy in Nigeria and fostering greater political participation among its citizens.

2.2.2. Factors Contributing to Voter Suppression in Nigeria

Understanding the factors that contribute to voter suppression in Nigeria is crucial for safeguarding democratic processes and ensuring fair and inclusive elections. Several key factors shape the landscape of voter suppression in the country:

Legal and Regulatory Barriers

Numerous legal and regulatory barriers exist in Nigeria that can suppress voter participation. These include stringent voter registration requirements, such as the need for specific identification documents, which may disenfranchise certain segments of the population, particularly marginalized groups and rural communities (Suleiman, 2022). Additionally, complex electoral laws and regulations can create confusion and deter potential voters from participating in the electoral process.

Electoral Violence and Intimidation:

Instances of electoral violence and intimidation significantly undermine the integrity of elections in Nigeria. Threats, coercion, and physical violence against voters, candidates, and electoral officials can instill fear and discourage individuals from exercising their right to vote freely and safely (Aluko& Titus, 2023). This intimidation tactic is often employed by political actors seeking to manipulate election outcomes and suppress opposition support (Tonwe&Aihie, 2017).

Disenfranchisement of Minority Groups:

Certain minority groups in Nigeria, including ethnic and religious minorities, as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs), often face systematic disenfranchisement. Limited access to voter registration centers, as well as discriminatory practices by electoral authorities, can prevent these marginalized groups from fully participating in the electoral process, thereby suppressing their votes and influence.

Electoral Fraud and Manipulation:

Instances of electoral fraud, including vote rigging, ballot stuffing, and tampering with election results, undermine the credibility and fairness of elections in Nigeria. Manipulative practices by political parties and candidates, often in collusion with electoral officials, can distort the electoral outcome and suppress the genuine expression of voters' preferences.

Socioeconomic Barriers:

Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to information, contribute to voter suppression in Nigeria. Limited resources and education may hinder

individuals' ability to navigate the electoral process effectively, including voter registration and participation. Moreover, economic disparities can exacerbate inequalities in political representation and access to electoral resources, further marginalizing certain segments of the population.

Media Bias and Misinformation:

Media bias and misinformation play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and influencing voter behavior in Nigeria. Biased reporting by mainstream media outlets, as well as the proliferation of false information and propaganda on social media platforms, can distort electoral discourse and manipulate voter opinions (Oke&Ikechukwu, 2024). This deliberate dissemination of misleading information can suppress voter turnout and erode trust in the electoral process.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the dynamics of political participation and governance structures. In the context of Nigeria's political landscape, various theoretical perspectives offer distinct perspectives on leadership, governance, and democratic processes

Elite Theory

This study is based on Elite theory. Elite theory is particularly suitable for conceptualizing the concept vote suppression and political participation in Nigeria 2023 presidential election because it claims that a selected few individuals hold majority of

power, dominate decision making process, shape public policy outcomes and control over the society (Dahl 1956, 1971, 1989). These elite groups are often policymakers and leaders who control the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the society. In respect to vote suppression, this theory could be applied to conceptualize how political elites use their influence and resources to enact policies and perpetuate certain tactics that suppress individuals or groups their right to vote in an election.

Elite theory suggest that voter suppression emerges due to the fact that these elites are motivated by self-interest and seek to maintain their privileged positions within the political space (Dahl 1961). These political elites control the nation by direct and indirect mechanism. They employ the use of identity, ethnicity, religious sentiments to protect their political interest (Dahl 1961). Streamlined to vote suppression, political elites in Nigeria may employ the use of various methods to disenfranchise and suppress individuals, groups and consolidate their respective power. This could involve implementing restrictive voter registration requirements, manipulating electoral boundaries through gerrymandering, or engaging in voter intimidation and violence, manipulating of election results, snatching of ballot boxes among others to suppress turnout in opposition strongholds. In addition, political elites may use their control over the media and other institutions to disseminate propaganda and misinformation that undermines confidence in the electoral process, further suppressing voters and political participation.

