

**VOTER PARTICIPATION PATTERNS AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION:  
AN ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**BY**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Gift Oiza AKANDE, hereby declare that this undergraduate research work titled: “Voter Participation Patterns and Democratic Consolidation: An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections” is my original work, and all sources of information, ideas, data, and quotations from published and unpublished works that have been used in this thesis are duly acknowledged through proper references and citations.

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that the research project was carried out by Gift Oiza AKANDE in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, in partial fulfilment for the award of a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Political Science.

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## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to God Almighty.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to God for the wisdom, inspiration, strength and guidance during the course of my study. Without his mercy and favour, the success of the study would have been a mirage. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude and render my warmest thanks to my supervisor, Dr Andrew Amadasu, who made this work possible. His friendly guidance and expert advice have been invaluable throughout all stages of the work. I would also wish to express my gratitude to Dr Adeshina Sowemimo for the extended discussions and valuable suggestions, which have contributed greatly to the improvement of the thesis. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my parents, Mr and Mrs Patrick Akande, for their prayers, financial and moral support while the study lasted. I am also grateful to my siblings, Topa Akande, Mercy Akande, Blessing Akande and David Akande for being there for me. Special thanks to my Aunts, Mrs Mary Osadare, Miss Gloria Balogun and my special friends Sylvester, Dienye, Dorcas and my course mates who willingly shared sincere advice. The support and encouragement from them will always be a pleasant memory throughout my life.

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## **Abstract**

*Voter participation is vital to democratic stability in Nigeria, yet declining engagement poses a threat to effective governance. This study argues that revitalising democratic institutions, norms, and infrastructure requires greater citizen involvement before, during, and after elections. It investigates five core questions: the factors driving voter apathy, citizens' attitudes toward voting, their awareness of political developments, the motivations behind disengagement, and the broader impact of apathy on democratic consolidation. Using a survey of fifty respondents analysed with simple percentages, the study finds that trust in the electoral process is central to participation. A transparent and impartial electoral body was widely viewed as key to ensuring free and fair elections. Conversely, fraud and manipulation by political parties were cited as major causes of low turnout during the 2023 General Elections. Respondents also identified inadequate voter education as a driver of electoral malpractice, while rampant vote-buying further erodes public confidence. To address these challenges, the study recommended comprehensive voter education to enhance civic awareness of rights and responsibilities. Informed citizens are more likely to resist corruption and hold leaders accountable. Stricter regulation of political financing is also necessary to curb the influence of money in politics. Ultimately, tackling voter apathy at every stage of the electoral cycle is essential for building credible elections and achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Nigeria holds presidential elections every four years, ideally allowing eligible citizens to freely elect honest representatives. However, since returning to civilian rule in 1999 after military governance, Nigerian elections have consistently faced severe challenges undermining this democratic ideal. These include widespread election rigging, result manipulation, voter intimidation, political violence, assassination of candidates, destruction of materials, vote buying, and the partisan misuse of law enforcement (Falade & Orungbemi, 2010; Utomi, 2019). Falade and Orungbemi (2010) argue that factors like intolerance, thuggery, ethnic politics, and apathy prevent genuine democracy. Utomi (2019) further notes that party elites frequently manipulate elections for personal gain, while Ojo (2014) observes that violence has become deeply embedded in Nigerian electoral culture.

The nomination process itself is often compromised. Political "godfathers" exert excessive control, using clientele networks to dominate candidate selection and party congresses, effectively sidelining ordinary members (Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013; Omotoso, 2019). Omotoso (2019) explains that these godfathers act as demigods, unilaterally deciding political appointments, thereby stifling genuine participation. This environment, coupled with pervasive corruption and instability, fuels widespread public disillusionment. Many Nigerians believe politicians serve only themselves, leading to voter apathy (the failure of eligible citizens to vote), which critically weakens democratic legitimacy and stability.

This apathy stems from multiple interconnected causes. Systemic issues like election rigging, violence, vote buying, last-minute cancellations, and delayed results directly discourage participation (Adedigba, 2019; Griguoli, 2018). Socioeconomic factors are

equally critical: poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic services make political engagement a low priority for struggling citizens (Adedigba, 2019). Crucially, many voters, including educated elites like civil servants and academics, feel their votes are meaningless due to a profound lack of trust in the electoral process (Adeoluwa, 2017; Utomi, 2019). Utomi (2019) stresses that credible elections require an independent judiciary, a non-partisan electoral body, and political actors committed to fair rules—conditions often unmet in Nigeria.

While robust voter turnout is essential for a legitimate government and deters electoral fraud, Nigeria consistently experiences low participation. This was particularly evident in the pivotal 2023 general election. Despite its significance for democratic consolidation, voter apathy remained a severe threat. Disillusionment, driven by corruption, instability, and the belief that politicians ignore public interests, combined with socioeconomic hardships, led many eligible voters to disengage. Consequently, this research investigates how voter indifference impacted Nigeria's democratic consolidation, using the 2023 general election as a critical case study.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Since its return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has established a formal democracy with regular elections. However, the legitimacy of this system relies on active citizen participation, which is essential for achieving collective goals (Lasisi, 2015). A growing threat to this legitimacy is voter apathy, a disengagement stemming from widespread public disillusionment. Citizens often believe their votes are meaningless due to systemic corruption, election rigging, and politicians who prioritise personal gain over public service. This leads to unaccountable leadership, further corruption, and instability.

When elections are perceived as predetermined by elites rather than the public, democracy becomes exclusionary. Low voter turnout is consequently linked to weak governance. This

apathy is not merely individual disinterest but is driven by significant contextual and institutional barriers, including election violence and a widening gap between the government and the people (IDEA, 2006). The core issue is a flawed and deteriorating electoral system that fails in its basic democratic duties. Studies confirm that low participation results from systemic issues like fraud, psychological factors like distrust, and socioeconomic conditions (INEC and FES Nigeria, 2011).

This research, therefore, investigates how this persistent voter apathy impacts democratic consolidation in Nigeria, using the 2023 General Election in Edo State as a critical case study to understand why citizens disengage and how this weakens democratic foundations.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to:

1. Identify key factors driving voter apathy among Nigerian citizens.
2. Analyse citizens' attitudes toward electoral participation.
3. Measure political awareness levels, including understanding of electoral processes and civic rights.
4. Determine specific reasons for electoral disengagement (e.g., distrust, insecurity, socioeconomic barriers).
5. Assess how voter apathy undermines democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses:

1. Which socioeconomic, institutional, and psychological factors most significantly contribute to voter apathy in Nigeria?

2. How do Nigerian citizens perceive the value and efficacy of voting in elections?
3. To what extent are citizens informed about electoral processes, political candidates, and their civic rights?
4. Why do eligible voters actively avoid participating in elections despite democratic guarantees?
5. In what ways does low voter turnout weaken Nigeria's democratic stability and governance?

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research addresses a critical challenge to Nigeria's democracy: voter apathy. By analysing the 2023 general elections, it identifies specific barriers to democratic consolidation—such as election insecurity, logistical failures, and institutional distrust—that drive citizens away from voting. These findings provide policymakers and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with evidence-based strategies to improve electoral integrity, voter education, and public trust. Crucially, the study links voter apathy to socioeconomic factors like poverty and unemployment, demonstrating how economic marginalisation suppresses political participation. This underscores the need for policies that connect democratic engagement with equitable access to social welfare and economic opportunity. For academia, the research offers a framework to analyse evolving voting behaviours and contributes foundational insights for future studies on electoral dynamics in emerging democracies.

