

DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND VOTERS' APATHY:

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SOME
SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF EKITI AND GOMBE STATES,
NIGERIA**

BY

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BENIN CITY**

OCTOBER, 2025

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**BEING A RESEARCH THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF
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FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD) DEGREE IN
COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

OCTOBER, 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this study was carried out by me, Tolulope Julius OMOYENI and it is original in score and content.

Tolulope Julius OMOYENI

Date

CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned certify that this research work titled “**DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND VOTERS' APATHY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SOME SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF EKITI AND GOMBE STATES, NIGERIA**” was carried out by Tolulope Julius OMOYENI in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Comparative Politics and Development Studies.

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DEDICATION

The success of this Thesis is dedicated to Almighty God the author of my story, the giver of my strength, and the keeper of my soul. Without His grace, this journey would have ended long before today.

To my family where I found a shelter even in the fiercest storms of life, you have been my safe harbor, my constant source of hope, and the hands that lifted me when I could not stand. To my Dad, whose constant believe and push helped in no small measure. To my Mum whose prayers and support have been valuable. To my siblings whose love and support never wavered you are my greatest treasure. And finally to the Max Care Foundation your kindness and generosity has given life and second chance to many, and I am living proof. You did not just help me survive; you made it possible for me to finish this dream.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in some selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe States, focusing on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. Distrust in government institutions, including electoral bodies, contributes significantly to voters' disengagement, leading to lower voters' turnout and reduced political participation. The research examined how distrust in government institutions influences citizen's political engagements especially voters' turnout and the extent to which socioeconomic factors shape voter participation. The research further investigates the impact of factors such as weak institutions, socioeconomic status, and political mobilization on voter turnout in these two states. In order to achieve the set objective of the study, four research questions were raised and hypotheses formulated to test the variables. The theoretical framework adopted for the study was structural- functional theory, and deliberative democracy theory. The research design adopted for the study was a cross-sectional survey design, the study draws on data collected from 2,391 registered voters across six local government areas in the two states, employing multi-stage sampling, simple random sampling, purposive and judgmental sampling, technique to select respondents for this study. The 2,391 sample size was derived through the use of Taro Yamane formula as respondents was drawn from six local government areas (LGAs) in Ekiti state (Ikere-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti) and Gombe States (Gombe, Kwami, and Kaltungo). The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire and in-depth interview of key informants. The copies of questionnaire were administered to a total number of 2,391 respondents and 2,020 questionnaires retrieved representing 84.5.3% return rate. Additionally, in-depth interview of 12 interviewees and key informants was conducted to provide robust understanding on the factors contributing to distrust of government and voter apathy. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation, regression analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 24). While qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings from this study revealed that distrust of government, fueled by perceptions of electoral fraud, lack of responsiveness, and government interference, significantly contributed to low voters turnout in both states. Educational attainment was found to have varying impacts, with Ekiti showing higher levels of distrust linked to education, while Gombe's political mobilization through community networks played a more significant role in encouraging voter participation. The study recommended the need for electoral reforms, improved voter education, and greater transparency in government institutions to restore public trust and enhance democratic participation in Nigeria.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Nigeria currently enjoys one of the most stable democracies on the African continent, having experienced over 25 years of uninterrupted democratic rule and smooth transition of power from one democratically elected government to another, and between political parties, without significant crises (Kucici & Inusa, 2025; Oluwole, 2025). However, democratic governance in Nigeria has faced both triumphs and tribulations in Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies that have hindered its democratic consolidation (Mumuni, 2024).

The strength and sustainability of any democratic system depend fundamentally on citizens' trust in government institutions and their willingness to participate in electoral processes. In Nigeria, however, these two pillars have become increasingly fragile. Several decades after the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, public trust in political institutions continues to decline, while voter turnout has followed a similarly downward trajectory. Repeated experiences of corruption, electoral irregularities, administrative inefficiencies, and unresponsiveness of political office holders have collectively weakened the credibility of democratic institutions and discouraged active participation in elections.

Nigeria's government institutions is characterised by overlapping governance challenges that manifest differently across regions. While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, and local government councils are designed to serve as instruments for democratic continuity, their effectiveness varies widely among the states. These institutional differences often shape citizens' political perceptions and behaviours, particularly in relation to trust, participation, and electoral engagement.

The 2023 general elections marked a pivotal moment in Nigeria's democratic journey as the country grappled with significant socio-economic challenges, including ethnic division and tension, erosion of public trust in government institutions, violent insecurity, high costs of living, and rising unemployment (Akinola, 2022; Uhere, 2024). The elections were conducted under these challenging conditions, giving the electoral umpire a significant challenge to deliver a credible election while ensuring citizen participation. However, as the democratic process unfolded, a pervasive atmosphere of distrust of government among citizens and voter

apathy became apparent, raising concerns about the health of Nigeria's democratic institutions, particularly in states like Ekiti in the southwestern geopolitical zone and Gombe in the northeastern part of the country. Concerns regarding the quality of Nigeria's democratic institutions were particularly pronounced in states like Ekiti and Gombe, which experienced varying degrees of voter disengagement and electoral irregularities (Ojo & Aluko, 2022; Berebon, 2023; Nzereogu & Nnolum, 2024).

Distrust in government institutions, which has been a persistent issue in Nigeria, is often rooted in historical and contemporary experiences (Alemika, 2004; Iroghama, 2012). Public trust is essential for the proper functioning of any democratic system, and its erosion can have dire consequences for democratic governance (Dogan, 2005). This lack of trust has prevented citizens from actively participating in the democratic process and holding elected officials accountable for their actions (Ojo, 2020). Studies by Omotola, (2009), Omotola, (2021) and Ojo (2020) highlight the significant role of corruption, electoral malpractices, and unfulfilled promises in fostering this widespread distrust of government.

Furthermore, the challenges of Nigeria's governance including institutional weaknesses, corruption, economic hardships, and electoral malpractices, have significantly contributed to voter apathy. Many Nigerians have come to view elections and political participation as ineffective avenues for real change (Ibeanu, 2022; Ayobolu, 2024). This political disengagement is a major threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation and poses a significant challenge to its future political stability (Uzochukwu, 2023; Dan-Woniowe, 2025).

Nigeria's democratic journey, marked by historic transitions since 1999, has encountered recurring impediments that continue to compromise the democratic ethos and tradition. The specter of government distrust looms large, rooted in historical grievances arising from corruption, electoral irregularities, weak institutional performance, and a persistent disconnection between public officeholders and the citizenry (Nwolise, 2018; Ojo, 2020). Over the years, these challenges have repeatedly surfaced in the nation's political history, with episodes such as the 2011 general elections standing out for their documented violence, ballot snatching, and widespread allegations of fraud (Akhaine, 2011; Akanji, 2018).

This pattern of distrust is not accidental; it emerges from persistent structural weaknesses within the institutions designed to uphold democratic governance. Government institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, and local government councils are constitutionally mandated to ensure credible elections, protect citizens, promote accountability, and enable effective participation in governance. Yet, repeated failures in fulfilling these functions have produced a climate of uncertainty and skepticism. Electoral bodies are often criticized for logistical shortcomings, inconsistent application of electoral laws, and susceptibility to elite influence. (Aiyede, 2006; Ogundiya, 2010). Internal party undemocratic practices, including candidate imposition, monetized primaries, and factional conflicts, further diminish the legitimacy of electoral competition and reduce citizens' trust in political actors (Omotola, 2010; Ibrahim & Igbuzor, 2019).

Security agencies, mandated to ensure safe election environments, have also struggled to prevent violence, intimidation, and the activities of political thugs. Incidents of electoral violence across multiple election cycles illustrate the incapacity of state institutions to provide basic electoral security, reinforcing citizens' fears and eroding trust in governance structures (Adesote & Abimbola, 2014; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). When citizens perceive elections as risky, unpredictable, or pre-determined, voter apathy becomes an almost rational response.

Corruption remains another entrenched impediment that undermines institutional credibility. High-profile corruption cases, misappropriation of public funds, and ineffective punitive mechanisms collectively reinforce a public perception that governmental institutions serve elite interests rather than the common good (Lawal & Tobi, 2006; Ogundiya, 2009). Such perceptions weaken the social contract and foster public disillusionment, making citizens doubt whether democratic processes can generate meaningful change or improve their welfare.

Electoral violence also compounds these concerns. From pre-election clashes to the destruction of polling materials and disruptions during collation, persistent violence across election cycles signals institutional fragility and generates psychological barriers to participation (Ibrahim & Amina, 2012; Onapajo, 2014). When the costs of voting outweigh

perceived benefits, abstention becomes widespread, and trust in government institutions further deteriorates.

These national-level dynamics manifest differently across Nigeria's states, where governance performance, institutional responsiveness, political culture, and security conditions vary significantly. Some regions experience chronic administrative inefficiencies, politicized security structures, and patronage-driven governance, while others demonstrate comparatively stronger institutional coordination and civic mobilization (Adejumobi, 2000; Suberu, 2015). These subnational variations underscore the need for systematic comparative analysis, particularly between states such as Ekiti and Gombe, whose patterns of voter turnout and institutional trust in the 2023 general elections differed despite operating under the same national framework.

The behavior and actions of political leaders and elected representatives, have also resulted in a deterioration of public trust and citizen disengagement in the Nigerian democratic system, which has become a source of concern for both local and international observers since independence in 1960. Iroghama (2012) noted that Nigeria's public trust and citizen engagement began to deteriorate after the 2007 general elections. One of the most significant contributors to government distrust in Nigeria is corruption. Ayobolu (2017) highlights that Nigeria consistently ranks as one of the most corrupt countries globally. Corruption scandals, mismanagement of public funds, and embezzlement by political leaders have undermined public trust in government institutions. The perception of corruption permeates most levels of government, eroding citizens' confidence.

In addition, inadequate public services fuel distrust government institutions. Nigerians expect their government to provide essential services like healthcare, education, infrastructure, and employment opportunities. When these services are either absent or of poor quality, citizens become disillusioned with their leaders and the system that perpetuates such disparities (Tanny, & Al-Hossienie, 2019).

The issue of electoral irregularities and manipulation remains a central factor undermining trust in government and democratic institutions in Nigeria. According to Omotola (2021), the credibility of elections in the country has frequently been questioned, reflecting a widespread

perception of electoral fraud. Irregularities such as inaccurate voter registers, multiple voting, ballot-box snatching, vote buying, and manipulation of results persistently cast doubt on the fairness of the electoral process and the integrity of democratic governance (INEC, 2019; Jega, 2013). These malpractices are not limited to isolated incidents; rather, they are symptomatic of deeper institutional weaknesses that make the electoral system vulnerable to manipulation by powerful elites and political actors (Mene, 2024).

The consequences of such irregularities extend beyond immediate electoral outcomes. Studies by Peterson and Wrighton (1998), Nwolise (2018), Pócza (2017), and Van De Walle and Six (2020) have demonstrated that distrust in government institutions fundamentally erodes the pillars of democracy. When citizens perceive elections as rigged or susceptible to elite manipulation, they often withdraw from political engagement, viewing participation as futile or even risky. This erosion of civic trust undermines the legitimacy of democratic processes and weakens the social contract between citizens and the state (Grogan, 2019; Aluko, 2020).

Electoral malpractice also interacts with other structural and historical factors to deepen political cynicism. High-profile corruption, inadequate enforcement of electoral laws, and the inability of security agencies to prevent election-related violence reinforce the perception that government institutions primarily serve the interests of a powerful few rather than the public good (Ayobolu, 2024; Suleiman, 2022). In regions where election-related violence is recurrent, citizens face not only the psychological burden of intimidation but also the tangible risks of physical harm, which further discourages participation. The recurring nature of these irregularities normalizes political manipulation and fosters a culture of skepticism, making it increasingly difficult to cultivate trust in public institutions (Uzochukwu, 2023).

Furthermore, distrust is not uniform across the nation. Variations in governance quality, political culture, and institutional responsiveness shape public perceptions differently across states. For instance, some states demonstrate relative institutional stability and transparent political practices, which can sustain higher levels of voter engagement, while others suffer repeated administrative inefficiencies, political patronage, and election-related violence, resulting in chronic apathy (Nwolise, 2018; Van De Walle & Six, 2020). Comparative analyses between regions, such as the divergent electoral experiences of Ekiti and Gombe in

the 2023 general elections, illustrate how local dynamics, combined with national-level institutional shortcomings, influence citizens' trust and willingness to participate in governance.

Thus, the interplay between electoral irregularities, structural weaknesses in governance institutions, and historical grievances generates a climate of enduring distrust in Nigeria's democratic system. The persistence of these challenges not only diminishes electoral participation but also threatens democratic consolidation. Addressing these issues requires a multi-dimensional approach that strengthens institutional integrity, ensures transparent electoral processes, and fosters inclusive political participation. Without such interventions, skepticism and apathy will continue to undermine the democratic ethos, perpetuating cycles of mistrust that compromise the effectiveness and legitimacy of governance in Nigeria (Omotola, 2021; Peterson & Wrighton, 1998; Pócza, 2017).