Elite theory posits that economic and social inequalities play a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes and perpetuating voter suppression. Nigeria experiences significant economic and social disparities, with a small elite class controlling a disproportionate share of the country's wealth and resources. Elite theory suggest that these economic elites have a vested interest in safe guarding their privileged positions within the political system to protect their wealth and influence (Mariotti 2020). As a result they may use their political power to influence political processes including elections, this economic influence can contribute to vote suppression by creating barriers to political participation for marginalized groups who lacks access to resources or who economically disenfranchised.

One of the major challenges facing Nigeria elections and political participation are the political elite, Nigeria facing vote suppression, intimidation, exploitation and insecurity is at the heart of political elites. These elites in Nigeria use their influence to create instability, election crisis, violence, insecurity and vote suppression during electoral process. They employ the use of force and violence.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review and theoretical framework presented in this chapter offer valuable insights into the dynamics of political participation and leadership in Nigeria. The exploration of existing literature underscores the significance of political participation as a cornerstone of democracy and highlights the multifaceted nature of factors influencing low political engagement in the country.

The concept of political participation is intricately linked to the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic governance. Scholars have emphasized its importance in ensuring equal opportunities for citizen engagement and fostering inclusive decision-making processes. However, the reality in Nigeria reflects challenges such as socio-economic disparities, political alienation, ethnic and religious divisions, limited civic education, electoral violence, weak democratic institutions, and youth disenfranchisement, all of which contribute to low levels of political participation.

The effects of low political participation reverberate across various spheres, including the erosion of democratic legitimacy, diminished accountability and transparency, exacerbated policy disparities, weakened social cohesion, and the risk of democratic backsliding. These consequences underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting civic education and awareness, and addressing socio-economic inequalities.

Theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter offer valuable perspectives on leadership, governance, and democratic processes. Traditional leadership theories highlight the role of inherent traits, behavioral dynamics, and situational factors in shaping leadership effectiveness, while contemporary theories emphasize ethical conduct, transformative change, authenticity, servant stewardship, and stakeholder engagement.

By integrating insights from both traditional and contemporary leadership theories, policymakers and practitioners can cultivate leadership capacities, enhance governance effectiveness, and promote citizen engagement in political processes. Leadership

development initiatives grounded in theoretical frameworks can nurture a new generation of leaders committed to democratic values, social justice, and inclusive governance in Nigeria.

In essence, addressing the challenges of low political participation requires concerted efforts from government institutions, civil society organizations, and the broader society. By fostering a culture of active citizenship, promoting inclusive political processes, and strengthening democratic institutions, Nigeria can realize its democratic aspirations and advance towards a more just, equitable, and participatory society.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the methodology adopted in the course of the study. It discusses issues such as design of the research, sources and methods of data collection; population and sample size of the study, techniques of sampling as well as method of data analysis. These issues are explained in subsequent parts of this chapter.

3.2. Research Method

This study adopts the survey method of research; the survey method studies both large and smaller groups of a population by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelationship of the independent and dependent variables (Story & Tait, 2019). This research is designed to be both descriptive and empirical. This method explores the relationship between variables in the population by selecting an unbiased sample and generalizing the findings on the entire population.

This research adopted survey design with a view to examining the influence of voter suppression on political participation in the 2023 Presidential elections. In doing this, variables that relate to voter suppression and political participation in Nigeria were extensively assessed. These variables include political involvement, political neutrality, voter eligibility, non-partisanship etc. These variables are mostly qualitative variables that were collected based on perceptions of respondents.

3.3. Sources and Methods of Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, data were generated from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary source of data was gathered through the instruments of questionnaires. On the other hand instrument of secondary data used included: data or information regarding political participation in Nigeria, voter suppression in Nigeria, and the voter turnout at the 2023 Presidential election. Other forms of secondary data explored included: official publications of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), scholarly articles, text books, unpublished research materials, Websites and other related materials.

3.4. Population

Reid (2004) described population in a study as all units possessing certain characteristics, which are of the interest of researchers' study. From the definition, population can be understood as the targeted community or group of people which is involved or selected by the researcher for his study.