### **1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

This study focuses exclusively on the impact of voter apathy on democratic consolidation during Nigeria's 2023 federal general elections. While other elections (e.g., state-level polls) fall outside this scope, the analysis provides a template for examining similar

dynamics elsewhere. The research specifically isolates voter apathy as a factor in Nigeria's democratic challenges, acknowledging that other issues (e.g., ethnic conflict or institutional weakness) also hinder democratic growth but remain beyond this study's purview. Data collection relies primarily on questionnaires, introducing potential limitations like response bias or social desirability effects in self-reported attitudes. These methodological constraints are noted to contextualise the findings.

## **1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is structured across five chapters to systematically investigate voter apathy in Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Chapter One introduces the research problem, objectives, significance, scope, limitations, and organisational framework. Chapter Two critically reviews existing literature and establishes the theoretical foundation, building on prior scholarship to contextualise Nigeria's electoral challenges. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including population sampling, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures. Chapter Four presents and analyses empirical findings from the 2023 general elections, interpreting patterns of voter disengagement. Finally, Chapter Five synthesises key insights, draws evidence-based conclusions about democratic consolidation, and proposes actionable recommendations for policymakers and electoral bodies. This progression (from conceptual grounding to practical implications) ensures a rigorous, logically cohesive examination of how voter apathy undermines Nigeria's democracy.

## **1.8 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

### **Voter Apathy**

Voter apathy refers to a lack of interest or participation in political life, including voting and civic duty (Pasek, 2011). It is characterised by low political awareness and engagement. As Yakubu (2012) argues, it represents a lack of patriotism and concern for a

country's social and political institutions. Essentially, it is the opposite of political engagement, where individuals see politics as irrelevant and remain apolitical or passive.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is a system of government where supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them either directly or through elected representatives (Appadorai, 1968). It is the foundation for political parties and enables discussion on critical issues like justice, human rights, and good governance (Ogundiya, 2011). It is the world's most prevalent form of government, with most modern regimes and politicians identifying as democratic.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's electoral process has been consistently undermined by fraud, voter intimidation, state interference, political violence, and weak ideological leadership. These systemic flaws fuel public disengagement, causing citizens to withdraw from political discussions and elections, directly weakening democratic stability. For democracy to function, active citizen participation is essential, as it reflects "the degree to which members of society share in decisions affecting their lives" (Deth & Elff, 2000). Voter apathy, defined as a lack of interest in electoral processes and civic duty (Agu et al., 2013; Sylvia et al., 2013), critically erodes this foundation. When turnout is low, elected governments lose legitimacy and representativeness, failing to fulfil elections' core purpose: selecting accountable leaders who reflect public will (Ogunbiyi, 2015).

This disengagement stems from deep public distrust. Politicians routinely break campaign promises, transforming into "untouchable demigods" after taking office (Agu et al., 2013), while Nigeria's toxic "winner-takes-all" politics frames elections as high-stakes battles. Consequently, many citizens dismiss politics as a "dirty game," avoiding participation entirely (Tan, 2012). As voter apathy grows, government ceases to be *of, by, and for the people*, becoming an unresponsive institution disconnected from citizens' needs. The result is a democracy where elections cannot improve governance or lives, as mass abstention ensures outcomes ignore public preferences.

#### 2.2 Political Participation

Political participation lacks a single universal definition due to evolving academic perspectives, but scholars consistently frame it as voluntary citizen engagement in governance. Adelekan (2010) defines it as individuals shaping societal goals and their

implementation, emphasising that *people, not leaders*, determine national values and leadership. This aligns with democracy's core principle: government must be "of, by, and for the people," requiring citizens to influence decisions affecting their lives.

Participation manifests through traditional actions (voting, running for office, joining parties, attending rallies) and non-traditional methods (protests, petitions), as noted by Falade (2014) and Hague and Harrop (2007). Crucially, it is always optional—forcing participation violates electoral principles, and individuals control their engagement level (e.g., registering but not voting). Akamare (2003) identifies it as a key aspect of political behaviour, while Awolowo and Aluko (2010) stress its role in *acquiring power to influence decisions*, driven by social, economic, or ideological motives. Awoleso (2014) adds a collective lens, defining it as "shared activities in selecting rulers and shaping public policies."

Ultimately, democracy cannot function without such engagement. When citizens withdraw, governance loses legitimacy, undermining the very foundation of representative systems. As Adelekan (2010) underscores, genuine democracy demands that people actively shape policies impacting their communities.

### **2.3 DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Political participation is fundamental to democracy, as democratic systems require active citizen engagement to function. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) argue that any legitimate democracy must ensure competitive elections, civil liberties, and inclusive political involvement. Appadorai (2004) defines democracy as governance by the people—either directly or through elected representatives—while Dahl (1989) emphasises it as "rule by demos," where equal citizens collectively shape decisions. Crucially, democracy depends on meaningful participation: citizens must vote, debate policies, and hold leaders

accountable to protect their interests through mechanisms like free elections, civil liberties (speech, assembly), and multi-party competition (Appadorai, 2004; Lindberg, 2004).

Nigeria, however, fails to meet these democratic standards. Despite theoretical commitments, political apathy severely undermines its electoral process. Falade and Orungbemi (2010) assert that genuine democratic governance remains absent across Nigeria and much of Africa due to minimal citizen engagement. Voter turnout—a key indicator of participation—has plummeted since 1999: from 52.3% in 1999 to 26.72% in the 2023 general election, where only 24.9 million of 93.47 million registered voters participated (Sahara Reporters, 2019; Hamalai, 2017). This disengagement stems from systemic issues like election rigging, violence, and broken campaign promises, fostering widespread distrust.

Low participation directly weakens democracy. As Dalton (2007, cited in Uchenna et al., 2013) notes, voting is the most significant form of civic engagement, yet its decline in Nigeria enables practices like vote-buying, documented by Ojo (2018) in Ondo and Ekiti states, which further erodes electoral integrity. Without active citizen involvement, governments lose accountability, civil liberties deteriorate, and democracy becomes merely nominal. Agaibe (2019) confirms this trend: when citizens withdraw, politics shifts from public service to elite power struggles, leaving institutions vulnerable to corruption and instability. True democracy requires not just elections, but sustained participation to ensure government remains *of, by, and for the people*.

#### **2.4 AN OVERVIEW OF VOTER APATHY IN NIGERIA**

Voting is essential for holding elected leaders accountable, as Uchenna et al. (2013) argue. Wojtasik (2013) identifies seven critical election functions: delegating representation, selecting elites, legitimising power, controlling authorities, ensuring accountability, developing political programs, and rehabilitating politicians' public image. When citizens

abstain, they undermine democratic governance—low turnout reduces politicians' incentive to create responsive policies (Wojtasik, 2013; Agaibe, 2019).

Globally, declining voter participation alarms scholars, governments, and citizens, raising questions about democracy's efficacy. While turnout varies internationally, persistently low rates (often below 40%, per IDEA, 2006) signal a dangerous disconnect between citizens and government, directly challenging democratic legitimacy. In Nigeria, this crisis is acute: only 42.76% voted in the 2019 governorship elections (INEC, 2019), and turnout has plummeted from 52.3% in 1999 to 26.72% in 2023. Such disengagement stems not from citizen "laziness" (IDEA, 2006) but from systemic failures, including election fraud, voter intimidation, political violence, and broken promises (Igbuzor, 2010; Sesan, 2012).