Voters' apathy, characterized by disinterest and low turnout of eligible voters to cast their votes during elections is a critical challenge. Data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on past elections show that only a small percentage of Nigeria's voting population actually vote during elections. Data from INEC captures the disheartening trend in voter turnout in Nigeria's elections: 52.3% in 1999; 69% in 2003; 57.5% in 2007; 53.7% in 2011; 43.7% in 2015, 34.8% in 2019 and 26.72% in 2023(INEC, 2023).The rising tide of voters apathy in the democratic journey of Nigeria leaves so much to desire.

According to state-level data released by INEC, the 2023 general elections recorded historically low voter turnout across Nigeria. Nationwide, the highest participation was observed in Jigawa State (40.61%), Plateau State (39.83%), and Osun State (38.71%), all below 41%, highlighting a general trend of low electoral engagement. At the other extreme, Rivers State recorded the lowest turnout (15.66%), followed closely by Bayelsa (16.38%), Abia (18.00%), and Lagos (18.92%) (INEC, 2024).

Amid these extremes, Ekiti and Gombe states occupy an important middle ground, reflecting regional variations in electoral participation. Gombe State achieved a voter turnout of 32.87%, ranking fifth nationally, while Ekiti State recorded a slightly lower turnout of 31.84%, placing

it eighth compared to previous elections. These figures, while modest relative to the top performers, are substantially higher than the bottom-tier states, suggesting that local factors such as state-level governance, political culture, and electoral management may have a significant influence on citizens' willingness to participate.

Focusing on these two states provides a valuable lens for understanding the dynamics of voter engagement in Nigeria. Gombe's relatively higher turnout may reflect effective mobilization strategies, localized trust in electoral institutions, or lower incidence of election-related violence, whereas Ekiti's turnout, slightly lower yet still above the national average, may indicate challenges such as voter apathy, logistical constraints, or lingering skepticism toward political processes.

Furthermore, the persistent erosion of public trust in Nigeria's democratic institutions has produced a climate in which many citizens question the usefulness of voting. When institutions fail to provide security, credible elections, or effective governance, voter apathy becomes an almost predictable response. This dynamic varies by region, with some states exhibiting sharper declines in participation than others. Examining the experiences of Ekiti and Gombe therefore provides a unique opportunity to understand how the performance and legitimacy of democratic institutions shape both trust and apathy at subnational levels.

The 2023 general elections, with their notable discrepancies in turnout patterns across states, reinvigorate the need to interrogate these variations. A comparative study focusing on selected local government areas in Ekiti and Gombe States makes it possible to identify the institutional, political, and contextual factors that contribute to distrust in government and voter apathy. Such an analysis is essential not only for academic discourse, but also for strengthening electoral credibility, guiding democratic reforms, enhancing civic engagement, and informing policy interventions aimed at revitalising Nigeria's democratic project.

In the face of these challenges, there have been narratives and debates about how technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), could potentially resolve some of the electoral issues that have plagued Nigeria's democracy, offering a pathway to restoring public trust and enhancing electoral integrity (Dan-Woniowe, 2025; Ibeanu, 2022). As Nigeria moves

forward, addressing these deep-rooted issues is crucial for ensuring a healthy and vibrant democracy that can meet the needs of its citizens.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Nigeria's democracy continues to confront two interlinked challenges; deep-rooted distrust in government institutions and persistent voters' apathy. Over the years, corruption, electoral malpractice, political manipulation, and weak governance structures have steadily undermined citizens' confidence in public institutions (Omotola, 2019; Ojo, 2020). These realities, combined with unemployment, insecurity, and the normalization of political thuggery, have contributed to declining public interest in electoral participation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011; Oyoru, 2023).

Despite periodic elections and transitions, recurring irregularities remain a troubling feature of the country's political landscape. Evidence from the 2011 elections and subsequent cycles shows how violence, manipulation, and systemic lapses continue to erode trust and raise questions about the credibility of electoral outcomes (Bamgbose, 2012; Okorie, 2025). Such patterns make it increasingly difficult for citizens to believe that elections reflect their will.

In recent decades, Nigeria has grappled with persistent challenges related to distrust in government institutions and voters' apathy, which have significant implications for the democratic process. The escalating levels of distrust in government institutions, fueled by historical factors such as corruption and electoral malpractices (Omotola, 2019; Ojo, 2020), coupled with the rising tide of voters' apathy driven by unemployment and political thuggery, demand comprehensive scrutiny (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011; Oyoru, 2023).

The historical legacy of corruption and electoral malpractices has engendered a pervasive atmosphere of distrust in government among Nigerian citizens (Omotola, 2021). Despite the democratic transitions, instances of electoral violence and irregularities documented in the 2011 elections (Bamgbose 2012 ; Okorie 2025) continue to cast shadows over the credibility of subsequent electoral processes. The constant erosion of trust in government institutions raises critical questions about the long-term viability of the democratic framework and its ability to address the needs and aspirations of the populace.

Several studies have highlighted the problems of voters' apathy and distrust in government institutions. For instance, a study by Agu, Falade, & Ibrahim, (2013), Madubuegwu, Agudiegwu, Onyia, Odoh, & Steve, (2020), Ariyo, & Folorunso. (2022) & Udentia, & Udentia (2023) posit that voter abstention in Nigeria is influenced by the high rate of unemployment and lack of trust in the government. These studies suggested that voter abstention has become a major cause for concern in Nigeria and could impact negatively on the consolidation of Nigerian democracy. These studies contend that malpractices in the electoral process and systems disenfranchise many citizens, encouraging bad leaders who want power at all costs to lay hold of the mantle of leadership, thereby steering the country towards a calamitous path. The studies also argue that the factors responsible for voter abstention are not unconnected with institutional and leadership failure, which result in bad governance, breeding feelings of distrust and dissent in the citizenry, spurring their indifference towards participation in voting as much as in politics and governance (Agu, Falade, & Ibrahim, 2013).

Another study by Ibrahim, Liman, & Mato. (2015), asserts that political socialization was among the major factors that determined the voting behavior and political participation of Nigerians in the 2015 general elections. The study found that poverty, electoral manipulation, inadequate security, and intimidation of electorates were among the reasons for voter abstention in Nigeria (Ibrahim, Liman, & Mato, K., 2015). Furthermore, a study by Pinto, Gratschew, and Sullivan (2001) revealed that Nigeria, Egypt, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire were exceptions to the high voter turnout recorded in African nations following the wave of democratization in the continent from the mid-1980s. Nigeria was ranked 157th of 169 countries based on the level of voter turnout, with the 2015 election recording 56.4% voter abstention and a much higher voting age abstention of 67.9%. (Pinto, Gratschew, & Sullivan (2001). These studies highlighted the dynamic factors contributing to distrust of government and voter apathy in Nigeria, which demands urgent attention to enhance public trust, and strengthen electoral integrity in order to promote greater political participation and democratic consolidation in the country.

An additional layer to the problem lies in ensuing vicious cycle generated by voters' apathy. When only a fraction of the population actively participate in the electoral process, elected officials may perceive a lack of a broad mandate. This perception can lead to irresponsibility

and unresponsiveness, as politicians may believe they are only accountable to the limited portion of the electorate that voted for them. Consequently, this irresponsiveness escalates the issue of government distrust, creating a detrimental feedback loop where citizens become increasingly disenchanted due to perceived negligence. The interplay of distrust in government institution, voters' apathy, and the ensuing vicious cycle presents a ground for thorough examination.

Despite these national-level patterns, the 2023 general elections revealed notable sub-national variations that warrant systematic investigation. Although voter turnout remained generally low across the country, states such as Gombe recorded 33.87 percent turnout, compared to 31.84 percent in Ekiti. While the difference may appear marginal, it raises important questions regarding the underlying factors within specific local government areas that influence trust in government institutions and the willingness of citizens to participate in elections. Both states operate under the same national electoral framework, yet exhibit distinct behavioural outcomes, suggesting the presence of deeper localized dynamics.

This discrepancy underscores the need for a comparative study of selected local government areas in Ekiti and Gombe States. Such an inquiry is essential to identify the socio-political, institutional, historical, and contextual factors that shape perceptions of government trustworthiness and electoral participation across these regions.

This study is essential in understanding the socio-political factors contributing to the erosion of voters' participation. The financial investments required to conduct elections are immense. For example, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) estimated the cost per voter for the 2023 elections at \$5.39, with a total expenditure of N305 billion, a staggering 61.37% increase from the 2019 general elections which cost N189.2 billion (INEC, 2022). These investments underscore the scale of the financial burden borne by the nation, yet voters' turnout remains disappointingly low.

The taxpayers bear the brunt of this escalating financial expenditure, which is rendered less effective when large segments of the electorates abstain from voting. If this trend continues, the financial resources allocated to elections could become increasingly unjustifiable, potentially diverting resources from other pressing national needs, such as infrastructure,

education, and healthcare. This research investigated the underlying causes of voters' apathy especially the role of distrust of government, and aims to offer actionable recommendations that can lead to policy reforms, targeting increased voter engagement. However, if neglected, the long-term sustainability of democratic governance in Nigeria may be compromised, and the nation may continue to face challenges related to political instability, low legitimacy of elected officials, and reduced governmental accountability.

With the 2023 elections concluded, the imperative to address distrust in government institutions and voter apathy as central to Nigeria's democratic advancement. By probing into the specific dynamics of Ekiti and Gombe states, this research seeks to offer insights that can inform policy measures, electoral reforms, and civic engagement initiatives, contributing to the robustness of the democratic process in Nigeria.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does institutional weakness contribute to distrust in government and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does socioeconomic status influence distrust in government institutions and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
3. How did distrust in government institutions shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?
4. What were the effects of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between distrust in government institutions and voters' apathy in Nigeria.

The specific objectives seek to:

1. investigate how institutional weaknesses influence distrust in government and voter apathy in selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections
2. examine how socioeconomic status influence distrust in government institutions and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
3. investigate the various ways distrust in government institutions shapes citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states in the 2023 General elections in Nigeria
4. examine the effects of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe States in the 2023 General elections in Nigeria.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

1. Ho: Institutional weaknesses do not significantly contribute to distrust in government or variations in voter apathy in selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections
2. Ho: Socioeconomic status did not significantly influence distrust in government institutions and voters' turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.
3. Ho: Distrust in government institutions does not significantly shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.
4. Ho: Distrust in government institutions has no significant effect on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study primarily investigates the interplay between institutional weaknesses, socioeconomic factors, and their influence on citizens' distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the 2023 General Elections in selected Local Governments in Ekiti and Gombe States. It seeks to understand how the performance of government institutions including their credibility, transparency, accountability, and overall effectiveness affects citizens' trust in the electoral process and their willingness to participate in elections. Special attention is given to institutions that are central to the democratic process, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, and other relevant public offices that play a role in election administration.

The research further examines the key drivers of voter apathy in Nigeria, including, but not limited to, electoral violence, political insecurity, corruption, manipulation of election results, inadequate voter education, and socioeconomic disparities among citizens. These factors are analyzed to determine the extent to which structural institutional weaknesses and social inequalities shape political behavior and influence voter engagement. By doing so, the study aims to provide insights into why large segments of the population choose to abstain from voting despite being constitutionally empowered to participate in the democratic process.

In addition, this study adopts a comparative perspective, focusing on selected local government areas in Ekiti and Gombe States. The comparison allows for an examination of how regional variations such as differences in political culture, governance practices, institutional responsiveness, and security conditions impact levels of trust in government and voter turnout. Ekiti and Gombe states were chosen due to their contrasting sociopolitical landscapes, electoral histories, and voter engagement patterns, making them ideal cases to explore nuanced differences and similarities in citizens' perceptions and behaviors.

The research primarily targets registered voters who were eligible to vote in the 2023 general elections, including those who actively participated and those who abstained, to capture a comprehensive understanding of voter behavior. While references to previous elections may be used to contextualize findings and identify trends, the main focus remains on the 2023

elections. By concentrating on this specific electoral cycle, the study seeks to provide up-to-date insights into the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, highlighting how institutional deficiencies and socioeconomic factors continue to shape citizens' trust in government institutions and their engagement in electoral processes.

1.7 Significance of Study

This research holds profound significance as it aims to address one of the most critical issues hindering democratic consolidation in Nigeria--low voters' turnout. This phenomenon has been a persistent challenge, with voters' engagement steadily declining over the past two decades. The 2023 general elections, which saw a voters' turnout of less than 27%, emphasizes the alarming trend of civic disengagement. A key factor driving this issue is the pervasive distrust of government, which fosters voters' apathy, leading to a weak democracy and further undermines the integrity of the electoral process.

This study contributed to the existing literature on voters' behavior, government distrust, and democratic consolidation in transitional democracies, especially in Africa. The study sought to advance democratic theory by exploring the links between institutional distrust and voter apathy, areas that remain largely underexplored in many African countries, including Nigeria.