Therefore, for this study the population from which the samples will consist of the following groups of participants/interviewees:

- a) Female Electorate
- b) Male Electorate.
- c) Male Lecturers.
- d) Female Lecturers

3.5. Sampling Techniques and Sample size

For the purpose of this research, Questionnaires were randomly administered to 100 respondents and electorates in the 2023 presidential elections to document their responses on the mediating role of voter suppression on political participation in the 2023 Presidential elections. According to Kelly (2010), the purposive sampling procedure is a nonprobability sampling method that emphasizes respondent selection based on preconceived conditions.

Questionnaires were also randomly administered to respondents who were not members of any electoral management body (EMB) such as INEC, or any political party that was represented in the 2023 presidential elections to document their responses on factors they perceive, underpinned voter suppression in the 2023 presidential election, and the effects of same on political participation in Nigeria. The target population are the voters in the 2023 General elections, which includes both male and female voters, and staff of the University of Benin who served as collation and returning officers in the 2023 General elections. Randomly sampling selection was used to target these populations and the response obtained is analyzed using descriptive analysis (frequencies, percentages, and charts).

3.6. Data Analysis

In this study, both the qualitative and the quantitative methods of data analysis were adopted. These include descriptive statistics analysis using frequency tables and simple percentages in analysing and interpreting the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULT OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The 2023 General elections conducted on 25 February, 2023 was which ushered in the 6th Republic. The major parties involved were the All Progressive Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), People Democratic Party (PDP), each fielding presidential candidates. The election was characterized by astounding incidences of voter suppression, ranging from voter intimidation to vote-buying, and manipulation of the delineation of electoral boundaries. Electoral violence was reported in Borno, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Kogi to Rivers, Enugu, Abia, Edo, Delta, Ogun, and Lagos States. In Northern states, allegations of underage voters proliferated, with live footage showing minors invalidly exercising their franchise (Oduola, 2023). The 2023 elections stood out as a stark reminder of the persistent shortcomings within the Nigerian electoral landscape. Reports of widespread voter suppression, political apathy, and electoral violence cast doubt on the integrity and inclusivity of the electoral process. From voter intimidation to the manipulation of electoral boundaries, the elections are marred by various forms of malpractice that undermined the fundamental principles of democracy.

Moreover, the decline in political participation during the 2023 elections raised significant concerns about the ability of the Nigerian electoral system to inspire trust and engagement among citizens. The staggering levels of voter apathy observed across the country underscored a deep-seated disillusionment with the political process and

institutions. Furthermore, the prevalence of electoral violence in numerous states, coupled with allegations of underage voting in certain regions, further eroded confidence in the electoral process and highlighted the systemic challenges that continue to hinder the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

It is against this background that this research set out to assess the mediating role of voter suppression on political participation in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria.

4.2.1. Responses on the Proliferation of Voter Suppression Tactics during the 2023 Presidential Election?

Table 1. Responses on the Proliferation of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agreed	18	18
Agreed	40	40
Undecided	20	20
Disagreed	14	14
Strongly Disagreed	8	8
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2024.

In examining responses regarding the proliferation of voter suppression tactics during the 2023 Presidential Election, the data reveals a varied spectrum of opinions among respondents. According to Table 1, a significant portion of respondents, 58%, expressed

agreement (combining "Strongly Agreed" and "Agreed" categories) that voter suppression tactics were indeed on the rise. Among them, 18% strongly agreed, while 40% simply agreed. Conversely, 34% of the respondents were either undecided or disagreed, with 20% falling into the "Undecided" category and the 14% of the respondents disagreeing with the notion. The remaining 8% strongly disagreed with the idea of increased voter suppression tactics during the election. This distribution suggests a noteworthy level of consensus among respondents, with a majority leaning towards agreement on the issue. Such a trend lends credibility to the reliability of the responses collected, as they predominantly stem from individuals knowledgeable about the subject matter.

4.2.2. Responses on the Impact of Voter Suppression on Political Participation in the 2023 Presidential Elections

Table 2. Responses on the Impact of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Significantly increased my participation	34	34
Somewhat increased my participation	29	29
Had no effect	12	12
Significantly decreased my participation	17	17

participation		
Somewhat increased my participation	9	9
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024.