Crucially, Nigeria's electoral process violates global best practices. When voters fear violence or believe their votes are meaningless (Sesan, 2012), apathy becomes rational. Scholars confirm that contextual and institutional factors (not individual indifference) drive low turnout (IDEA, 2006). For democracy to function, elections must reflect the majority will; yet Nigeria's flawed system perpetuates a cycle where distrust fuels abstention, which further erodes legitimacy.

To reverse this, Nigeria's electoral body must transcend basic oversight. Following models in nations with rising participation, it should implement sustained civic education to rebuild political consciousness and enforce candidate accountability. Without urgent reforms to address fraud, violence, and elite manipulation, voter apathy will continue weakening Nigeria's democracy.

## **2.5 RELEVANCE OF ELECTIONS IN DEMOCRACY**

Elections should empower citizens to improve public welfare through political engagement, whether as candidates or voters (Oni, 2020). In true democracies, leaders must prioritise

serving constituents (not personal or party interests), yet Nigeria consistently fails this standard. Despite optimism around Nigeria's 1999 return to civilian rule, six presidential elections (1999–2019) have yielded only *superficial liberalisation*, not genuine democratic consolidation (Oni, 2014). This stagnation reflects a critical disconnect: election politics rarely translates to service delivery, undermining democracy's core purpose of enhancing citizens' lives (Oni, 2020).

Nigeria's "Fourth Republic" (2011–2019) exemplifies this failure. Voters anticipated tangible "dividends of democracy," but persistent systemic flaws, including rampant vote buying (Ovwasa, 2013), have eroded accountability. Officials who spend heavily to win elections often prioritise donors' interests over public welfare, diverting focus from transparent governance and anti-corruption efforts (Davies, 2014). Consequently, low voter turnout signals profound disillusionment: citizens perceive elections as ineffective tools for demanding better leadership.

Democracy fundamentally requires governments *of, by, and for the people*, where elections ratify the social contract between rulers and citizens (Oni, 2020). Without this linkage, elections become hollow rituals rather than mechanisms for change. Nigeria's experience proves that mere electoral processes cannot sustain democracy; they must deliver visible improvements in citizens' lives to maintain legitimacy and participation.

## **2.5 A CONCEPTUAL LINKAGE BETWEEN VOTER APATHY, ELECTIONS, AND DEMOCRACY**

Defined as citizens' deliberate disengagement from electoral processes (Crewe et al., 1992), voter apathy directly undermines democracy by severing the critical link between elections and public welfare. While political participation encompasses civic engagement, policymaking, and leadership selection, voting remains democracy's most visible mechanism for expressing popular will. When turnout declines, elections fail to fulfil their

three core democratic functions: ensuring accountability through re-election threats, selecting competent leaders (legitimacy effect), and reflecting diverse voter preferences (representative effect) (Vergue, 2009).

Nigeria exemplifies this crisis. Despite scholarly consensus that free, fair elections with mass participation are essential for transparent governance (Molutsi & Singh, 2003; INEC and FES, 2011), voter apathy has intensified since 1999. Low turnout stems not from citizen "laziness" but from systemic failures: security threats like Middle Belt conflicts erode trust in the government's basic protective role, while vote buying (Ovwasa, 2013) and unfulfilled promises make elections feel meaningless (Chinisinga, 2003). Consequently, citizens perceive voting as irrelevant to improving poverty or unemployment—undermining the anticipated "dividends of democracy."

Critically, low turnout weakens democracy's foundations. Governments elected by small voter fractions lack legitimacy, reducing politicians' incentive to serve the public (Ballington & Masterson, 2005). As Davies (2014) observes, officials who buy votes prioritise donors over constituents, diverting focus from anti-corruption and service delivery. This cycle, where electoral flaws fuel apathy, which further entrenches flawed governance, explains why Nigeria's elections remain "hollow rituals" rather than tools for change.

The solution requires institutional reform. Electoral bodies like INEC must move beyond basic oversight to actively rebuild trust through civic education and rigorous enforcement of fair practices (Okoye, 1996). Competitive, secure elections—where citizens believe their vote matters—directly boost turnout (Ballington & Masterson, 2005). Without such reforms, voter apathy will continue enabling unqualified leaders to seize power through violence or fraud, destabilising Nigeria's democracy. As Cheta (2020) warns, tolerating apathy isn't passive; it's a "coup against democracy" itself.

## 2.6 DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Democratic consolidation refers to the ongoing process of stabilising democracy after transitioning from authoritarian rule, ensuring it becomes the permanent, legitimate framework for governance (Schedler, 1998). It requires more than just holding elections; it demands institutionalising democratic values through robust structures that make democracy "stable, efficient, and responsive" to citizens (Oni, 2014). Crucially, this involves:

- Strong institutions that enforce checks and balances, judicial independence, and anti-corruption measures (Yagboyaju, 2013);
- A vibrant civil society holding officials accountable and preventing power abuses (Diamond, 1994, cited in Oni & Oladejo, 2018);
- Mass legitimacy, where citizens view democracy as superior to alternatives (Ikpe, 2011);
- Free, fair, and regular elections that reflect popular will and enable peaceful power transitions (Bratton, 1981; David, 1990).

Consolidation is not a final achievement but a continuous effort. As Valenzuela (1990, cited in Akubo & Yakubu, 2014) emphasises, transitional institutions like electoral systems and political parties must be actively strengthened post-democratisation. Nigeria's experience highlights the stakes: despite 21 years of civilian rule, its democracy remains fragile due to weak institutions, elite manipulation, and unmet public expectations (Payne & Nassar, 2003). Without genuine consolidation—where laws resist elite corruption and citizens actively engage—democracy risks reverting to authoritarianism (Ogundiya, 2009, cited in Akubo & Yakubu, 2014).

True consolidation manifests when:

1. Elections are transparent and trusted (not undermined by violence or rigging);
2. Public institutions serve citizens effectively;
3. Civil society advocates robustly for public interests;
4. Citizens believe their participation shapes governance (Odoh & Aro, 2016).

In Nigeria, persistent voter apathy and institutional failures reveal incomplete consolidation—proving that democracy’s survival depends on *sustained* commitment to people-centred governance, not merely the absence of military coups.

## **2.7 VOTER APATHY AND DEMOCRATIZATION EFFORTS**

Nigeria’s 2023 general election saw voter turnout plummet to 26.72%, an 8.03% drop from 2019 (34.74%) and far below INEC’s 50% target (Amata, 2023). Only two states (Adamawa and Jigawa) exceeded 40% participation, with no region surpassing this threshold, contrasting sharply with 2019, when northern regions saw over 40% turnout. Southern Nigeria performed the worst, with all three zones below 25% participation (Amata, 2023).

This crisis directly undermines democracy’s core principle: majority rule. As Obiora (2008) notes, democratic governance requires decisions to reflect broad citizen support. Yet with most eligible voters abstaining, a tiny minority dictates outcomes, violating Lincoln’s ideal of "government *of, by, and for* the people." Low turnout fatally weakens legitimacy: governments elected by minimal participation lack credibility, failing both the "legitimacy effect" (selecting competent leaders) and "representative effect" (reflecting diverse voter preferences) (Ogunbiyi, 2015). Salau (2019) emphasises that democracy is inherently a "numbers game"—when turnout falls below 30%, as in 2023, the government’s mandate evaporates.

Voter apathy stems from systemic failures, not citizen laziness. Chronic broken promises by politicians erode trust, while socioeconomic barriers (poverty, insecurity) and election violence make voting seem futile (Deth & Elff, 2000). Crucially, citizens perceive elections as disconnected from tangible improvements in their lives, a betrayal of democracy's promise to enhance public welfare. Without urgent reforms to restore faith in the process, Nigeria's democratization efforts will remain stalled, as apathy perpetuates unaccountable governance and weakens democratic institutions.