Empirically, this research provides evidence-based perspective into the relationship between distrust in government institutions, institutional weaknesses, socioeconomic factors, and voter apathy. By focusing on specific local government areas in Ekiti and Gombe States, the study generates data that can help identify the particular institutional deficiencies and social conditions that most strongly influence citizens' distrust in government institutions. These findings can guide policymakers, electoral bodies, and civil society organizations in designing targeted interventions to improve electoral participation, enhance the credibility and transparency of governance institutions, and mitigate voter apathy. Additionally, the comparative approach allows for the identification of regional variations in voter behavior, providing practical lessons for tailoring voter education campaigns, strengthening institutional frameworks, and addressing localized causes of electoral disengagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on democratic governance, political behavior, and institutional trust in developing democracies. It extends existing

models of political participation by incorporating the interplay between institutional performance and socioeconomic status as determinants of voter engagement and trust in government institutions. The research also provides a framework for understanding how structural and social factors jointly shape citizen perceptions, thus offering a more nuanced perspective on theories of political apathy and institutional distrust. By integrating these dimensions, the study enriches theoretical discourses on democratic consolidation in Nigeria, providing scholars with an analytical lens to explore the causes and consequences of voter disengagement in similar political contexts.

The outcome of this study would provide valuable policy inputs for government officials, policymakers, and electoral bodies such as INEC, equipping the commission with practical recommendations for improving electoral integrity, increasing transparency, and enhancing public trust in the electoral process. This knowledge is crucial for the formulation of policies aimed at rebuilding trust in governmental institutions and fostering civic engagement.

Other critical stakeholders in the democratic process would benefit from this research by gaining a better understanding of the root causes of voters' apathy and government distrust. The findings of this study can form a basis for designing targeted electoral reforms that addresses the structural weaknesses contributing to voter disengagement, which would directly contribute to increasing voters' turnout in future elections.

Additionally, international observers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on democracy and governance in Africa would find this research valuable in shaping their programmes and partnerships, aimed at strengthening democratic institutions in Nigeria. By understanding the underlying factors driving voters' apathy, they can better allocate resources and develop strategies for enhancing democratic participation.

In the long run, this study could serve as a cornerstone for future research on electoral reforms and democratic governance in Nigeria. This study will significantly contribute to reinvigorating Nigeria's democracy by providing a practical framework for increasing voter engagement, and addressing government distrust. Its findings will serve as a vital resource for INEC, government policymakers, and NGOs, helping them craft effective strategies for ensuring a more inclusive, transparent, and participatory democratic process in future elections

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Distrust in Government institutions

Distrust of government refers to the skepticism, lack of confidence, and suspicion that citizens harbor towards governmental institutions, including elected officials, public agencies, and administrative bodies. It is characterized by a diminished faith in the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the government to the needs and aspirations of the populace. Government distrust often involves doubts about the willingness and ability of the government to hold itself accountable for its actions, particularly in addressing issues such as corruption and maladministration

Voter Apathy

Voters' apathy refers to a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or motivation among eligible citizens to participate in the electoral process. It manifests as low voter turnout, disengagement from political campaigns, or abstention from civic duties, and it is often a visible indicator of broader disillusionment with the political system. It is often a response to a broader political dynamics rooted in citizen's perceptions of corruption, election rigging, violence, and inefficiencies within government institutions. When citizens believe that their vote will not influence outcomes or that the political system is biased toward elites, they are less likely to participate actively in elections

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout refers to the percentage of eligible voters who actively participate in an election by casting their votes. It is quantitatively measured as the percentage of eligible voters who cast their ballots in a given election. This is calculated by dividing the number of voters by the total number of eligible voters and multiplying by 100. Analysis of voter turnout involves comparing the participation rate in a particular election with turnout figures from previous elections. A decline in turnout may indicate increased voter apathy, while an increase may suggest heightened civic engagement. While understanding voter turnout requires examining demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and socio-economic status to identify patterns and disparities in participation across different segments of the population

Political Participation

Political participation refers to the diverse range of activities through which individuals engage with the political process, contribute to political decision-making, and express their preferences or interests. It encompasses both conventional and unconventional forms of involvement that influence the functioning of a political system.

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation refers to the dynamic process through which a nascent democracy evolves, solidifies, and matures, demonstrating enduring adherence to democratic principles and practices within a society. This involves the establishment of stable democratic institutions, the consistent application of the rule of law, protection of civil liberties, transparent and regular electoral processes, active civil society engagement, and the cultivation of a democratic political culture

Civic Disengagement

Civic disengagement refers to the withdrawal, lack of participation, or indifference of citizens in civic and political activities, reflecting a diminished level of involvement in public affairs, lack of public trust in government institutions and elected officials and a reduced commitment to democratic processes. It encompasses various forms of non-participation, including abstention from voting, reflecting the percentage of eligible voters who choose not to cast their ballots in elections, limited engagement with civic organizations, and a general apathy towards political events and decision-making like lack of; interest, awareness, and engagement with political events, policy discussions, and public affairs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Review

Nigeria gained independence in 1960, ushering in the first republic. However, political stability was short-lived as a series of coups from 1966 onwards disrupted civilian rule (Adekanye, 2002). These coups set the stage for a prolonged period of military rule, impacting the nascent democratic processes and elections. The subsequent decades saw Nigeria oscillating between military and civilian rule. While military regimes periodically organized elections, these were marred by allegations of manipulation and lack of transparency. The Second Republic (1979-1983) witnessed an attempt to restore civilian governance but succumbed to another military coup in 1983 (Nwolise, 2009). Nigeria's journey through electoral history has been a complex and dynamic process, shaped by key milestones, persistent challenges, and ongoing efforts at reform. The historical development of elections in Nigeria reflects her resilience and determination to embrace democratic governance. From the disruptions of military rule to the efforts at reform in the 21st century, Nigeria's electoral journey is marked by a complex interplay of milestones, challenges, and reforms

The turn of the century marked a significant transition to civilian rule in 1999, marking the birth of the Fourth Republic and a renewed commitment to democratic ideals. However, the elections during this transition were not without challenges. Allegations of irregularities raised questions about the credibility of the electoral process (Jega, 2013). In response to the perceived shortcomings, efforts were made to institute electoral reforms. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), established in 1998, aimed to ensure impartiality and transparency. Subsequent elections witnessed the introduction of technology, including biometric voter registration and card readers, intended to enhance the integrity of the electoral process (Jega, 2013).

Despite these reforms, challenges continued to characterize Nigerian elections. The 2015 elections were considered a step forward, but issues such as violence, irregularities, and allegations of fraud persisted. Subsequent elections, including those in 2019 and 2023, faced scrutiny for issues like voter apathy and distrust in the electoral process (Omotola, 2010).

Studies have explored the contemporary dynamics shaping Nigerian elections, focusing on the role of social media in influencing voter behavior, the increasing involvement of the youth demographic, and the impact of ethno-religious factors (Suberu, 2001; Sani, 2015; Iwuoha, 2018; LeVan, 2019).

The successful conduct of democratic elections is contingent upon the active and informed participation of citizens. Abutudu, (2014) believes that election is a means of choosing people to occupy positions of authority in organizations, institutions or government in a democracy. However, recent elections in Nigeria have witnessed challenges related to government distrust and voters' apathy. Nigeria's democratic process has faced numerous challenges, including electoral irregularities, fatal electoral violence, contested election outcomes, and low voter turnout. (Suleiman, 2022). The 2023 general elections in Nigeria, particularly in Ekiti and Gombe states were characterized by a significant decline in voter turnout, reflecting a growing trend of government distrust and voter apathy in the country.

Voter turnout in the 2023 general elections was grossly lower than that of 2019, impacting the legitimacy of elections and posing grave danger for political participation and democratic consolidation in Nigerian democracy. The country's vast number of first-time voters and the enactment of important electoral reforms in 2022 to improve the integrity and transparency of the elections did not prevent these issues from arising. (Akinola, 2023)

Distrust in Government Institutions

Distrust in government institutions is not only a theoretical construct but also a practical lens through which citizens interpret and respond to governance. It reflects a heightened sensitivity to perceived institutional failures, including corruption, lack of transparency, selective enforcement of laws, and ineffectiveness in policy implementation (Grogan, 2019; Alemika, 2004). Scholars argue that distrust is both cognitive and emotional: cognitively, citizens assess the likelihood that institutions will fail or act against public interest, and emotionally, they experience skepticism, suspicion, or frustration when interacting with governance structures (Van De Walle & Six, 2014; Moisés, 2006).

Unlike mere low trust, distrust carries proactive behavioral implications. Citizens may disengage from political participation, question the legitimacy of policies, or resort to

informal governance mechanisms when they perceive formal institutions as unreliable (Dyck, 2009; Bertsou, 2019). This distinguishes distrust from passive skepticism it motivates both caution and avoidance in civic engagement. In democratic societies, where institutional legitimacy depends on citizens' participation and compliance, widespread distrust can undermine governance effectiveness and erode the social contract (Tanny & Al-Hossienie, 2019; Van Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022).

Conceptually, distrust functions as both a cause and an amplifier of voter apathy. Persistent distrust reduces the likelihood of participation, which in turn weakens electoral accountability and allows institutional weaknesses to persist (Van De Walle & Six, 2014; Tanny & Al-Hossienie, 2019). This cyclical relationship highlights the importance of addressing distrust not only as an attitudinal problem but also as a structural barrier to democratic consolidation. Strengthening institutional transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement is therefore essential to mitigating voter apathy and fostering a more participatory political culture (Alemika, 2004; Shaaba, 2012; Ojo, 2022).

Furthermore, distrust is contextually shaped. Historical legacies of authoritarianism, electoral manipulation, and selective law enforcement influence citizens' baseline expectations of government behavior (Iroghama, 2012; Ojo, 2022). In environments where corruption and mismanagement are visible and persistent, distrust is rationalized as a protective mechanism: citizens adjust their behavior to minimize personal or collective vulnerability to institutional failures (Latusek & Cook, 2025). In this sense, distrust functions not merely as an attitude but also as a coping strategy within political systems perceived as unreliable.

Often, distrust is dynamic rather than static. It can intensify in response to crises, such as electoral violence, policy failures, or systemic corruption, and conversely, it may decrease if institutions demonstrate transparency, accountability, and responsiveness (Shaaba, 2012; Grogan, 2019). Recognizing this multidimensional, situational nature of distrust is essential for scholars and policymakers, because interventions aimed at rebuilding confidence must address both the structural sources of institutional failure and the perceptual experiences of citizens (Van De Walle & Six, 2014; Tanny & Al-Hossienie, 2019).

Distrust in government institutions is fundamentally rooted in citizens' evaluations of institutional performance and fairness. Moisés (2006) frames distrust as a rational response to both perceived and experienced institutional failures. From this perspective, distrust is not merely an emotional reaction but a reasoned judgment arising when democratic institutions fail to meet normative expectations of transparency, accountability, and procedural fairness. In other words, citizens interpret repeated shortcomings such as corruption, unfulfilled policy promises, or selective enforcement of laws as evidence that institutions may act contrary to the public interest, thereby justifying skepticism and cautious engagement.

Dyck (2009) complements this view by emphasizing that distrust is often "initiated" through direct experiences of exclusion, manipulation, or unfair treatment within governance processes. This approach highlights the experiential dimension of distrust: political attitudes are shaped not only by abstract evaluations of institutional reputation but also by tangible interactions with state actors. Citizens who perceive that their voices are ignored, that policies favor elites, or that elections are manipulated are more likely to develop enduring skepticism toward institutional motives and capabilities.

From a broader governance perspective, Latusek and Cook (2025) argue that citizens' evaluations of institutions extend beyond their functional outputs to include symbolic and procedural signals that communicate fairness, competence, and impartiality. This perspective recognizes that institutional legitimacy is not determined solely by the delivery of services or policies but also by the perceived integrity and ethical conduct of institutional actors. For example, transparent decision-making processes, consistent application of rules, and visible accountability mechanisms serve as cues that reinforce citizens' confidence in governance structures. Conversely, when these symbolic or procedural expectations are unmet, citizens interpret institutional actions as self-serving or biased, even if the formal outputs appear adequate (Latusek & Cook, 2025).

Furthermore, Latusek and Cook (2025) argue that distrust operates along both cognitive and affective dimensions. Cognitively, individuals assess the likelihood that institutions will fail or act against their interests, while affectively, they experience suspicion, frustration, or fear that reinforces disengagement. Van De Walle and Six (2014) similarly note that distrust is

distinct from mere low trust, as it carries specific behavioral consequences, including political withdrawal, resistance to policy compliance, and selective participation in civic life.

Van Prooijen, Spadaro, and Wang (2022) describe the outcome of such misalignment as a “suspicion of institutions,” a form of distrust that extends beyond individual grievances to broader societal effects. Suspicion can manifest in heightened sensitivity to perceived corruption, the spread of conspiracy narratives, reluctance to cooperate with public initiatives, and erosion of social cohesion. In essence, institutions that fail to align their behavior with normative expectations create an environment in which skepticism is normalized and engagement is reduced. This underscores that institutional legitimacy is as much about perception and symbolic trustworthiness as it is about policy effectiveness, highlighting the complex, multidimensional nature of distrust in governance.

Empirical research consistently highlights multiple factors that drive citizens’ distrust of government institutions. Among the most prominent are corruption, lack of transparency, and the inconsistent delivery of public goods and services (Alemika, 2004; Grogan, 2019). Corruption, in particular, undermines the perception that institutions act in the public interest, creating the sense that governance structures are primarily vehicles for elite enrichment rather than mechanisms for societal welfare. Similarly, opaque decision-making processes and arbitrary policy implementation erode confidence, as citizens are unable to observe or verify the fairness and accountability of institutional actions.