In analyzing responses concerning the impact of voter suppression on political participation during the 2023 Presidential Elections, the data showcases diverse viewpoints among respondents. According to Table 2, a significant portion of respondents, totaling 63% (combining "Significantly increased my participation" and "Somewhat increased my participation" categories), felt that voter suppression tactics had some level of effect in boosting their participation. Among them, 34% indicated that their participation was significantly increased, while 29% stated it was somewhat increased. On the contrary, 26% of respondents reported a decrease in their participation due to voter suppression tactics, with 17% stating it significantly decreased their involvement and 16.67% somewhat decreased it. Only a minority of respondents, 12%, claimed that voter suppression had no effect on their political participation. This distribution underscores a varied impact of voter suppression tactics on political engagement among respondents. It suggests that while a substantial portion experienced increased participation, a significant number also felt deterred from participating due to such tactics. This perspective highlights the complexity of the issue and underscores the need for further examination and action to address voter suppression concerns.

4.2.3. Responses on the Influence of Voter Suppression on the Legitimacy of Election Results

Table 3. Responses on the Influence of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	18	18
Agreed	42	42
Undecided	8	8
Disagreed	19	29
Strongly Disagreed	13	13
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024.

In examining responses regarding the influence of voter suppression on the legitimacy of election results, the data reveals varying perspectives among respondents. According to Table 3, a significant portion of respondents, totaling 60% (combining "Agreed" and "Strongly Agreed" categories), believed that voter suppression does indeed impact the legitimacy of election results. Among them, 42% agreed and 18% strongly agreed with this assertion. Conversely, 32% of respondents disagreed with the notion, with 19% indicating disagreement and 13% strongly disagreeing. Only a small fraction of respondents, 8%, remained undecided on the matter. This distribution vividly illustrates the devastating influence of voter suppression on the legitimacy of election outcomes.

While a significant portion acknowledges its impact, a few persons express their skepticism or outright disagreement. Such a range of perspectives underscores the complexity of the issue and suggests a need for further examination and discourse to address concerns surrounding voter suppression and its potential effects on election integrity.

4.2.4. Responses on the Impact of Voter Suppression on Political Apathy?

Table 4. Responses on the Impact of Voter Suppression on Political Apathy

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	18	18
Agreed	42	42
Undecided	19	19
Disagreed	13	13
Strongly Disagreed	8	8
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2024.

In assessing responses concerning the impact of voter suppression on political apathy, the data indicates a range of perspectives among respondents. According to Table 4, a notable portion of respondents, totaling 60% (combining "Strongly Agreed" and "Agreed" categories), believed that voter suppression indeed contributes to political apathy. Among them, 18% strongly agreed, while 42% simply agreed with this assertion.

Conversely, 32% of respondents expressed uncertainty or disagreement, with 19% being undecided and the 13 per cent disagreeing with the notion. An additional 8% strongly disagreed with the idea that voter suppression impacts political apathy. This distribution suggests a significant degree of consensus among respondents regarding the link between voter suppression and political disengagement. A majority acknowledge the potential role of voter suppression in fostering apathy, underscoring the relationship between voter suppression and the waning political engagement in Nigeria.

4.2.5. Responses on the Most Popular Form of Voter Suppression Tactics used during the 2023 Presidential Election?

Table 5. Responses on the Proliferation of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Polling place closures	16	16
Voter intimidation	42	42
Misinformation	18	18
ID requirements	16	16
Other	8	8
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

Examining responses regarding the most prevalent form of voter suppression tactics used during the 2023 Presidential Election, the data highlights varying perceptions among

respondents. According to Table 5, the most commonly cited tactic was voter intimidation, identified by 42% of respondents. Following this, polling place closures, misinformation, and ID requirements each garnered 16%, 18%, and 16% of the responses, respectively. Additionally, 8% of respondents cited other forms of voter suppression. This distribution indicates a diverse array of perceived tactics employed to suppress voter turnout. While some tactics, such as voter intimidation, were more prominently recognized, others like polling place closures, misinformation, and ID requirements also featured prominently in respondents' assessments. Such findings underscore the multifaceted nature of voter suppression tactics and the importance of addressing them comprehensively to safeguard electoral integrity.