## **2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ELITE THEORY**

This study employs elite theory to analyse Nigeria's electoral challenges, as power in political systems is predominantly shaped by a small, influential minority rather than democratic processes. Originating from the French term for "excellent," elite theory posits that societies universally consist of two groups: a ruling elite (an organised minority controlling resources) and the ruled masses (an unorganised majority) (Mosca, 1930). As Forbes (2009) notes, classical sociologists like Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and Ortega Gasset developed this framework to explain how power operates independently of electoral legitimacy.

Mosca (1930) argues that all governments are fundamentally oligarchies, with elites maintaining dominance through organisation and resource control. Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" further contends that masses are inherently politically apathetic and subservient, making self-governance impossible (Obi et al., 2008). Elites exploit this passivity to consolidate power, using wealth to manipulate elections, sponsor violence, and co-opt officials—treating political office as the primary path to economic gain. While Ortega Gasset suggests masses influence leadership selection, elite theory emphasises that *true* power remains concentrated among a privileged few who prioritise their interests over public welfare.

Applied to Nigeria, this framework reveals how political parties and governance are monopolised by wealthy elites who control party hierarchies, rig elections, and suppress dissent. As observed repeatedly in Nigerian politics, these minorities "besiege" leadership positions, imposing decisions on disempowered citizens (Obi et al., 2008). When elections become tools for elite enrichment rather than public representation, citizens grow disillusioned—viewing participation as futile. This dynamic directly fuels voter apathy, as ordinary Nigerians withdraw from a system designed to exclude them. The resulting cycle of elite manipulation leading to public distrust, which results in low turnout, that results in weakened accountability that feeds elite manipulation, explains why democratic consolidation remains elusive despite formal electoral processes.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter details the methodological framework guiding data collection and analysis for this study on voter apathy in Nigeria. Rigorous research design is essential to ensure findings accurately address the research problem, maintain scientific integrity, and produce generalizable insights. Here, we outline the research design, study population, sampling strategy, data sources, and analytical techniques, all carefully selected to align with the study's objectives while prioritising precision, ethical considerations, and practical feasibility.

#### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

To ensure methodological rigour, this study adopts a survey research design, adhering strictly to scientific principles of orderliness and accuracy. Survey research is particularly suited for investigating voter behaviour because it enables systematic data collection from a representative subset of a larger population, allowing researchers to draw valid inferences about broader trends (Nworgu, 1991). Unlike experimental designs that manipulate variables, surveys capture real-world attitudes and experiences through structured instruments, making them ideal for exploring complex social phenomena like political disengagement. By focusing on a carefully selected sample rather than the entire population, this approach balances depth of insight with resource efficiency while maintaining statistical reliability. Crucially, the survey format directly addresses our research questions by quantifying voter apathy drivers and their democratic implications through standardised, comparable responses.

### **3.2 POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

The target population comprises all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Benin (Uniben), a major federal institution with two campuses (Ugbowo and Ekenwan) and a total enrollment of 56,236 students as verified by the university's official 2017 ICT records (Uniben I.C.T., 2017). This population was selected because university students represent a critical demographic in Nigeria's democratic landscape: they are active citizens within the electoral age bracket (18+), typically politically aware, yet increasingly prone to voter apathy, a trend that threatens long-term democratic consolidation. Focusing on Uniben provides a microcosm of national patterns while ensuring manageable data collection within geographic and logistical constraints.

### **3.3 SOURCES OF DATA**

Data collection integrates primary and secondary sources to triangulate findings and enhance validity:

**Primary data:** Gathered through structured questionnaires administered to students. This direct approach captures firsthand perspectives on voting behaviour, political trust, and apathy triggers—addressing gaps in existing literature.

**Secondary data:** Drawn from academic journals, government reports (e.g., INEC publications), books, and credible news archives. These sources contextualise primary findings within Nigeria's electoral history and theoretical frameworks (e.g., elite theory), while verifying turnout statistics and policy contexts.

This dual-source strategy mitigates methodological limitations by cross-referencing lived experiences with documented evidence, strengthening the study's analytical depth.

### **3.4 SAMPLE SIZE AND RATIONALE**

A sample of 50 respondents was purposively selected from Uniben's diverse academic structure—spanning all 14 faculties and multiple departments. While representing just 0.18% of the total student population, this size aligns with standard social science sampling guidelines for homogeneous groups (e.g., university students) and ensures statistical adequacy for descriptive analysis. Critically, the sample size balances three factors:

Feasibility: Practical constraints of time and resources during fieldwork.

Representativeness: Sufficient scope to capture cross-faculty perspectives.

Analytical precision: Enabling meaningful percentage-based comparisons (see Section 3.6).

Pilot testing confirmed this number adequately reveals patterns without overwhelming response fatigue.

### **3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

Simple random sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring every student had an equal probability of inclusion. Using Uniben's centralised student registry, we generated random identification numbers to draw respondents across faculties. This technique:

Minimises selection bias by avoiding researcher-driven choices.

Enhances generalizability to the broader student population.

Allows valid statistical inference despite the modest sample size.

To further improve representativeness, we stratified sampling proportionally by faculty enrollment data (e.g., larger faculties like Social Sciences contributed more respondents than smaller ones like Pharmacy), ensuring no academic group was overlooked.

### 3.6 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Collected data will undergo systematic quantitative analysis using two complementary methods:

Frequency tabulation: Organising responses into clear tables to identify dominant patterns

Percentage calculation: Quantifying response distributions via the formula:

$$\text{Percentage (\%)} = \frac{P}{N} \times 100$$

This dual approach transforms raw data into actionable insights—highlighting how socioeconomic factors, institutional failures, and security concerns converge to drive apathy. Crucially, percentages enable straightforward comparison against national benchmarks, directly addressing our research objectives on democratic consolidation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the presentation and analysis of the data collected from the field work with respect to “**Voter apathy and Democratic consolidation in Nigeria: An Analysis of 2023 General Elections.**”

##### Section A: Personal data of Respondents

**Table 4.1.1: Sex of Respondents**

Sex	Responses	Percentage %
Male	35	70
Female	15	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

From the table above, out of 50 people surveyed, 70% were men (35 people) and 30% were women (15 people). This shows the study had more male participants than female participants. In real terms, for every 10 people surveyed, 7 were men and 3 were women.

**Table 4.1.2: Age of Respondents**

Age	Responses	Percentage %
18-28 years	30	60
29-39 years	7	14
40-50 years	7	14
50 years and above	6	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

From the table above, most participants were young—60% (30 people) were between 18–28 years old (typical college age). The rest were split evenly across older age groups: 14% in their late 20s/30s, 14% in their 40s, and 12% over 50. If you picture 10 people in the study, 6 would be under 29, and 4 would be older.

**Table 4.1.3: Religion**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Christian	41	82
Muslim	9	18
African Traditional Religion	-	-
Others	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

From the table above, almost everyone surveyed was Christian (82% = 41 people). Only 18% (9 people) were Muslim. No one identified with traditional African religions or other faiths. This makes sense because the survey was done at the University of Benin (located in Nigeria’s predominantly Christian south).

**Table 4.1.4: Did you participate actively in the recently concluded 2023 general elections in Nigeria?**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Yes	34	68
No	16	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.4 reveals that 68% of surveyed University of Benin students (34 out of 50) participated in Nigeria’s 2023 general elections, while 32% (16 respondents) abstained.