In the Nigerian political processes, these determinants are compounded by recurrent governance failures and systemic irregularities. Iroghama (2012) observes that repeated electoral manipulation, selective law enforcement, and inconsistent application of public policies reinforce perceptions of institutional illegitimacy. Citizens interpret such patterns as evidence that institutions are biased, unaccountable, and incapable of safeguarding public interests. Ojo (2022) further highlights that ineffective citizen engagement mechanisms such as limited avenues for public input, tokenistic consultation, or poor responsiveness intensify feelings of exclusion, fostering cynicism about the willingness of institutions to serve the populace effectively.

Information manipulation also plays a critical role in shaping distrust. Moisés, (2006), and Bertou, (2019) argue that disinformation campaigns, partisan propaganda, and biased media reporting amplify skepticism by creating conflicting or misleading narratives about institutional behavior. This dynamic is particularly salient in contemporary governance contexts, where social media and digital communication platforms allow rapid dissemination of both accurate and misleading information. Exposure to contradictory narratives can heighten suspicion, erode social trust, and weaken the perceived legitimacy of state institutions (Van Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022). Citizens may therefore not only distrust institutions based on observed performance but also on circulating perceptions of corruption, bias, or malfeasance.

Thus, the determinants of distrust are both structural and perceptual. Structural weaknesses such as corruption, inefficiency, and governance failures interact with perceptual factors, including information manipulation and exclusion from decision-making, to produce a multidimensional form of skepticism. Understanding these determinants is essential for designing interventions that not only improve institutional performance but also restore citizens' confidence in governance systems (Alemika, 2004; Ojo, 2022; Van Prooijen et al., 2022).

Distrust in government institutions carries significant implications for governance, democratic consolidation, and social cohesion. Scholars emphasize that when distrust becomes widespread, it undermines the legitimacy of institutions and alters the nature of citizen engagement. Bertou (2019) notes that political distrust often results in transactional or contingent interactions with state actors, where citizens participate selectively, based on perceived personal or group benefits, rather than out of a commitment to collective governance. Grogan (2019) similarly observes that distrust can reduce compliance with public policies, erode civic participation, and exacerbate societal fragmentation, creating conditions in which institutions struggle to maintain authority and coherence.

The consequences of distrust are particularly tangible in Nigeria democracy where citizens continue to abstain from taking part in the electoral processes cumulating in low voter turnout in recent elections. Studies indicate a strong linkage between distrust and voter

apathy, low tax compliance, and reluctance to engage in community development initiatives (Shaaba, 2012; Ojo, 2022). Citizens who perceive institutions as unresponsive, opaque, or biased often treat political engagement as a symbolic or selective act, rather than a normative duty. This shift from active participation to disengagement undermines democratic consolidation by weakening electoral accountability and reducing the pressure on institutions to perform effectively.

Distrust also reinforces socio-political polarization. Latusek and Cook (2025) argue that when citizens lose confidence in formal institutions, they increasingly seek alternative mechanisms to advance their interests, whether through opposition parties, civil society networks, or informal governance arrangements. This reorientation can fragment the public sphere, erode social cohesion, and challenge the capacity of state institutions to act as neutral arbiters in society. Additionally, pervasive distrust can generate a climate of suspicion, encouraging conspiracy thinking, resistance to public initiatives, and selective adherence to laws (Van Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022).

Consequently, distrust in government institutions operates as both a consequence of governance deficiencies and a mechanism that reinforces them. Citizens' perceptions of corruption, inefficiency, arbitrariness, and lack of accountability not only erode confidence in state structures but also reduce civic engagement, thereby weakening the accountability mechanisms that might otherwise compel institutional reform (Van De Walle & Six, 2014; Moisés, 2006). In this sense, distrust functions as a dual phenomenon: it is simultaneously an attitudinal response to observed institutional shortcomings and a structural feedback mechanism that influences future governance outcomes. Reduced citizen participation, selective compliance with policies, and diminished public scrutiny create an environment in which institutional weaknesses can persist or even deepen, thereby perpetuating the cycle of distrust.

Tanny and Al-Hossienie (2019) emphasize that distrust is neither homogeneous nor evenly distributed across society. It varies according to demographic factors, historical experiences, and institutional domains. For example, institutions directly involved in political regulation such as electoral commissions, the judiciary, and law enforcement agencies often attract

higher levels of suspicion due to their perceived role in manipulating or enforcing power asymmetrically. In contrast, service-oriented agencies, including health or education ministries, tend to evoke comparatively lower levels of distrust, as their outputs are more tangible and directly beneficial to citizens. This variation underscores the importance of contextualizing distrust, treating it as a phenomenon that is institution-specific, historically informed, and socially differentiated, rather than as a uniform measure of political sentiment.

Distrust of Government in Nigerian Democracy

Public trust is the foundation upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of good governance is built (Tahmina&Chowdhury, 2019). Despite a wealth of data tracking the deteriorating attitudes of citizens towards their government representatives and political systems in general, there is still a debate regarding the meaning of distrust and its significance for the health of democracies(Bertsou, 2019).However, distrust of government by citizens has been a recurring theme within the Nigerian political space and a subject of interest in the academia. Several studies have highlighted the historical roots of government distrust, tracing it to military interference in politics. The erosion of democratic institutions during military regimes fostered an environment where citizens questioned the legitimacy of subsequent governments,furthermore, issues of corruption, electoral malpractices, and unfulfilled promises by political leaders.These historical experiences engendered skepticism among citizens, shaping their perceptions of subsequent democratic governments. (Nwolise, 2018; Roelofs, 2019;Ojo, 2020; Ojo,2022).

The behavior and actions of political leaders and elected representatives have resulted in a deterioration of public trust and citizen disengagement in the Nigeria democratic system, which has become a source of concern for both local and international observers since independence in 1960. As noted by Iroghama (2012), Nigeria's public trust and citizen engagement began to deteriorate after the 2007 general elections. There is growing evidence of the dilapidation of trust in governments globally (Ayodele, 2014; Grimes, 2017; Iroghama, 2012; Kerr &Luhrmann, 2017; Kumagai&Ilorio, 2020; Latinobarometro, 2005; Lenihan& Bennett, 2015; Murtin et al, 2018).The findings of these studies contrast sharply with those of African countries where the majority of the factors identified as adversely impacting public trust are not only linked to the president (the executive tier), but also the judicial and the

legislative tiers. The Afrobarometer(2006) reported that trust in Nigeria's president plummeted from 78% to 26% while trust in democracy plunged from 81% in 2000 to 25% in 2005

Corruption stands out as a pervasive cause of distrust of government in Nigeria. The country has consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt globally (Ayobolu, 2017). Nigeria has consistently ranked among the world's most corrupt countries (Transparency International, 2022). Rampant corruptions, mismanagement of public funds, and embezzlement by political leaders have severely undermined public trust in government institutions. The impact of this corruption extends far beyond financial losses and includes diminished access to basic services, and infringing upon citizens' rights which has contributed to the erosion of public trust in government institutions (Okoi, 2022).

The perception of corruption at various levels undermines citizens' confidence in the government's ability to act in their best interests (Nwolise, 2018). Corruption has undermined morality, values, and ethical governance practices as it has metamorphosed into a cankerworm that has spread across the system. Thus, this study participants' perceptions corroborate scholarly evidence which revealed that Nigerian leaders have been robbing, stealing, and wasting public funds, as well as inflating contracts and padding payrolls (Odo, 2015; Nwokeoma, Ezeh, & Onwuama, 2023). Furthermore, mismanagement of public resources further fuels government distrust. Inadequate provision of essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, coupled with economic disparities, intensifies citizens' disillusionment with their leaders. When government fails to meet the basic needs of the populace, it creates a breeding ground for distrust (Oni, Olufunmilayo, & Adebowale, 2018).

The credibility of elections in Nigeria has long been a contentious issue with implications for distrust of government. Several factors have historically challenged the credibility of elections in Nigeria. One of these prominent issues is electoral malpractice, including voter intimidation, ballot-box snatching, and manipulation of results (Afrobarometer, 2006). Corruption, both within the electoral process and broader political landscape, has also posed a significant threat to the credibility of elections (Ayodele, 2014). Lawal (2004) points out that these concerns about election integrity have led to widespread distrust. Challenges such as

inaccurate voter registers, multiple voting, ballot-box snatching and manipulation of results have raised doubts about the fairness of elections and the integrity of the democratic process. Recognizing the need for electoral reforms, Nigeria has implemented various measures to enhance the credibility of elections. The establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998 was a crucial step (INEC, 2021). INEC was tasked with organizing and supervising elections, aiming to ensure transparency and fairness.

The introduction of technology in the electoral process has been a landmark reform. The use of biometric voter registration and electronic voting systems aimed to minimize fraud and enhance the accuracy of results (Magaji, 2016). However, these technological advancements also posed new challenges, such as technical glitches and concerns about cyber security which has not helped in improving the confidence and trust of citizens in INEC as a governmental institution despite the role of international partnerships in supporting Nigeria's electoral credibility. Organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have provided election monitoring and assistance, contributing to the legitimacy of the electoral process (Kumagai&Ilorio, 2020).

Enhancing the credibility of elections requires not only institutional reforms but also increased public awareness and civic engagement and boost trust in government voter education programs have been initiated to inform citizens about their rights and the importance of participating in the electoral process. Civil society organizations and the media have played a critical role in holding the government and electoral bodies accountable (Latinobarometro, 2005; Lenihan& Bennett, 2015). Another factor responsible for distrust of government in Nigerian democracy is social and economic disparities. The perception of distrust in government is intertwined with social and economic disparities. A critical dimension of this distrust emerges from the unmet expectations of citizens who anticipate access to fundamental services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. As these expectations remain unfulfilled, a palpable disillusionment permeates the Nigerian society, eroding the bedrock of trust in governmental institutions.

The study by Oni et al. (2018) sheds light on the pivotal role that social and economic disparities play in fostering government distrust. The citizens of Nigeria, like any democratic society, hold certain expectations from their government. These expectations include the

assurance of accessible and high-quality healthcare, robust educational opportunities, and well-developed infrastructure. However, when the government fails to deliver on these fronts, a chasm widens between the citizens' aspirations and the reality they experience. The provision of essential services by the government is not merely a matter of administrative efficiency; it is a fundamental aspect of the social contract between the state and its citizens (Ojo, 2020). The study conducted by Oni et al. (2018) underscores this point, emphasizing how the shortfall in delivering essential services contributes significantly to the erosion of trust in government institutions. The citizens' disillusionment stems from the perceived inability of the government to bridge the gap between promises made and services rendered.

Furthermore, the disconnect between government policies and the welfare of the people exacerbates this sense of distrust. Citizens, feeling marginalized and underserved, start questioning the legitimacy of the democratic system that perpetuates such disparities (Pócza, 2017). The erosion of trust becomes not just a reaction to unmet expectations but also a manifestation of the widening gap between governance and the well-being of the populace.

The consequences of this trust deficit are far-reaching. As citizens lose confidence in the government's ability to address their basic needs, the social contract that underpins a functional democracy weakens. The study by Ojo, (2020). aptly highlights how this disillusionment can lead to decreased civic engagement as citizens disassociate themselves from a system they perceive as failing them.

Governance Crises and Distrust in Government institutions in Nigeria

Distrust in government institutions remains one of the most persistent challenges in Nigerian democracy, significantly influencing voter apathy. Governance crises have compounded this issue, creating a vicious cycle where citizens feel disillusioned with political leadership and disengage from democratic processes. Several interrelated factors contribute to the erosion of public trust in government, including poor governance, weak institutions, insecurity, lack of transparency, economic mismanagement, ethnic and religious divisions and ineffective public service delivery.

Governance involves the processes of exercising and managing the collective will of a people. It encompasses the political, economic, and administrative authority used to oversee a nation's affairs, or more specifically, the way a government exercises political power. (Ikelegbe,

2010), Otoghile, Igbafe, & Agbontaen, (2014) further emphasized the significance of governance in the functioning, growth and development of the state which largely depends on how its government establishes a framework for the effective and responsible exercise of authority and control.

Unfortunately, governance in Nigeria has been marred by a history of mismanagement, lack of accountability, and weak institutional frameworks. Many Nigerians perceive their leaders as self-serving individuals who prioritize personal or elite interests over national development (Eze, 2018). Successive administrations have failed to address critical social and economic issues, leading to widespread discontent. Leadership transitions in Nigeria have often been characterized by political instability, electoral violence, and a lack of continuity in policies, further deepening public skepticism about the government's ability to govern effectively (Arowolo & Aluko, 2012).

While weak political and governance institutions contribute significantly to the distrust of government, the Nigerian political system has been criticized for its lack of transparency, widespread corruption, and ineffective law enforcement (Ojo, 2020). Key institutions such as the judiciary, the legislature, and anti-corruption agencies have struggled to maintain independence and effectively check executive excesses. When institutions fail to uphold justice and accountability, citizens become disenchanted with democracy, perceiving it as a system that serves only the political elites.