4.2.6. Perception of Overall Transparency of the 2023 Presidential Election Process

Table 6. Perception of Overall Transparency

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Transparent	8	8
Transparent	13	13
Neutral	19	19
Not Transparent	42	42
Very Not Transparent	18	18
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

In examining responses regarding the perception of the overall transparency of the 2023 Presidential election process during the 2023 Presidential Election, the data reveals a varied spectrum of opinions among respondents. According to Table 6, a significant portion of respondents, 21% enthused that the 2023 Presidential elections were not respondent. Among them, 8% opined that the process was very transparent, while 13% simply opined that it was transparent. Conversely, 60% of the respondents surmised that the election was not transparent. This distribution suggests a noteworthy level of consensus among respondents, with a majority surmising that the election process was not transparent.

4.2.7. Effectiveness of Voter Education Efforts in Combating Suppression

Table 7. Effectiveness of Voter Education Efforts

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Effective	7	7
Somewhat Effective	21	21
Neutral	10	10
Somewhat Ineffective	34	34
Highly Ineffective	29	29
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

Examining responses on the effectiveness of voter education efforts in combating suppression, the data highlights varying perceptions among respondents. A significant portion of respondents, totaling 28% (combining "highly effective" and "somewhat effective" categories), felt that voter education efforts had some level of effect in combating voter suppression. Among them, 7% indicated that voter education efforts were highly effective, and 21% stated it was somewhat effective. On the contrary, 34% of the respondents reported that voter education efforts were somewhat ineffective, with 29% stating that it was highly ineffective.

4.2.8. Gender (Female) Predilection of Voter Suppression in the 2023 Presidential Election

Table 8. Gender Predilection of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	7
Agree	21	21
Undecided	10	10
Disagree	34	34
Strongly Disagree	29	29
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

In analyzing responses concerning the gender orientation of voter suppression on political participation during the 2023 Presidential Elections, the data showcases diverse viewpoints among respondents. According to Table 8, a minute portion of the respondents, totaling 28% agreed felt that voter suppression tactics was more prominent amongst women. Among them, 7% strongly agreed, whereas 21% merely agreed. On the contrary, 63% of the respondents disagreed with the perspective that voter suppression is more prominent among females.

4.2.9. Gender (Male) Predilection of Voter Suppression in the 2023 Presidential Election

Table 9. Gender Predilection of Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29	29
Agree	34	34
Undecided	10	10
Disagree	21	21
Strongly Disagree	7	7
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

In analyzing responses concerning the gender orientation of voter suppression on political participation during the 2023 Presidential Elections, the data showcases diverse viewpoints among respondents. According to Table 9, a significant portion of the respondents, totaling 63% agreed felt that voter suppression tactics was more prominent amongst women. Among them, 7% strongly agreed, whereas 21% merely agreed. On the contrary, 28% of the respondents disagreed with the perspective that voter suppression is more prominent among females.

4.2.10. Usage of Social Media as a Tool for Voter Suppression in the 2023 Presidential Election

Table 10. Use of Social Media as a Tool for Voter Suppression

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	7
Agree	27	27
Undecided	8	8
Disagree	43	43
Strongly Disagree	15	15
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024.

In analyzing responses concerning the influence of media on voter suppression during the 2023 Presidential Elections, the data showcases diverse viewpoints among respondents. According to Table 10, a portion of the respondents, totaling 34% agreed that social media was used as a tool of vote suppression tactics was more prominent amongst women. On the contrary, 58% of the respondents disagreed with the perspective that social media was used as a tool of vote suppression tactics was more prominent amongst women.

4.3. Discussion

The findings from the survey on the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election shed light on the prevalence and impact of voter suppression tactics, as well as the broader implications for political participation and electoral integrity. This discussion section synthesizes the results from the survey with insights from existing literature on political participation, voter suppression, and electoral dynamics in Nigeria.