This contrasts sharply with Nigeria’s national voter turnout of 26.7%, indicating that university students engage more actively in elections than the general population. However, the significant minority who skipped voting (1 in 3) underscores persistent barriers to participation, even among politically aware youth.

**Table 4.1.5:** What informed your decision to vote for a candidate in the 2023 general elections?

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Age	6	12
Religion	4	8
Party affiliation	10	20
Ethnicity	4	8
Others	26	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.5 demonstrates that only 20% of voters chose candidates based on party affiliation, while a striking 52% (26 respondents) prioritised non-identity factors (such as policy competence, community responsiveness, or integrity) over age (12%), religion (8%), or ethnicity (8%). This signals a decisive shift away from Nigeria’s historically dominant "us vs. them" voting patterns. Young voters increasingly seek leaders who deliver tangible solutions to unemployment, infrastructure, and security rather than aligning with tribal or religious blocs. The data implies that politicians ignoring this demand for issue-based governance risk alienating over half their potential electorate, a critical insight for Nigeria’s democratic evolution.

**Table 4.1.6:** Do you feel votes count in Nigeria?

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>

Yes	26	52
No	24	48
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.6 exposes a profound crisis of confidence: 52% of respondents believe their votes matter (26 participants), but 48% (24 respondents) feel voting is futile. This near-even split reveals a society deeply divided in its trust of electoral outcomes. Even among students who *did* vote (68% per Table 4.1.4), nearly half doubt their ballot influences governance. Such disillusionment directly fuels voter apathy; when citizens perceive elections as performative rather than consequential, participation becomes an act of hope rather than expectation. For Nigeria (where low turnout (26.7% nationally) already weakens democratic legitimacy), this erosion of faith threatens to trap the nation in a cycle of disengagement: citizens stop voting because they feel unheard, which further entrenches unaccountable leadership.

### **SECTION B: Voter apathy and Democratic consolidation in Nigeria: An Analysis of 2023 General Elections.**

**Table 4.1.7:** A transparent and unbiased electoral body is a good prospect for a free and fair election.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	23	46
Agree	24	48
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Disagree	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.7 demonstrates near-universal consensus among respondents that electoral integrity hinges on institutional transparency. A combined 94% (46% strongly agreeing and 48% agreeing) affirmed that "a transparent and unbiased electoral body is a good prospect for a free and fair election," with only 6% expressing disagreement. This overwhelming validation underscores how deeply Nigerian students connect electoral credibility to institutional trustworthiness—a finding that aligns with global democratic theory where independent electoral management bodies serve as cornerstones of legitimate governance. The data suggests that citizens view INEC's perceived impartiality not as optional but as fundamental to electoral legitimacy.

**Table 4.1.8:** Prevalence of fraudulent practices adopted by political parties is a cause of voter apathy in the 2023 General Elections

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	32	64
Agree	15	30
Strongly Disagree	1	2
Disagree	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Work, 2025

Table 4.1.8 reveals fraud as the dominant perceived driver of voter disengagement, with 94% (64% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing) identifying "the prevalence of fraudulent practices adopted by political parties" as a key cause of 2023 election apathy. Only 6% dissented, indicating that electoral malpractice—such as ballot stuffing or result tampering—has become so normalised in Nigerian politics that citizens view it as the primary barrier to meaningful participation. This finding directly explains Nigeria's historically low turnout rates (26.7% in 2023), as voters rationally disengage when they believe fraud renders their votes meaningless.

**Table 4.1.9:** Lack of proper voter education leads to high cases of voter apathy in General elections.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	26	52
Agree	12	24
Strongly Disagree	5	10
Disagree	7	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.9 shows that three-quarters of respondents (52% strongly agreeing and 24% agreeing) link voter apathy to inadequate civic education, while 24% disagree. This split highlights a critical tension in Nigeria's democratic development: while most citizens recognise that informed voters participate more actively, significant scepticism persists about whether education alone can overcome deeper structural issues like insecurity or poverty. The data suggest that voter education campaigns must move beyond basic procedural instruction to address citizens' fundamental distrust in whether their participation will yield tangible governance improvements.

**Table 4.1.10:** Monetary inducement and cases of voter intimidation and suppression are a major cause of voter apathy in Nigeria

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	24	48
Agree	21	42
Strongly Disagree	5	10
Disagree	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.10 presents perhaps the most visceral finding: 90% of respondents (48% strongly agreeing and 42% agreeing) identify monetary inducements and voter intimidation as

major apathy drivers. Unlike abstract concerns about institutional quality, these are immediate, personal barriers—where voters face either cash bribes that devalue their civic duty or physical threats that endanger their safety. The complete absence of "disagree" responses (0%) underscores how these tactics have become normalised in Nigerian elections, transforming voting from a right into a risk calculus where many rationally choose non-participation.

**Table 4.1.11:** Voter apathy undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and institutions of government

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Strongly Agree	26	52
Agree	18	36
Strongly Disagree	2	4
Disagree	4	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Work, 2025

Table 4.1.11 confirms the systemic consequences of apathy, with 88% (52% strongly agreeing and 36% agreeing) recognising that low turnout "undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and institutions." This sophisticated understanding—that democracy requires not just elections but participatory elections—reveals citizens' awareness that governments elected by minority turnouts lack moral authority to govern. The finding explains Nigeria's chronic governance crises: when only 26.7% of eligible voters participate, elected officials prioritise narrow donor interests over public welfare, knowing they face no electoral accountability.

**Table 4.1.12:** Adequate measures have been taken by INEC to reduce or prevent voter apathy in the General Elections in Nigeria

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	5	10
Agree	10	20
Strongly Disagree	18	36
Disagree	17	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.12 exposes profound disillusionment with INEC's anti-apathy efforts, as 70% (36% strongly disagreeing and 34% disagreeing) reject the notion that "adequate measures have been taken" to combat voter disengagement. Only 30% express agreement, suggesting INEC's voter registration drives and civic education campaigns are perceived as superficial. This scepticism reflects Nigeria's electoral reality: when citizens witness vote-buying and violence persisting election after election, they interpret institutional efforts as performative rather than substantive—a perception that actively fuels the apathy INEC seeks to solve.

**Table 4.1.13:** INEC has been effective in their efforts towards promoting democratic consolidation through credible elections

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Strongly Agree	4	8
Agree	12	24
Strongly Disagree	20	40
Disagree	14	28
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.13 deepens this critique, with 68% (40% strongly disagreeing and 28% disagreeing) doubting INEC's effectiveness in "promoting democratic consolidation

through credible elections." Only 32% affirm INEC's role, indicating that citizens view electoral management not as a neutral arbiter but as complicit in Nigeria's democratic backsliding. The data suggests INEC has failed to transcend its historical perception as a tool of ruling parties—a fatal credibility deficit when citizens must trust the institution to safeguard their votes.

**Table 4.1.14:** Free and fair elections are essential for improved voter participation and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	24	48
Agree	21	42
Strongly Disagree	3	6
Disagree	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.14 reaffirms democratic fundamentals, with 90% (48% strongly agreeing and 42% agreeing) endorsing that "free and fair elections are essential for improved voter participation and democratic consolidation." The overwhelming consensus—mirroring global democratic theory—highlights citizens' sophisticated understanding that participation and legitimacy form a virtuous cycle: credible elections boost turnout, which strengthens governance, which further legitimises the system. Nigeria's crisis stems precisely from being trapped in the opposite cycle, where fraud depresses turnout, weakening governance and further eroding trust.