Furthermore, the credibility of Nigeria's elections has long been questioned due to widespread electoral fraud, voter suppression, and political interference in electoral processes. Reports of ballot-box snatching, vote-buying, multiple voting, and rigging have significantly undermined trust in the democratic system (Afrobarometer, 2006). Despite reforms aimed at improving election transparency, including the use of biometric voter registration, allegations of election rigging and partisan influence within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) continue to erode public confidence in the process (Magaji, 2016). The lack of avenues for meaningful citizens' participation in governance fuels distrust in government. Many Nigerians believe their voices do not matter in the political process due to the dominance of political elites who control decision-making. When citizens feel disconnected from governance, they are less likely to engage in civic activities such as voting, further weakening democratic

legitimacy (Akinboye, 2013). The rapid growth of social media has played a crucial role in exposing government failures, corruption, and human rights abuses in Nigeria. While the traditional media outlets are often constrained by government influence, social media platforms have provided a space for citizens to hold leaders accountable. However, the spread of misinformation and propaganda has also deepened distrust in government, as conflicting narratives make it difficult for citizens to discern credible information (Nwabueze, 2018).

The bad shape of the government also been a serious factor as the economy have become plagued by poor management, corruption and policies that have failed to address critical socioeconomic challenges. The mismanagement of oil revenues, rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and poor infrastructure development have worsened living conditions for many Nigerians (Oni, Olufunmilayo, & Adebawale, 2018). When governments fail to deliver economic stability and improve citizens' livelihood, public trust diminishes, leading to increased voter apathy as citizens perceive elections as irrelevant to their daily struggles, not helped by wide spread corruption which remains a deeply entrenched issue in the Nigerian public space, affecting governance at all levels. Political leaders and public officials have been implicated in cases of embezzlement, contract inflation, misallocation of funds, and other corrupt practices (Ayobolu, 2017). Transparency International consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt nations, reinforcing public perceptions of government untrustworthiness (Transparency International, 2022). When corruption scandals go unpunished, citizens lose faith in governance, reinforcing apathy towards elections and political participation.

Finally, persistent insecurity is a major factor eroding public trust in Nigeria's government. The country has been grappling with multiple security crises, including terrorism (Boko Haram insurgency), banditry, herder-farmer conflicts, kidnapping, and communal clashes. The government's inability to provide adequate security and respond effectively to these threats has heightened citizens' distrust in state institutions (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). The failure of security agencies to curb rising violence has fueled public frustration, making many question the government's capacity to fulfill its primary duty of protecting lives and property. The failure of public institutions to further provide essential services such as healthcare, education, water supply, and electricity further fuels government distrust. The inability to ensure quality service delivery, coupled with bureaucratic inefficiencies and

neglect of rural communities, reinforces the belief that the government is ineffective and disconnected from the people's needs (Ojo, 2020).

Voter Apathy

Once distrust in government institutions sets in, voter apathy often follows closely behind. Voter apathy refers to the lack of interest, enthusiasm, or motivation to participate in elections. Behaviorally, it can manifest in several ways: citizens may refuse to register to vote, abstain from casting ballots, disengage from political discussions, or ignore civic responsibilities entirely (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2000). In Nigeria, low voter turnout has been a recurring feature of elections since the return to democracy in 1999, despite increases in voter registration. For instance, the 2019 general elections recorded a turnout of only about 35% of registered voters, illustrating the persistent challenge of electoral disengagement (INEC, 2019; Akanji, 2018).

Several practical factors contribute to this pattern. Electoral violence remains a major deterrent. In the 2011 elections, widespread reports of ballot box snatching, politically motivated attacks, and clashes between party supporters in states like Kano, Rivers, and Plateau created a climate of fear that discouraged participation (Agu et al., 2013; Akhaine, 2011). Even when direct violence is absent, the fear of potential intimidation, harassment at polling units, or partisan enforcement by local security actors generates a pervasive sense of risk among voters, particularly in politically volatile regions.

Distrust in electoral management institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is another key factor. Many Nigerians believe that elections are rigged in favor of incumbents or influential parties, reinforcing the perception that individual votes are inconsequential (Folu, 2020; Ariyo & Folorunso, 2022). For example, allegations of result manipulation in the 2007 and 2015 elections led to widespread skepticism, with voters expressing doubts about the fairness and transparency of counting and collation processes. This skepticism is compounded by systemic issues such as poorly managed voter rolls, logistical delays, malfunctioning card readers, and inconsistent communication during elections (Berebon, 2023).

Economic and logistical constraints also shape apathy. In a country where a significant portion of the population engages in daily-wage labor, long queues, delayed polling, or the need to travel long distances to vote imposes real economic costs. Rational choice theory explains this well: when the expected personal cost of voting exceeds perceived benefits, abstention becomes a rational choice (Downs, 1957; Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974). For instance, during the 2019 general elections, many rural voters reported missing voting opportunities due to early closure of polling units or lack of transportation to distant centers, particularly in northern states such as Bauchi and Yobe.

Beyond rational calculation, expressive and emotional factors play a significant role. Frustration with recurring political failures, disillusionment with party politics, and cynicism about leadership competence contribute to a general withdrawal from political life (Fiorina, 1976; Balogun & Nwakwo, 2023). Young Nigerians, who make up over 60% of the voting-age population, often express disengagement through social media commentary rather than formal participation, highlighting how distrust can shift political expression into alternative spaces. Moreover, emotional fatigue driven by repeated experiences of violence, corruption, and electoral fraud can compound disengagement, producing a sense of helplessness and resignation (Itesi et al., 2024; Akinola, 2023).

Political materialism and vote buying further exacerbate apathy. In many states, including Lagos, Anambra, and Delta, reports of vote-buying practices have created cynicism about the fairness of electoral contests. Citizens may perceive voting as a transactional activity benefiting those with financial or political leverage, which discourages genuine engagement among ordinary voters (Chukwudi, 2022; Ezeugwu & Ejeh, 2024). In some cases, voters actively disengage to signal dissent or protest against the perceived commodification of political participation.

Voter apathy represents a critical manifestation of distrust in government institutions, particularly in emerging or fragile democracies where citizens' confidence in governance is tenuous. Beyond the immediate perception that participation is futile, voter apathy reflects deeper systemic and psychological dynamics. Persistent institutional failures, such as corruption, selective enforcement of laws, and the manipulation of electoral processes,

cultivate a sense of learned helplessness among citizens, wherein repeated experiences of exclusion or marginalization reinforce the belief that individual or collective political action will not yield meaningful change (Moisés, 2006; Dyck, 2009).

In Nigeria, the history of governance crises amplifies these effects. Longstanding patterns of electoral irregularities, political patronage, and selective application of justice have normalized skepticism toward state institutions (Ayodele, 2014; Iroghama, 2012). Citizens internalize these experiences, forming expectations that political actors and institutions are primarily self-serving. This dynamic disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including the youth and economically marginalized populations, who perceive both formal political structures and civic engagement channels as unresponsive to their needs (Jimoh et al., 2025; Afrobarometer, 2016).

Information flows further complicate this landscape. Disinformation campaigns, biased media coverage, and strategically manipulated narratives exacerbate the perception that elections are neither free nor fair (Agbedo & Krisagbedo, 2014; Van Prooijen, Spadaro, & Wang, 2022). In this environment, distrust becomes not merely a reaction to observed governance failures but a socially reinforced cognitive schema: citizens anticipate institutional bias, discount electoral outcomes, and increasingly rely on informal networks or alternative avenues of influence to meet their needs. Over time, this can entrench political disengagement and reduce the social capital necessary for participatory democracy.

Conceptually, the relationship between distrust and voter apathy is cyclical. Distrust reduces electoral participation, which diminishes institutional accountability and allows governance failures to persist, thereby reinforcing the conditions that generate further distrust (Van De Walle & Six, 2014; Tanny & Al-Hossienie, 2019). This cycle highlights the dual nature of distrust as both an attitudinal and structural barrier: it shapes individual behavior while simultaneously constraining institutional responsiveness. Mitigating voter apathy therefore requires interventions that address both dimensions improving institutional transparency, enforcing fair electoral practices, strengthening citizen engagement mechanisms, and fostering public trust through consistent, inclusive governance (Alemika, 2004; Shaaba, 2012; Ojo, 2022).

Moreover, addressing voter apathy has broader implications for democratic consolidation. High levels of disengagement undermine the representativeness of elected bodies, weaken public accountability, and create openings for elite capture and policy manipulation. By contrast, restoring citizen confidence and engagement can reinforce democratic norms, enhance civic vigilance, and promote governance that is both responsive and equitable. In Nigeria, this underscores the importance of combining structural reforms such as improving electoral integrity and institutional performance with efforts to rebuild normative trust, including civic education, transparent communication, and participatory decision-making platforms.

In essence, voter apathy is both a symptom and a driver of institutional distrust. It illustrates how citizen perceptions, shaped by experience, history, and information environments, can produce behavioral patterns that perpetuate governance challenges. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for policymakers, civil society actors, and scholars seeking to strengthen democracy, as it demonstrates that institutional reform and citizen engagement are mutually reinforcing processes rather than isolated interventions.

Voter's Apathy in Nigeria

Voter apathy as a manifestation of political disinterest, poses a significant challenge to democracies, particularly in developing nations. Active participation in the political process is crucial for democratic decision-making. Consequently, when voters abstain from participating in elections, it adversely affects the electoral process, generally signifying ill-health within the political system and can potentially undermine the legitimacy of election outcomes. In essence, low voter turnout suggests that the majority who abstained indirectly empower the minority who did vote to make decisions on behalf of the entire populace. The enormous discrepancy between registered voters and actual voters further implies that a significant portion of the population is either disenchanting with the political system, discouraged from participating, or has lost faith in the electoral process (Egbe, 2020). Consequently, a minority of voters makes decisions that affect the lives of the majority. Dass, & Sa'idu, (2022) argued that the increasing manifestation of voter apathy in the last two decades of Nigeria's democracy leads to a poor democratization process and governance failures in the Nigerian

project. It has promoted a condition in which individuals still remain more powerful than institutions.

Voters are vital to elections and modern democracy, as the power to choose the state's leadership resides with them. The real preferences of the voters in a democracy, according to this logic, are often subverted. The impact of this is that the quality of elections is frequently compromised throughout Africa, in Nigeria, prompting concerns about the crucial roles played by electoral stakeholders, including the electorates, and the election management body (EMB), all of which have significant consequences on the exercise of franchise and the selection of voters choice at the polls. (Idowu, 2023) and Haruna and Enikanselu (2021) reiterate that the involvement of the populace in political activities, elections, and the expression of their voter's choice is crucial for the consolidation and sustainability of democracy, making it one of the critical components of the democratic process

The enigma of low voter turnout in Nigeria raises serious concerns about the vibrancy and inclusivity of the nation's democracy. With millions of citizens not exercising their constitutional right to vote, the democratic process falls short of representing the collective will of the Nigerian people. Studies have noted that some of the ecological factors that affect voter turnout include political attitudes of the population, including the mobilization of ethnic values, the mobilization of religious sentiments across Nigeria's religious divide, inflammatory statements, and hate speech by the media and key opinion leaders and politicians; political or electoral violence and communal tension, regionalism and the long-standing power sharing problem, injustice and associated culture of impunity; economic vulnerability of participants in the electoral process, voters which underlies the phenomenon of vote selling; electoral malpractices and even the weather (Phillips et al, 1999; Nnamani, 2014)

The findings of (Roberts, Ijaiya, &Adewumi, 2023) reveal that ecological factors, such as religion and ethnicity, institutional factors, such as electoral body, election logistics, the courts, and others, like electoral violence, political intimidation, etc., impede voters from making their preferred choices at the polls. The study further identified the challenges of electoral process and politics that frustrate Nigerian voters in recent years. The nature of Nigerian politics, particularly the weaponization of social and religious sentiments,

institutional encumbrances and electoral logistics often subverts the choice of electorates for the benefit of the choice of the elites which reemphasizes the debate that citizens only vote, but rarely, in the actual sense of it choose their preferred leaders. The implication of these challenges is that it has led to disenfranchisement, voter apathy and low voter turnout in recent elections in Nigeria with decline in political participation as a whole. These issues impede the growth and consolidation of democratic tenets in Nigeria, as the most common and available means of citizens' participation in the political process is stunted, thus endangering democratization within the country's political space.

Another crucial factor that impacted voter participation was due to widespread disinterest, as a result of institutional factors that causes anguish for voters, which makes them loose hope in the electoral process as a result of the inefficiency of the electoral governing body to design a seamless electoral cycle that makes it easy for citizens to participate in the process.

The effect on voters is that voters who support these candidates bear the brunt in some ways, especially the loss of enthusiasm in the electoral process and the continued decline of trust in election tribunals. This reflects the decline in participation during subsequent elections that accounts for low voter turnout as we shall see shortly in respect of the presidential elections conducted in the Fourth Republic. The after-effects of these challenges are disenfranchisement, voter apathy, and low voter turnout during elections (Oduro, 2014; Agaiye, 2015). These outcomes have specific consequences that assume the forms of withdrawal, anger, and aggression, which translates in political behavior terms into key pathologies of democratic frustration, including powerlessness, inefficacy, alienation, lack of interest in the electoral process, distrust and cynicism of citizens towards the political system.