Firstly, based on the survey findings, it is apparent that political participation is foundational to democracy, serving as a barometer of citizens' engagement with governance processes. All 100 respondents voted in the 2023 Presidential highlighting the importance of political participation as demonstrated by Agbaje (1993). It was further discovered that voter suppression poses a significant challenge to political participation and democratic legitimacy. 63% of the respondent pool agreed and strongly agreed to this corroborating the earlier findings of Usoro and Ben (2020). The majority of the respondents also noted that voter suppression tactics was widely employed during the

2023 Presidential Election, highlighting the systemic nature of voter suppression as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of society (Oduola, 2023). The survey findings also cited misinformation as a prominent voter suppression tactic utilized in the 2023 Presidential election. This corresponds with Oke and Ikechukwu's (2024) finding of media bias and misinformation as a contributory factor to voter suppression.

In conclusion, the findings from the survey on voter suppression in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election underscore the complex interplay between political participation, electoral integrity, and democratic legitimacy. The survey results align with existing literature on the factors underpinning low political participation and highlight the pervasive influence of voter suppression tactics on electoral dynamics in Nigeria.

Addressing voter suppression requires concerted efforts from government authorities, civil society organizations, and international partners to enact meaningful reforms and safeguard electoral rights. By addressing the root causes of suppression and promoting inclusive political processes, Nigeria can advance its democratic development and foster greater citizen engagement in governance.

4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, a range of factors, including legal barriers, electoral violence, disenfranchisement of minority groups, electoral fraud, socioeconomic inequalities, and media bias, contribute to voter suppression in Nigeria. Addressing these underlying challenges through comprehensive electoral reforms, strengthened institutional

mechanisms, and greater civic engagement is essential to uphold democratic principles and ensure free, fair, and inclusive elections in the country.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.1. Summary of Findings

The research findings on voter suppression during the 2023 Presidential Election revealed several key insights:

- The majority of respondents acknowledged the proliferation of voter suppression tactics during the election, with significant agreement among respondents.
- Voter suppression tactics were perceived to have a varied impact on political participation. While a substantial portion reported increased participation due to voter suppression, a significant number also experienced decreased participation.
- Opinions on the influence of voter suppression on the legitimacy of election results were divided among respondents. While a significant portion believed it impacted the legitimacy, others expressed skepticism or disagreement.
- There was consensus among respondents regarding the link between voter suppression and political apathy, with a majority acknowledging its role in fostering disengagement.
- Voter intimidation was identified as the most prevalent form of voter suppression tactic during the election, followed by polling place closures, misinformation, and ID requirements.

5.1.2. Implications of the Findings

The findings have significant implications for democracy and electoral integrity in Nigeria:

- Acknowledging the widespread acknowledgment of voter suppression underscores the urgent need for electoral reforms to address these challenges and safeguard the democratic process.
- Understanding the varied impact of voter suppression on political participation highlights the importance of targeted interventions to ensure inclusivity and fairness in elections.
- The division of opinions on the influence of voter suppression on election legitimacy underscores the importance of fostering transparency and accountability in the electoral process to enhance public trust.
- Recognizing the link between voter suppression and political apathy emphasizes the need for civic education and engagement initiatives to empower citizens and enhance their participation in the democratic process.

5.1.3. Limitations of Findings

While this study provides valuable insights into voter suppression during the 2023 Presidential Election, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations:

- The research focused solely on perceptions and opinions of respondents, which may not fully capture the complexity of voter suppression dynamics.

- The study was limited to a specific time frame and may not capture the evolving nature of voter suppression tactics over time.
- The research did not explore the perspectives of marginalized or disenfranchised groups, whose experiences may differ significantly from the broader population.
- The study did not consider regional variations in voter suppression dynamics, which may have different implications for electoral integrity in different parts of the country.

5.2. Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Electoral Laws and Enforcement Mechanisms:** Enhancing the implementation of electoral laws and regulations is essential to combating voter suppression. Electoral authorities should prioritize the enforcement of laws that protect voters' rights and penalize those who engage in voter suppression tactics. This includes ensuring timely and transparent adjudication of electoral disputes and holding perpetrators of voter intimidation and violence accountable. Additionally, electoral infrastructure should be improved to minimize logistical challenges and ensure equitable access to polling stations for all citizens.