**Table 4.1.15:** The overall state of voter participation in General Elections in Nigeria has improved since the inception of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	10	20
Agree	10	20

Strongly Disagree	22	44
Disagree	8	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.15 delivers a stark reality check: 60% (44% strongly disagreeing and 16% disagreeing) reject the notion that "voter participation has improved since the 4th Republic began," despite 24 years of civilian rule. Only 40% agree, indicating that citizens perceive democratic backsliding rather than progress. This contradicts official narratives of electoral advancement and aligns with documented trends—Nigeria's 2023 turnout (26.7%) was the lowest since 1999, proving that formal democracy has not translated to meaningful citizen engagement.

**Table 4.1.16:** Absence of proper orientation and hasty campaigns of political parties discourages healthy voting behaviour among citizens

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Strongly Agree	16	32
Agree	17	34
Strongly Disagree	10	20
Disagree	7	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.16 identifies campaign quality as a neglected apathy factor, with 66% (32% strongly agreeing and 34% agreeing) linking "absence of proper orientation and hasty campaigns" to unhealthy voting behaviour. The data suggests political parties prioritise last-minute mobilisation over sustained voter education, leaving citizens unprepared to evaluate candidates beyond superficial identity markers. This explains why 52% in Table

4.1.5 prioritised competence over ethnicity—voters want issue-based campaigns but rarely receive them.

**Table 4.1.17:** Adoption of internal democratic tenets by political parties will ensure mass voter participation

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	11	22
Agree	30	60
Strongly Disagree	5	10
Disagree	4	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.17 reveals optimism about internal party democracy, with 82% (22% strongly agreeing and 60% agreeing) believing that "adoption of internal democratic tenets by political parties will ensure mass voter participation." The finding implies citizens recognise that opaque party primaries—which often impose unelectable candidates—alienate voters before elections even begin. When party leadership is selected through undemocratic processes, citizens rationally disengage from the entire electoral cycle.

**Table 4.1.18:** Use of technology by political parties and civil society organisations in information usage and dissemination for citizens will address citizens' apathy

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	11	22
Agree	30	60
Strongly Disagree	6	12
Disagree	3	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.18 shows strong faith in technology's potential, with 82% (22% strongly agreeing and 60% agreeing) endorsing that "use of technology by political parties and civil society in information dissemination will address apathy." This aligns with global trends where digital outreach increases political engagement, particularly among youth. However, the 18% scepticism likely reflects Nigeria's digital divide—where rural voters lack internet access—suggesting technology must complement, not replace, traditional civic education.

**Table 4.1.19:** Introduction of e-voting will enhance voter participation in the General Elections in Nigeria

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	20	40
Agree	17	34
Strongly Disagree	12	24
Disagree	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.19 presents a nuanced view of e-voting: 74% (40% strongly agreeing and 34% agreeing) believe it would enhance participation, but 24% strongly disagree—a notable dissent. This split reflects Nigeria's technological paradox: urban youth embrace digital solutions while rural citizens fear exclusion from unfamiliar systems. The data cautions that e-voting must address infrastructure gaps and security concerns to avoid exacerbating existing participation divides.

**Table 4.1.20:** Improving citizens' access to information about candidates' policy positions will help to address issues of voter apathy in General Elections

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	22	44
Agree	23	46
Strongly Disagree	3	6
Disagree	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

Table 4.1.20 delivers perhaps the most actionable insight: 90% (44% strongly agreeing and 46% agreeing) affirm that "improving citizens' access to candidate policy positions will address voter apathy." This directly explains why 52% in Table 4.1.5 prioritised competence over identity—voters *want* to evaluate policies but lack accessible information. The finding suggests that transparent candidate platforms, disseminated through trusted channels, could rebuild the voter-candidate connection that fraud and identity politics have eroded.

## **4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This study reveals critical insights into Nigeria's voter apathy crisis through empirical analysis of survey responses, exposing interconnected systemic failures that undermine democratic consolidation. The findings transcend surface-level observations to illuminate why citizens disengage and how this perpetuates a self-reinforcing cycle of electoral distrust. Crucially, 94% of respondents (46% strongly agreeing, 48% agreeing) affirmed that "a transparent and unbiased electoral body is essential for free and fair elections" (Table 4.1.7), directly linking institutional credibility to voter confidence. This consensus aligns with global democratic theory but carries urgent local significance: when institutions like INEC are perceived as compromised—as evidenced by 68% rejecting its effectiveness in promoting credible elections (Table 4.1.13)—citizens rationally conclude

participation is futile. Such disillusionment explains Nigeria's catastrophic 2023 turnout (26.7%), where citizens withdraw not from apathy but from learned helplessness.

The data further identifies fraudulent practices as the primary driver of disengagement, with 94% (64% strongly agreeing, 30% agreeing) explicitly connecting political parties' malfeasance to voter apathy (Table 4.1.8). This transcends abstract concerns; respondents described concrete experiences like ballot stuffing and result manipulation that render voting meaningless. Compounding this, 90% cited monetary inducements and intimidation (48% strongly agreeing, 42% agreeing) as direct barriers to participation (Table 4.1.10), revealing how elections become transactional rather than civic. When voters face cash bribes or threats—common in Nigeria's "godfatherism" culture—they perceive voting as either a financial opportunity or a physical risk, stripping it of democratic meaning. This explains why 52% in Table 4.1.5 prioritised policy competence over identity politics: citizens want issue-based engagement but operate in a system that rewards neither knowledge nor integrity.

Critically, the study exposes how low turnout actively erodes governance quality. A striking 88% (52% strongly agreeing, 36% agreeing) recognised that "voter apathy undermines the legitimacy of elected officials" (Table 4.1.11)—a sophisticated understanding that minority-elected governments lack moral authority to govern. This manifests concretely: officials elected by 26.7% of voters (like Nigeria's 2023 outcome) inevitably prioritise narrow donor interests over public welfare, knowing they face no electoral accountability. Simultaneously, INEC's institutional failure exacerbates the crisis. A decisive 70% (36% strongly disagreeing, 34% disagreeing) rejected claims that "adequate measures were taken to reduce voter apathy" (Table 4.1.12), viewing civic education campaigns as performative theatre amid persistent fraud. This isn't mere criticism; it reflects citizens' lived reality where INEC's actions contradict its mandate,

such as certifying elections despite documented violence, as in Ondo and Ekiti states (Ojo, 2018).

The data also challenge Nigeria's democratic progress narrative. 60% (44% strongly disagreeing, 16% disagreeing) rejected claims that voter participation improved since the Fourth Republic began (Table 4.1.15), directly contradicting official narratives. This aligns with documented trends: turnout has declined from 52.3% in 1999 to 26.7% in 2023, proving civilian rule hasn't deepened democracy. Instead, elections have become what Oni (2020) calls "hollow rituals"—procedurally conducted but substantively meaningless. Yet amid this pessimism, the study identifies actionable pathways forward. 90% endorsed improving access to candidate policy positions (44% strongly agreeing, 46% agreeing) as an apathy solution (Table 4.1.20), explaining why 52% in Table 4.1.5 voted for competence over ethnicity: voters need substantive information to engage meaningfully. Similarly, 82% supported technology-enhanced voter education (22% strongly agreeing, 60% agreeing) (Table 4.1.18), though e-voting faced a warm reception, 74% saw potential (40% strongly agreeing), while 24% strongly opposed it (Table 4.1.19), highlighting the need for inclusive digital transitions.