In Nigeria, the zero-sum nature of elections means that different tactics, foul and fair, are deployed to render the electoral process vulnerable to abuse, and gain maximum electoral advantage which is often at the expense of voters and their desired choice, and liable to their rejection leading majority of voters to abstain from fully taking part in voting on election day (Roberts and Obioha, 2005). Tambe, & Monyake, (2023) examines the impact of corruption and clientelism on voter turnout in African countries, finding that individuals with more experience with electoral clientelism are more likely to vote, while those with negative perceptions of corruption are less likely to vote.

Furthermore, given the pervasiveness of corruption in many African countries, a more recent study that focuses on the effect of corruption on individual-level voter turnout, confirms that corruption decreases turnout (Dahlberg & Solevid, 2016). They argued that the impact of corruption and clientelism on voter turnout in Africa is massive, as the perception of corruption generally suppresses voter turnout in African countries, according to the study using cross-national survey data. This result suggests that voters who think corruption is more widespread in their country are less likely to vote. The marginal effect of voting decreases by 7 percentage points as we move from those who perceive widespread corruption (0.76) to those who perceive little or no corruption (0.83). The effect of corruption on voter turnout is more pronounced in countries with high levels of political corruption. Clientelism tends to decrease voter turnout, particularly in poor African countries. (Tambe, & Monyake, 2023)

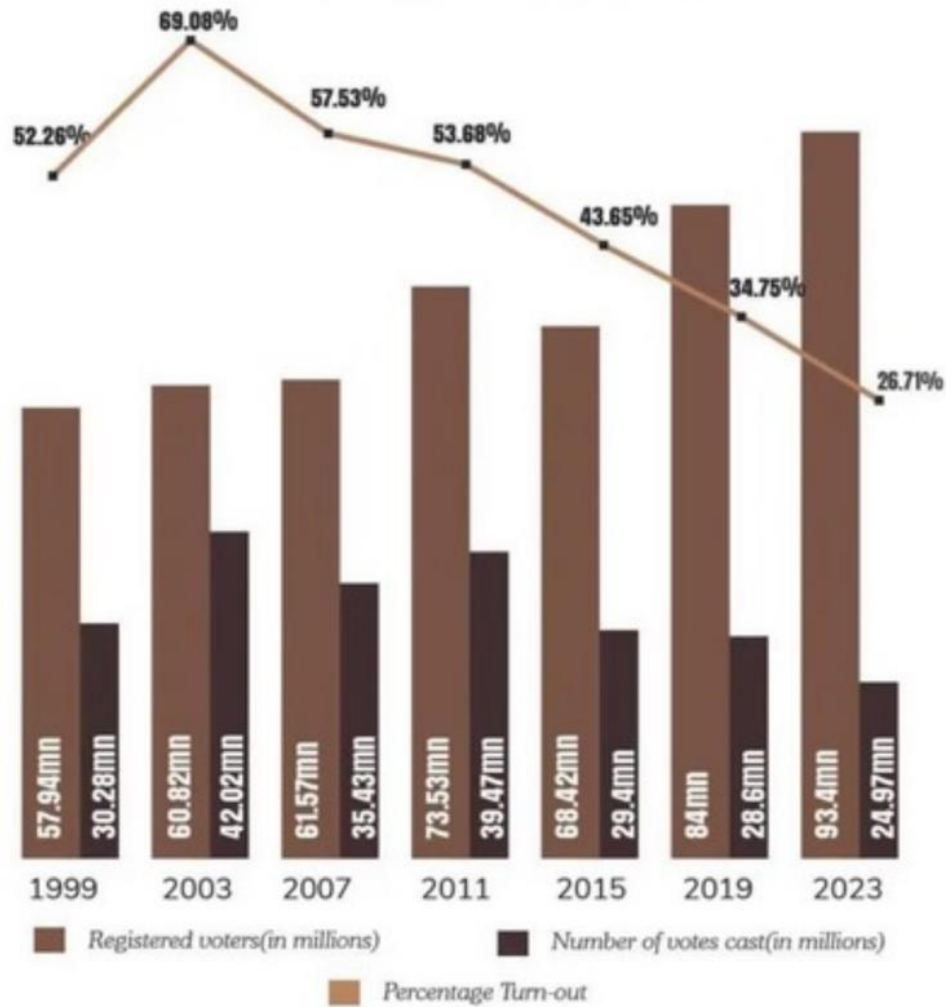
Voter Turnout and Electoral Violence.



Nigeria's Voter Turnout (1999-2023)



The 2023 Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives elections had the lowest voter turnout since the 1999 elections.



Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2023.

Elections in Nigeria, over the years have witnessed various challenges, including electoral violence and declining voter turnout. It is important to investigate electoral violence as a key driver of voter turnout especially in Nigeria where election has become war as the winner takes all attitudes of politicians and the adoption of zero sum strategy by political gladiators

Voter turnout, a crucial metric in assessing the health of a democracy, plays a pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes. However, there has been a steady decline in voter's turnout over the years with the 2023 General elections recording the lowest since the return to civil rule in 1999. Studies on Nigeria's electoral participation highlighted this declining trend in voter turnout since 1999. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), voter turnout in presidential elections has dropped from 69% in 2003 to 34.75% in 2019 and 26.71 in 2023. Omotola (2010) and Adetula (2018) attribute this decline to growing voter apathy, disillusionment with the political class, and persistent electoral malpractices, while Okonofua (2021) further highlights regional disparities in voter turnout, noting higher participation rates in the northern states compared to the southern regions, potentially due to differences in political mobilization strategies and voter incentives.

The relationship between voter turnout and electoral violence has been a topic of considerable concern. Voter turnout refers to the percentage of eligible voters who participate in an election. High voter turnout is often considered a positive sign for democracy, reflecting widespread civic engagement and a sense of responsibility among citizens. On the other side, low voter turnout can indicate political apathy, dissatisfaction, or disenfranchisement especially in fiercely contested elections, where voter turnout is a decisive factor, the stakes are high. This intensity can escalate tensions and increase the potential for violence, particularly if supporters feel their preferred candidate is being unfairly marginalized which does not look too healthy for democratic consolidation

Several studies suggest a correlation between voter turnout and the occurrence of electoral violence. Low voter turnout can create an environment where certain groups feel marginalized or underrepresented, fostering tensions that may escalate into violence. When a significant portion of the population feels excluded from the political process, it can contribute to social unrest and increase the likelihood of conflicts surrounding elections. (Collier, & Vicente, 2014; Tonwe, & Aihie, 2017; Salihu & Yakubu, 2021) while Rosenzweig, (2017) argued that

violence tends to reduce participation and thereby helps perpetrators win elections by distorting popular choice. Tonwe, & Aihie, (2017) submits that the persistent and endemic nature of electoral violence in Nigeria overtime has remained a clog in the wheels of democratic progress and invariably portends danger for democratic consolidation.

Examining the causes and manifestations of electoral violence in Nigeria reveals a complex interplay of factors. Studies, such as that of Collier and Vicente (2008), highlight the role of violence as a strategy, particularly in the 2007 Nigerian general elections. The findings of this study suggested that voter intimidation is an effective tool in reducing voter turnout, emphasizing the strategic use of violence in the electoral process. While the study of Salihu & Yakubu (2021) sheds light on the influence of political parties on electoral violence. The study argues that the tactics employed by political parties, including violence as an electoral strategy, have contributed to a decline in voter turnout over multiple electoral cycles.

Furthermore, the data from Afrobarometer (2019) and other post-election reports, shows that electoral violence has been a deterrent to voter turnout in Nigeria. These findings reveal a significant drop in voter turnout over the years, with violence being identified as a key factor. The fear of intimidation, coercion, or physical harm has discouraged citizens from actively participating in the electoral process.

To mitigate the impact of electoral violence on voter turnout in Nigeria, it is important that strengthening state institutions, especially the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and civil security agencies is crucial for ensuring free and fair elections, while the use of state power by incumbents should be drastically reduced. Social reorientation programs aimed at transforming the value orientations of political elites and the general populace can contribute to a healthier democratic process.

Political Participation and Democratic Consolidation

Democracy entrusts authority to the governed individuals, and those in positions of leadership, acting as representatives of the governed, are under obligation to account for their stewardship. Consequently, both the Athenian model of direct democracy and Lincoln's vision of representative democracy emphasize political participation, recognizing that the authority of governance ultimately rests with the person which is often demonstrated in citizens voting during an election. (Gbensuglo et al., 2007).

The definition of political participation, a crucial concept in social sciences, lacks a universally accepted interpretation. The term "participation" within the context of democracy is often considered vague, complex, and somewhat ambiguous (Bruce, 2004). This diversity in interpretation has led scholars to approach the concept from various perspectives. Anifowose (2004) defines political participation as voluntary activities such as holding public and party offices, candidacy, attending election campaigns, voting, and exposing oneself to political stimuli. Sanghera (2005) provides a definition that sees political participation as the active engagement of individuals and groups in governmental processes affecting their lives. This involvement encompasses participation in decision-making and acts of opposition. Lewu (2005) defines political participation as the various ways in which people attempt to exert influence over the political process.

Barrett & Brunton-Smith (2014) delineate political participation into conventional and non-conventional forms. Conventional participation involves electoral processes, such as voting and election campaigning, while non-conventional participation occurs outside electoral processes, encompassing activities like signing petitions and participating in political demonstrations. Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord (2011) categorize political participation into conventional and unconventional types, with conventional participation involving responsible citizenship through regular participation in elections. Unconventional participation includes legal activities that may sometimes be perceived as inappropriate, such as signing petitions, organizing and supporting boycotts, and staging demonstrations or protests in public places.

The democratic ideal revolves around the concept of governance by the people. However, there exists a debate on the extent and nature of citizens' involvement required for a democratic government. Advocates of direct democracy assert that citizens must actively participate in government affairs, making decisions themselves; otherwise, the essence of democracy is compromised. On the other hand, many political observers argue that indirect governance through elected representatives is a viable alternative. They emphasize that selecting leaders through formal procedures like elections, involving the act of voting, is the most practical approach to achieving democracy.

Political participation is an integral component of any political system, whether it is modern, traditional, totalitarian or democratic. Within a democracy, political participation provides citizens with an avenue to communicate information to government officials regarding their concerns and preferences, exerting pressure on them to respond. Traditional studies on political participation often centered on voting; however, voting is just one among many overt political acts. Other forms of political engagements include contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations, engaging with government officials, attending protests, rallies, marches, or demonstrations, collaborating informally with others to address community issues, actively participating in voluntary associations, and contributing financially to political causes (Verba et al., 1995:42), as cited in Bofo-Arthur(2006). Jan Teorell et al. asserted that political participation empowers citizens to voice their grievances through various means, such as writing letters to representatives, campaigning for a political party, signing petitions, and participating in protest marches. This multifaceted perspective recognizes that political engagement extends beyond the act of voting and encompasses a range of activities through which citizens actively contribute to and influence the political landscape.

The overall degree of involvement in a society reflects the extent to which the entire populace is dedicated to political engagement. Within this framework, the thesis defines political participation as a sequence of actions that substantially impact public policy or government initiatives. This encompasses engagement in political discussions, involvement in electoral processes, and participation in community-based initiatives. The conceptualization recognizes that political participation extends beyond singular activities, incorporating a spectrum of actions through which individuals collectively shape the direction of public policies and governmental actions.

Democratic consolidation is very crucial to any democratic state especially in countries with history of authoritarian regimes. Democratic consolidation, as described by Oni (2014), represents a discernible stage in the shift from authoritarian governance to civil rule. It encompasses the establishment of democratic systems crucial for the formation of a robust, institutional, and enduring democracy. Oni emphasizes that the realization of democratic consolidation involves not only adopting democracy as a framework for societal and governmental organization but also establishing associated institutions, fostering a culture, and upholding ethical standards. Osaghae argues that democratic consolidation goes beyond

defeating supposedly undemocratic forces and rulers, such as KamuzuBandu of Malawi or Robert Mogabe of Zimbabwe, or merely instituting democratic institutions and paraphernalia (Osaghae, 1998).

Omotola (2002), also argued that democratic consolidation signifies a state of democratic maturity wherein it becomes impervious to threats or disruptions from reactionary forces, be it internal or external. The sustenance of democracy is intricately linked to its ability to improve the material conditions of the people, encompassing effective and affordable education, shelter, life and property security, employment opportunities, food, portable water, and access to political healthcare. Democratic consolidation also involves legitimizing political institutions, and from this standpoint, Diamond defines it as "the process of achieving broad and deep legitimization, wherein significant political actors at both elite and mass levels believe that the democratic system is better for society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine" (Diamond, 1999: 62). Extending the argument of legitimization, Stepan emphasizes that democratic consolidation must involve a shared normative and behavioral commitment to a country's constitutional system (Luiz and Stepan, 1996: 33).