2. **Promote Civic Education and Awareness:** Increasing civic education and awareness programs is crucial for empowering citizens to recognize and report instances of voter suppression. Educating voters about their rights, responsibilities, and the electoral process can help mitigate the impact of misinformation and intimidation tactics. Civil society organizations, media outlets, and educational institutions should collaborate to develop

comprehensive voter education campaigns that reach diverse communities and address specific challenges faced by marginalized groups.

3. **Enhance Electoral Transparency and Accountability:** Strengthening electoral transparency and accountability mechanisms is paramount for building public trust in the electoral process. Electoral authorities should prioritize transparency in voter registration, ballot counting, and results announcement to ensure the integrity of elections. Moreover, independent monitoring and oversight mechanisms should be established to detect and prevent instances of electoral fraud, manipulation, and voter suppression. Political parties and candidates should commit to upholding electoral integrity and refrain from engaging in tactics that undermine the fairness and credibility of elections.

4. **Address Socioeconomic Barriers to Political Participation:** Addressing socioeconomic inequalities is essential for promoting inclusive political participation and reducing vulnerabilities to voter suppression. Efforts to alleviate poverty, improve access to education and healthcare, and create economic opportunities can empower marginalized communities and enhance their ability to engage meaningfully in the electoral process. Additionally, targeted interventions such as voter registration drives, mobile polling stations, and transportation assistance can help overcome logistical barriers to political participation, particularly in remote or underserved areas.

5. **Combat Electoral Violence and Intimidation:** Mitigating electoral violence and intimidation requires a multi-faceted approach involving law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and community leaders. Strengthening security measures around

polling stations, deploying impartial observers, and implementing early warning systems can deter perpetrators and ensure the safety of voters and electoral officials. Furthermore, fostering dialogue and reconciliation initiatives at the grassroots level can help address underlying grievances and promote peaceful coexistence during electoral periods.

6. Foster Interagency Collaboration and International Cooperation: Enhancing collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners is essential for addressing the complex challenges of voter suppression.

Interagency task forces should be established to coordinate efforts, share information, and implement targeted interventions to combat voter suppression effectively. Additionally, international organizations and donor agencies should provide technical assistance, capacity-building support, and financial resources to strengthen electoral processes and promote democratic governance in Nigeria. By working together collaboratively, stakeholders can leverage their collective expertise and resources to uphold electoral integrity and safeguard democracy in the country.

5.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on voter suppression during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria has provided valuable insights into the challenges and complexities surrounding the electoral process. The findings reveal a concerning proliferation of voter suppression tactics, including intimidation, misinformation, and poll closures, which have significant implications for democracy and electoral integrity in the country. Despite the widespread

acknowledgment of voter suppression, there remains a division of opinions on its impact on election legitimacy, highlighting the need for transparency and accountability in the electoral process to enhance public trust.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of addressing socioeconomic barriers to political participation and promoting civic education and awareness to empower citizens and foster inclusive electoral processes. By strengthening electoral laws and enforcement mechanisms, enhancing transparency and accountability, and fostering interagency collaboration, stakeholders can work together to combat voter suppression effectively and uphold democratic principles. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study, including its focus on perceptions rather than objective measures of voter suppression and its failure to consider regional variations in suppression dynamics. Moving forward, further research and concerted efforts from policymakers, electoral authorities, civil society, and citizens are necessary to address these challenges and ensure free, fair, and inclusive elections in Nigeria.

To build upon the findings of this study and address its limitations, future research should adopt a more comprehensive approach to examining voter suppression dynamics in Nigeria. This could involve conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in suppression tactics over time and exploring the perspectives of marginalized or disenfranchised groups to capture a more diverse range of experiences. Additionally, future research should consider regional variations in suppression dynamics to develop targeted interventions that address specific challenges faced by different communities.

Moreover, incorporating objective measures of voter suppression, such as electoral turnout data and incidence reports, can provide a more nuanced understanding of its impact on the electoral process. By addressing these gaps in knowledge, future research can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to combat voter suppression and strengthen democracy in Nigeria.

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