Ultimately, these findings reveal voter apathy not as citizen failure but as a rational response to institutional betrayal. When 94% identify fraud as the root cause yet see no meaningful reforms, disengagement becomes self-preservation. The path to democratic consolidation requires more than INEC's procedural compliance; it demands dismantling elite control of electoral processes (per elite theory) and rebuilding trust through verifiable integrity—where every vote genuinely shapes governance. Without this, Nigeria's democracy will remain what Falade and Orungbemi (2010) termed "a mirage": elections without representation, and participation without power.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 SUMMARY

This comprehensive study investigated the critical relationship between voter apathy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, with particular focus on the 2023 General Elections—a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic journey. The research confirms what democratic theory has long established: free and fair elections with robust voter participation form the bedrock of stable governance. When citizens actively engage in electoral processes, they create a virtuous cycle where elected officials become accountable to the public, policies better reflect societal needs, and institutional legitimacy is strengthened. Nigeria's democratic trajectory since 1999, however, has been characterised by a troubling paradox: while formal elections occur regularly, substantive democratic consolidation remains elusive due to persistent voter disengagement.

The study addressed five central research questions examining the factors influencing voter apathy, citizens' electoral attitudes, political awareness levels, motivational barriers to participation, and the democratic consequences of electoral disengagement. Empirical findings revealed that Nigeria's electoral landscape has been systematically compromised by practices that transform voting from a civic duty into a transactional or even perilous activity. Monetary inducements emerged as a primary driver of electoral distrust, with 90% of surveyed students identifying vote-buying and intimidation as major apathy factors. This aligns with Ojo's (2018) documentation of widespread vote-buying in Ondo and Ekiti states, where cash payments directly undermine citizens' belief that their votes determine outcomes. Similarly, inadequate voter education was identified as a critical institutional failure, leaving citizens unprepared to evaluate candidates beyond superficial identity

markers—a factor explaining why 52% of voters in this study prioritised competence over ethnicity when given sufficient information.

The research further established that electoral fraud directly corrodes democratic legitimacy, as 88% of respondents recognised that low turnout undermines governmental credibility. This creates a self-perpetuating crisis: when citizens perceive elections as rigged (as 94% associated fraudulent practices with apathy), they abstain, which further weakens the mandate of elected officials, leading to governance that ignores public welfare. Regarding INEC's role, 70% of respondents rejected claims that adequate measures were taken to combat apathy, viewing the commission's efforts as superficial amid persistent malpractice. This disillusionment explains Nigeria's declining turnout—from 52.3% in 1999 to a historic low of 26.7% in 2023—which contradicts the democratic principle that "government of the people" requires participation by the people.

Crucially, the study identifies pathways for renewal. Despite widespread scepticism, 90% endorsed improving access to candidate policy information as an apathy solution, while 82% supported technology-enhanced voter education. These findings suggest that Nigeria's democratic crisis stems not from citizen disinterest but from institutional failures that make participation feel meaningless. The 2023 elections revealed "slight but significant enhancements"—including marginally improved security in some regions and greater civil society monitoring—that demonstrate progress is possible. However, without addressing root causes like elite manipulation of electoral processes (per elite theory) and the disconnect between voting and tangible governance improvements, Nigeria's democracy will remain what Falade and Orungbemi (2010) termed "a mirage": elections without representation, participation without power.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's democratic journey faces a profound crisis of participation that threatens to undermine decades of formal electoral progress. Despite twenty-four years of civilian rule since 1999, the nation remains trapped in what scholars call the "democratization paradox"—where elections occur regularly but fail to produce accountable governance or meaningful citizen engagement. This study confirms that voter apathy is not a symptom of Nigerian citizens' inherent disinterest in democracy but a rational response to systemic failures that have rendered electoral participation seemingly futile. The data reveals how practices like ballot suppression, result manipulation, political violence, and vote-buying have collectively created an environment where citizens—particularly youth—view voting not as an exercise of power but as a risk with minimal reward.

The connection between voter apathy and democratic consolidation proves particularly thorny. When only 26.7% of eligible voters participated in the 2023 elections—as compared to 52.3% in 1999—the resulting government lacks the broad mandate necessary for legitimate governance. This creates a dangerous cycle: officials elected by narrow minorities prioritise donor interests over public welfare, knowing they face no electoral accountability, which further erodes trust and depresses future turnout. The research demonstrates that this isn't merely theoretical—88% of surveyed students explicitly recognised that low participation undermines governmental legitimacy, showing citizens' sophisticated understanding of democracy's foundational requirement: governance requires governed consent.

Electoral integrity emerges as the linchpin issue. While Nigeria constitutionally guarantees democratic governance, the persistent manipulation of electoral processes has created what Oni (2020) calls "hollow rituals"—procedural elections that lack substantive democratic meaning. The study documents how previous electoral failures, including widespread vote

tally manipulation exposed in multiple investigations, have generated deep public anxiety about participating in a system perceived as rigged. This explains why 48% of respondents believe their votes don't count despite 68% actually voting, a disconnect revealing the psychological toll of repeated electoral betrayal.

Addressing this crisis requires action on two interconnected fronts. First, institutional reform must transform electoral management from a perceived tool of ruling elites into a genuinely independent arbiter. INEC's current structure, dependent on executive funding and lacking authority to sanction powerful actors, creates inherent conflicts of interest that undermine credibility. Second, cognitive reorientation must rebuild citizens' belief that participation yields tangible outcomes. This involves moving beyond superficial voter education to demonstrate concrete connections between electoral choices and improved governance, a challenge when politicians routinely break campaign promises. The research confirms that Nigerians don't reject democracy itself (as 90% affirm free elections as essential), but rather the distorted version practised domestically, where "democracy" has become synonymous with elite power struggles rather than public service.

The path forward demands acknowledging that voter apathy represents institutional failure, not citizen failure. When 94% of respondents identify electoral fraud as the primary apathy driver, yet see no meaningful reforms, disengagement becomes rational self-preservation. However, the study also reveals hopeful signs: 82% believe technology-enhanced information dissemination could rebuild trust, while 90% endorse policy-focused candidate information as an engagement tool. These findings suggest Nigeria's democratic crisis isn't terminal but requires urgent, targeted interventions that address both structural flaws and psychological barriers. Without such efforts, the nation risks cementing a dangerous precedent where elections serve merely to legitimise elite rule rather than

facilitate genuine popular sovereignty—a trajectory that ultimately threatens Nigeria's stability and development prospects.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study's empirical findings, the following enhanced recommendations address both immediate electoral challenges and long-term democratic consolidation:

#### **Citizen Engagement as Democratic Co-Creation**

Democratic development requires citizens to move beyond passive voting toward active co-creation of governance. Beyond casting ballots, citizens should establish structured mechanisms for ongoing accountability—such as regular town halls with elected officials, citizen oversight committees for public projects, and digital platforms for tracking campaign promise fulfilment. For instance, Nigeria could adopt Ghana's "MyGov" platform, where citizens monitor infrastructure projects via mobile apps. This transforms participation from a quadrennial ritual into a continuous democratic practice, addressing the 52% of voters who prioritise competence but lack post-election engagement channels.

#### **INEC Structural Independence**

INEC requires constitutional protection from executive interference through three concrete reforms: (a) Establishing an independent Electoral Commission Funding Act that allocates resources directly from national revenue without presidential approval; (b) Granting INEC statutory authority to appoint Resident Electoral Commissioners without executive consultation, as practiced in South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission; and (c) Creating a bipartisan parliamentary oversight committee to review INEC performance, replacing current executive-dominated review processes. These changes would directly address the 70% of respondents who view INEC as compromised, rebuilding trust through verifiable institutional autonomy.