This argument holds particular relevance for the study's purpose. For democracy to take root and flourish in the Nigerian polity, there is an urgent need to adopt and practice requisite democratic norms and values that will encourage citizens to actively take part in elections therefore enabling leaders to enjoy the legitimacy of a larger percentage of voters. The widespread adherence to undemocratic traditions and norms, such as electoral violence, electoral malpractices, indifferent attitude towards voting and the indoctrination of Nigerian youths into this decadent political behavior, poses a significant threat to the country's struggling democracy.

While the decline in public participation in politics, particularly among the youth, has raised concerns about the state of democracy in Nigeria, Tambe, &Monyake, (2023) in their study emphasized the importance of understanding the push and pull factors influencing Nigerians' participation in politics. The study also highlights the negative impact of political clientelism, where the elites manipulate public policies for personal gain, leading to widespread government distrust and voter apathy thereby leading to low participation. The study argued that voter abstention has become a major cause for concern in Nigeria and could have a

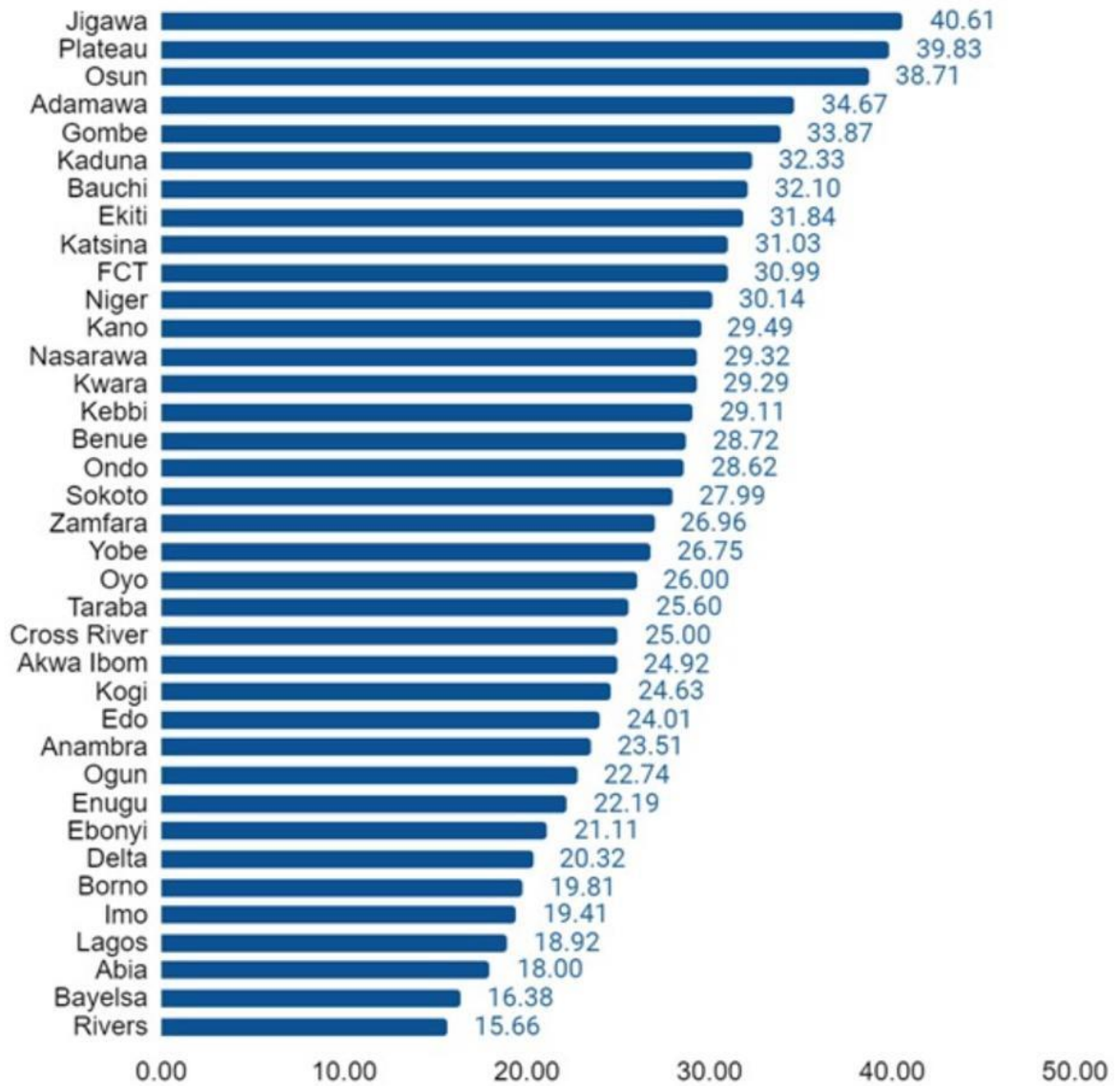
negative impact on the consolidation of Nigerian democracy. The malpractices in the electoral process and systems were identified as disenfranchising many citizens, fostering bad governance, and breeding feelings of distrust and dissent in the citizenry, thereby spurring their indifference towards participation in voting and politics.

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria present an opportunity for the country to set a good example for the West Africa sub- region given the spat of military take-over witness recently. However, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria have been marred by allegations of vote rigging, incompetence of election management, and logistical failures. The presidential and National Assembly elections, held on February 25, 2023, have been compared to the disastrous 2007 general elections, with reports of poor organization, logistical and operational failures, lack of transparency, voting disruptions, and violence. The election cycle included elections for governorships and members of parliament at the federal and state levels, with 93.4 million eligible voters. The elections were a defining moment for Nigeria, with concerns about insecurity, ethnic militia groups, and the impact of personalities over parties on the electoral process. The voter turnout was 26.71 %.(INEC, 2023, Hassan, 2023; Adetayo., Chughtai&Egbejule, 2023).

Figure 1 below represented the voters turn out of each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

Percentage of Voter Turnout by States in the 2023 General Election

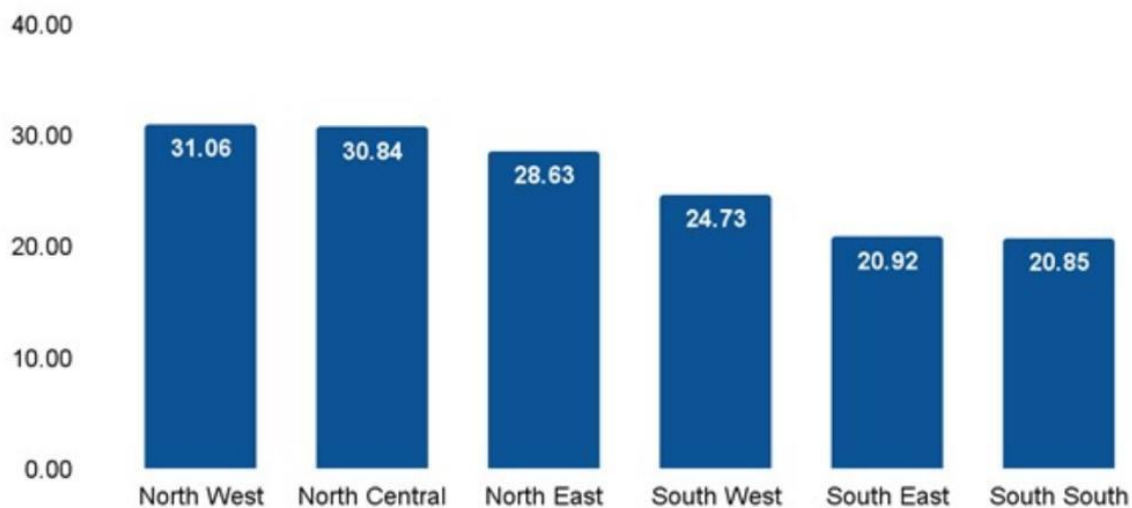


Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2023.

As Nigeria looks to consolidate her democratic governance, this worrisome trend has emerged, casting a shadow over the foundational principles of representative democracy. The 2023 general elections, a pivotal moment in the nation's political history, witnessed a stark reality: out of a staggering 93.47 million registered voters, a mere 24.9 million individuals exercised their right to vote, representing 26.72 percent voter turnout, the lowest since the nation's return to democracy in 1999. This unsettling figure reflects an 8.03 percent decline from the 2019 general election's turnout of 34.74 percent, signaling a worrisome trajectory of diminishing citizen engagement in the democratic process (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023).

Digging deeper into the breakdown of the figures released by INEC, each of the three zones in southern Nigeria recorded less than 25 percent voter turnout in the 2023 general election. It is worth pointing out that the South-South region, which had the highest voter turnout in southern Nigeria in 2019, recorded the worst turnout in the 2023 election. (*HycentAjah, 2023*)

Percentage of voter turnout in the 2023 Presidential election by Geo-political zone



Source:Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2023.

Only Jigawa managed to surpass a 40 percent voter turnout, a stark departure from the 2019 and 2015 elections where several states boasted over 50 percent participation. While only about 10 states recorded more than 30% voter turnout, the North-West and North-Central regions emerged as the frontrunners, achieving up to 30 percent voter turnout, while the North-East trailed with 28.63 percent. Lagos and Abia, on the other hand, found themselves among the states with the lowest turnout, perpetuating a concerning trend observed in previous elections (INEC, 2023).

Compounding these challenges is the failure to meet the 50 percent target set by INEC for the 2023 elections. The failure of the electoral commission in meeting her set goals emphasizes the urgency of comprehending the factors contributing to this marked apathy, as government distrust and voters' apathy intertwine to undermine the fundamental tenets of a vibrant democracy. This sobering revelation not only paints a picture of dwindling civic participation but also underscores the pressing concerns of government distrust and voters' apathy, phenomena that have become entrenched in Nigeria's recent electoral history.

Voter apathy in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors to include the voting process, distrust in the electoral system, inadequate voter education, electoral fraud and rigging, electoral violence, bad governance and uninspiring politicians among others encourages voter apathy (Muhammad, Nazariah, & Isah, 2018; Christopher, Udefuna, 2023). Voter apathy is a significant challenge in Nigerian democracy, deeply intertwined with citizens' experiences and perceptions of the political system. Low voter turnout can be attributed to various factors, and understanding these dynamics is crucial.

Franklin (2004) contends that apathy can be a consequence of political disillusionment, where citizens perceive their votes as inconsequential due to systemic inefficiencies or corruption. Furthermore, socio-economic factors, such as unemployment, bad economy and rising cost of living add fuel to distrust in government leading to voters apathy. The National Bureau of Statistics (2011) underscores the ominous surge in unemployment rates, particularly among the youths, who constitute a significant portion of the electorate, with the current unemployment rate standing at 37% (NBS, 2023).

Unemployment, especially among the youth demographic, not only reflects socio-economic disparities but also amplifies political apathy. As elucidated by Akani (2012), the potential

danger of high youth unemployment lies not just in economic terms but in its capacity to shape political landscapes. Unengaged and marginalized, the youth become susceptible to manipulation by political actors seeking to exploit their frustration through the deployment of thuggery during elections.

Economic disenfranchisement, coupled with high levels of poverty and unemployment, is another significant factor contributing to voter apathy. Olowu (2013) argues that when citizens feel that the government is not addressing their economic needs or creating opportunities for prosperity, they may disengage from the political process. The perceived disconnection between government policies and the economic well-being of the people can lead to indifference.

Owolabi (2018) further highlights the impact of these dire economic conditions on voter turnout, indicating a correlation between poverty and apathy, while Blais (2000) suggests that socioeconomic disparities can contribute to variations in political engagement. This disenfranchisement, coupled with the ominous shadow of political thuggery has created an environment where citizens, disillusioned and disenchanted, withdraw from active electoral participation.

The study of Oyoru, (2023) gave a broader perspective, noting that the main causes of low voter turnout in Africa and Nigeria, in the previous elections, include the failure of elected officials to keep their campaign promises, poor civic education, high incidence of corruption, and lack of trust in the integrity of the election process (Oyoru, 2023). Another reasons for voter apathy is the perception that elections are often rigged. Dode&Darlong (2016) argued that concerns about election integrity, including inaccurate voter registers and manipulation of results, lead to low voter confidence. Many Nigerians believe that their votes may not genuinely reflect the will of the people.

Ethno-religious divisions often discourage voter participation. Mohammed (2015) points out that ethno-religious conflict can create a climate of violence, leading citizens to fear for their safety during elections. This fear can deter them from participating, believing that their preferred candidates are unlikely to win, or that electoral violence may erupt.

As Nigeria strive to consolidate her democratic gains, it is imperative to understand government distrust and voters' apathy which has become a reoccurring theme in our electoral

system. The comparative analysis of Ekiti and Gombe states is not just a geographical juxtaposition but a strategic lens to unravel the dynamics of these challenges. The 2023 elections, framed against this backdrop, witnessed a palpable erosion of trust in government institutions and a notable decline in voter participation. Ekiti, known for its political vibrancy, situated in the southwestern region, and Gombe, with its unique socio-political architecture situated in the northeastern region, present diverse case studies for understanding the dynamics of government distrust and voters' apathy.