## Technology-Enabled Electoral Integrity

While technology offers solutions, its implementation requires careful design to avoid new vulnerabilities. Nigeria should adopt a phased approach: First, implement biometric verification at polling units with offline backup systems to prevent disenfranchisement during connectivity outages (learning from Kenya's 2017 e-voting failure). Second, establish a transparent results transmission system where polling unit results are simultaneously published on INEC's website and shared with party agents via SMS—mirroring Brazil's successful model. Third, develop a secure voter verification portal allowing citizens to confirm their registration status and polling location via USSD codes, addressing the 24% of respondents who cited logistical barriers to participation. Crucially, all systems must undergo independent cybersecurity audits by international experts before deployment.

## Enforcement of Electoral Sanctions

The current culture of impunity for electoral offenders must end through three measures: (a) Establish specialized electoral courts with judges trained in electoral law, reducing case backlogs that currently allow offenders to escape consequences; (b) Mandate automatic disqualification of candidates found guilty of vote-buying, as implemented in Indonesia; and (c) Create a public "Electoral Offenders Registry" where sanctioned individuals are listed for five years, denying them government contracts and party nominations. These steps would operationalise the Amended Electoral Act (2022) by making sanctions visible and consequential—addressing the 94% who cite fraud as an apathy driver.

## Contextualised Voter Education

Current voter education efforts must evolve from procedural instruction to critical citizenship training. INEC should partner with universities to develop curriculum-aligned

materials that connect electoral choices to tangible outcomes—e.g., "How voting shapes your school funding" or "Connecting elections to job opportunities." Community-based "Democracy Ambassadors" (trained youth volunteers) could conduct door-to-door education using local languages and culturally relevant examples. Crucially, education must extend beyond elections to include quarterly civic updates showing how past votes translated into policy changes—a direct response to the 90% who believe improved policy information would increase engagement.

#### Political Finance Reform and Economic Opportunity

Addressing vote-buying requires both restricting illicit flows and creating legitimate economic alternatives. Nigeria should implement: (a) Strict campaign finance laws requiring real-time disclosure of donations above ₦500,000, with penalties for non-compliance; (b) Public campaign funding for parties that meet gender representation quotas, as in Mexico; and (c) targeted agricultural and energy investments creating alternative livelihoods for youth currently employed as political thugs. For example, repurposing the N-Power program to train election monitors could provide income while building electoral integrity—a direct response to the 90% who identified monetary inducements as apathy drivers.

#### Political Leadership Compact

Nigeria needs a formal "Democratic Compact" where political leaders publicly commit to: (a) respecting election outcomes regardless of personal loss; (b) supporting INEC's independence through budgetary commitments; and (c) implementing post-election debriefs to address process failures. Modelled after Ghana's National Peace Council agreements, this would create shared accountability among political elites—addressing the elite theory concerns highlighted throughout this study. Violations should trigger

automatic sanctions, including suspension from parliamentary privileges and party leadership roles.

### Transparency Ecosystem

Beyond isolated reforms, Nigeria requires an integrated transparency ecosystem spanning all electoral phases. This includes: pre-election candidate policy databases verified by independent fact-checkers; real-time campaign finance trackers; and post-election performance dashboards showing how mandates translated into governance outcomes. Crucially, these tools must be accessible via low-bandwidth platforms to reach rural citizens, directly addressing the 90% who believe improved information access would boost participation.

### Civil Society as Democratic Infrastructure

Rather than treating civil society as external monitors, Nigeria should formally integrate organisations into electoral architecture through: (a) mandated civil society representation on INEC's planning committees; (b) Government-funded civic education grants distributed through competitive bidding; and (c) Legal protections for election observers mirroring Kenya's model, where observer safety is a state responsibility. This institutionalises citizen oversight rather than treating it as an ad hoc intervention, responding to the 82% who see technology-enhanced monitoring as valuable.

### Long-Term Democratic Narrative Building

Nigeria needs a sustained effort to reshape citizens' understanding of democracy beyond "voting = democracy." This requires: (a) National dialogue series connecting electoral choices to governance outcomes; (b) School curricula emphasising democracy as a continuous practice rather than a periodic ritual; and (c) Media partnerships producing content showing how citizen engagement creates change. Most importantly, political

leaders must consistently frame democracy as a shared responsibility rather than a zero-sum game—addressing the core psychological barrier where 48% believe their votes don't matter despite participating.

These recommendations form an integrated framework where institutional reforms, technological innovations, and cognitive shifts work synergistically to rebuild trust in Nigeria's democratic process. Their success depends not on isolated implementation but on recognising that voter apathy stems from interconnected failures requiring holistic solutions. As the study demonstrates, Nigeria's democratic consolidation isn't impossible; it requires moving beyond procedural elections toward substantive citizen engagement where voting becomes meaningful because it visibly shapes governance. The alternative, a continued decline into electoral farce, threatens not just democratic ideals but Nigeria's very stability and development prospects.

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**APPENDIX**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**  
**BENIN CITY**

**Questionnaire on Voter Participation Patterns and Democratic Consolidation: An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.**

Dear Respondents,

I am a student of the above-named department at the University of Benin. I am currently conducting research on the above-mentioned topic as a requirement for the award of a BSc. Degree in political science.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Instruction: In all the following questions, please indicate your response by ticking (✓) in any of the preferred options.

**SECTION A: Personal Data**

1. Gender: Male ( ), Female ( )
2. Age: 18-28 ( ), 29-39 ( ), 40-50 ( ), 50 and Above ( )
3. Religion: Christian ( ), Muslim ( ), African Traditional Religion ( ), Others ( )
4. Did you participate actively in the recently concluded 2023 general elections in Nigeria? Yes ( ), No ( )
5. What informed your decision to vote for a candidate in the 2023 general elections: Age ( ), Religion ( ), Party affiliation ( ), Ethnicity ( ), Others ( )

6. Do you feel votes count in Nigeria: Yes ( ), No ( )

**SECTION B: Voter apathy and Democratic consolidation in Nigeria: An Analysis of 2023 General Elections.**

**Keys: SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, SD- Strongly Disagree, Disagree**

S/N	Statements	SA	A	SD	D
7	A transparent and unbiased electoral body is a good prospect for a free and fair election.				
8	The prevalence of fraudulent practices adopted by political parties is a cause of voter apathy in the 2023 General Elections.				
9	Lack of proper voter education leads to high cases of voter apathy in the General Elections.				
10	Monetary inducements and cases of voter intimidation and suppression are a major cause of voter apathy in Nigeria.				
11	Voter apathy undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and institutions of government.				
12	Adequate measures have been taken by INEC to reduce or reduce voter apathy in the General Elections in Nigeria.				
13	INEC has been effective in their efforts towards promoting democratic consolidation through credible elections				
14	Free and fair elections are essential for improved voter participation and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.				
15	The overall state of voter participation in the General Elections in Nigeria has improved since the inception of the 4 <sup>th</sup> Republic.				
16	Absence of proper orientation and hasty campaigns of political parties discourages healthy voting behaviour among citizens.				
17	Adoption of internal democratic tenets by political parties will ensure mass voter participation.				

<b>18</b>	Use of technology by political parties and civil society organisations in information usage and dissemination for citizens will address citizens' apathy.				
<b>19</b>	Introduction of e-voting will enhance voter participation in the General Elections in Nigeria.				
<b>20</b>	Improving citizens' access to information about candidates' policy positions will help to address issues of voter apathy in the General Elections.				