The 2023 general election is significant for Nigeria's democratic institutions, identities, and security, with a focus on the impact of intraparty squabbles, the emergence of a credible third force, and the importance of delivering good governance to the citizens. The election also highlighted the role of ethnic militia groups and the potential impact of insecurity on voter apathy. The election saw the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, Bola Tinubu, emerge as the winner with 36.61% of the vote. (Hassan, 2023, February 23; Wikipedia, 2023)

In addition to the challenges, the election period also witnessed attacks on state offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and concerns about security, but INEC did not consider postponing the election. The election was held amidst a long-running pattern of violence, with experts noting a new wave of violence characterized by precision and sophistication. (Adetayo.,Chughtai&Egbejule, 2023).The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria have been a subject of intense scrutiny due to the various challenges and complexities surrounding the electoral process. The low voter turnout, allegations of malpractices, and the impact of insecurity and ethnic dynamics have made these elections a significant moment in Nigeria's democratic journey.

The failure of the ruling elite to build confidence of the generality of the people in the country has continued to create the feelings of indifference in political participation in Nigeria, especially the continued attitude of registered voters boycotting elections over the years. This was reflected in the recent 2023 general elections cycle where carefree attitude by the citizens towards voting ensured that the country recorded her lowest voter turnout in the history of the country

The 2023 General Elections in Ekiti and Gombe States

Ekiti State is located in the southwestern region of Nigeria, bordered by Kwara, Kogi, Ondo, and Osun states, and covers an area of approximately 6,353 square kilometers (Adebayo, 2004). The state is predominantly rural, with agriculture being the backbone of its economy. Ekiti is characterized by a hilly terrain, which has shaped its agricultural practices, with crops such as cassava, yams, maize, and cocoa playing a significant role (Babatola, 2018). Ekiti also boasts of a rich cultural heritage, with a substantial portion of the population practicing traditional Yoruba customs, alongside Christianity and Islam (Adebayo, 2004). Although the state has a high literacy populace and a competitive political system, challenges like unemployment, poverty and voter apathy still persists. Despite educational progress, political participation is often shaped by socio-economic factors, particularly in rural areas where there is limited access to modern political education (Adebayo, 2004; Moliki & Dauda, 2014). Furthermore, political dynamics in the state has been shaped by both historical and contemporary challenges, including political instability and issues related to electoral participation and governance (Moliki & Dauda, 2014).

Ekiti State is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group, with a population of approximately 2.8 million people (National Population Commission, 2021). The state is known for its high literacy rate, with a strong emphasis on education and civil service employment. The majority of Ekiti's citizens are engaged in agriculture and education (Babatola, 2018). The strong educational foundation in Ekiti is integral to understanding the state's political settings, particularly how education and literacy influence voter behavior and political participation (Moliki & Dauda, 2014).

In Ekiti State, agriculture remains a dominant economic activity, with key crops such as cassava, maize, yams, and cocoa providing the main source of livelihood for many residents (Babatola, 2018). Despite the state's educational progress, challenges such as high unemployment rates and rural poverty persist, affecting voter behavior and political participation (Adebayo, 2004). Moreover, political engagement is often shaped by the socio-economic conditions in rural areas, where there may be limited access to modern political education and fewer opportunities for civic engagement (Moliki & Dauda, 2014). These

socio-economic challenges play a significant role in shaping the political behavior of Ekiti residents, particularly in relation to voter apathy and government trust (Omilusi, 2015).

The political environment in Ekiti State is marked by competitive elections, particularly in the gubernatorial elections, where political ties and allegiances often shape electoral outcomes (Olatunde & Olayanju, 2019). Political participation in Ekiti is influenced by relatively educated electorates, but challenges such as voter apathy and rural disengagement remain significant (Moliki & Dauda, 2014). Additionally, electoral processes in Ekiti are often shaped by state-level issues, such as infrastructure development and agricultural policies, which directly impact political behavior and government accountability (Babatola, 2018).

Ekiti State, has been known for its active and competitive political landscape. It has witnessed alternating political powers between different parties, which adds to the complexity of electoral dynamics. This state's unique characteristics makes it a relevant case study for examining voter apathy. (Fajana, 2018). Gombe State, on the other hand is situated in the northeastern part of Nigeria, has its unique sociopolitical dynamics, marked by ethno-religious diversity and developmental challenges. It provides an interesting context for exploring government distrust, particularly in regions where instability and insecurity are prominent. It is against this worrisome backdrop this study investigates distrust in government intuitions, and how it affects voter apathy in Ekiti state, one of the state in the country with a high literacy rate.

The 2023 Nigerian General election was held against a backdrop of heightened political awareness, economic concerns, insecurity, and a growing demand for improved governance. While national dynamics shaped the overall contest, each state exhibited distinct electoral behaviours informed by local political history, party structures, voter mobilization strategies, and socioeconomic realities. Ekiti and Gombe though different in geography and culture provide revealing insights into how regional contexts influenced voter engagement and party performance.

Ekiti State, has historically oscillated between major political parties, particularly the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). As a relatively homogeneous Yoruba-speaking state with a high literacy rate and strong civil service

presence, political mobilisation in Ekiti often relies on elite networks, party loyalty, and perceptions of national leadership competence.



Source: INEC, 2023

The APC maintained a significant stronghold in the state. This is reflected in the overwhelming support for its presidential candidate across all local government areas. Many LGAs recorded over 60% of votes for the APC, with areas like Ise/Orun (76.84%), Ekiti West (73.47%), Gbonyin (72.09%), and Moba (66.06%) showing particularly high support.(INEC, 2023)

This pattern aligns with Ekiti’s tendency to follow regional political alliances within the South-West, especially under the influence of established political leaders.

Although the APC dominated, the turnout across the state remained modest. The average turnout in Ekiti was 31.84%, with LGAs such as Ado-Ekiti posting 24.49% and Ikere showing 28.97%. Only Ilejemeje (40.30%) surpassed the 40% mark.

Despite the overwhelming victory recorded by the APC across all local government areas, voter turnout in Ekiti State remained relatively low, averaging 31.84%, with many LGAs

falling between 25% and 35%. Several interrelated political, socio-economic, and psychological factors contributed to this outcome.(INEC,2023)

The period leading up to the 2023 election was marked by significant economic hardship nationally rising inflation, unemployment, fuel scarcity, and currency redesign challenges. For many prospective voters in Ekiti, daily survival took precedence over political participation. The economic hardship created a sense of disconnection from government policies, reducing enthusiasm for electoral engagement.

Many young people, civil servants, and informal workers expressed disappointment with successive governments, believing that electoral outcomes rarely translate into tangible improvements. This widespread sense of economic frustration contributed heavily to voter apathy, particularly among urban populations where economic indicators are more easily perceived.

Ekiti State has historically aligned with broader South-West voting patterns, especially when the region collectively supports a dominant candidate or party. In 2023, many voters perceived that the APC was already strongly positioned to win the state. Opposition parties, especially the PDP and LP, had weaker mobilisation structures in comparison. Voting would not significantly alter the expected outcome.

This created a psychological effect where potential voters felt that their participation would not meaningfully impact the final result. Political scientists refer to this as rational disengagement a scenario where individuals opt not to vote because the perceived cost of voting outweighs the expected benefit.

Although Ekiti is relatively peaceful compared to other geopolitical zones, the national security atmosphere influenced voter confidence. The 2023 election was conducted amid Reports of violence, voter suppression, and disruption in other states. Anxiety about the safety of polling units, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. Transportation difficulties caused by fuel scarcity and the currency redesign, leaving many voters unable to afford movement to polling centres.

Even when Ekiti did not directly experience widespread violence, the anticipation of possible unrest discouraged potential voters from leaving their homes. In addition, logistics delays by electoral officials in some wards reduced the willingness of voters particularly older persons to wait long periods under unpredictable conditions.

Nationally, the 2023 election witnessed an unprecedented surge in youth engagement, largely driven by the Labour Party (LP) and the popularity of its candidate. However, this movement was not as strong in Ekiti State for several reasons Ekiti's youth political network is less urbanized compared to Lagos, Abuja, or the South-East, where the LP movement was strongest. Despite the emergence of the Labour Party (LP) as a youth-driven movement nationally, LP's candidate recorded modest performance in Ekiti, peaking at 4–5% in some LGAs.

While traditional party structures in Ekiti remain influential, limiting the penetration of newer political movements. Many young people in Ekiti lacked the organisational infrastructure or sponsorship to drive sustained mobilisation. Social media driven political activism remained lower than in metropolitan states. As a result, the kind of energetic, youth-led “insurgent” mobilisation seen elsewhere did not occur at a scale that could significantly boost voter turnout.

In contrast, Gombe State is situated in the northeastern part of Nigeria, bordered by Yobe, Bauchi, Taraba, and Adamawa States, covering an area of approximately 20,265 square kilometers (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's terrain is a mix of savannah and semi-arid land, with agriculture, particularly crop and livestock farming as the primary economic activity. The state serves as a key political and economic center for the northeastern region of Nigeria (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's political environment is influenced by a blend of traditional governance structures, religious dynamics and regional political affiliations which play a crucial role in shaping political participation and governance (Sule, 2019).

Gombe State, with a population of about 3.2 million people (National Population Commission, 2021), is predominantly inhabited by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. Islam is the dominant religion, and Gombe has a relatively younger population, with a significant proportion living in rural areas (Tijani, 2012). The socio-political dynamics in Gombe are

deeply rooted in religious, ethnic, and traditional practices, which impact political participation patterns and electoral outcomes (Olayinka et al., 2024). The region's economic activity is largely centered on agriculture, and a significant proportion of the population depends on farming and local trade for their livelihood (Tijani, 2012).

In Gombe State, the economy is largely dependent on agriculture, particularly crop and livestock farming, although the region faces significant challenges such as vulnerability to climate change, drought, and limited access to modern agricultural techniques (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's poverty levels are relatively high, especially in rural areas, where access to essential services such as healthcare, education and infrastructure remains limited (Sule, 2019). These socio-economic difficulties contribute to a lack of political efficacy among Gombe residents, influencing their participation in the electoral process and their trust in government institutions (Bello & Sule, 2024).

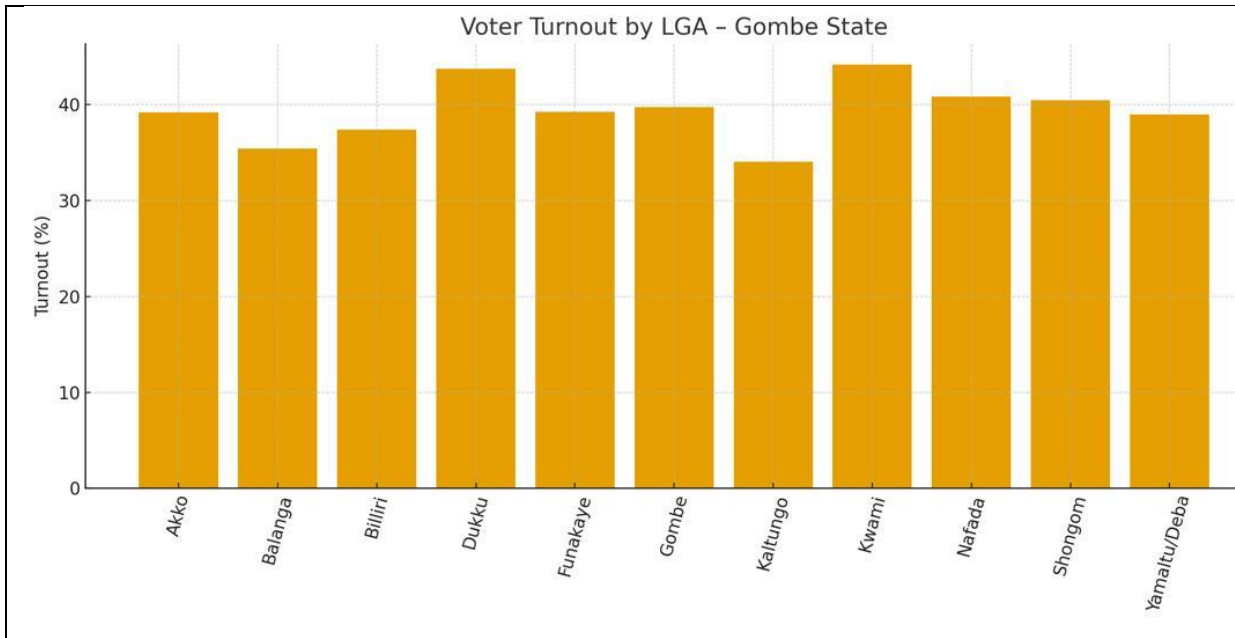
In Gombe State, the political dynamics is shaped both locally and politically. The state has experienced political mobilization driven by ethnic and religious factors, with elections frequently centered on issues such as security, infrastructure, and economic development (Tijani, 2012). Despite efforts to improve democratic governance, Gombe faces challenges related to political violence, voter disenchantment and a lack of trust in electoral processes (Sule, 2019). These challenges impact voter turnout and participation, especially in rural areas where civic education and political literacy may be limited (Bello & Sule, 2024).

Furthermore, Gombe faces challenges such as high poverty levels, limited access to services and vulnerability to climate change. Political participation here is influenced by ethnic, religious, and traditional dynamics, and the state struggles with voter disenchantment and political violence (Tijani, 2012; Sule, 2019).

and Gombe state, a similar smaller state in the North. These states represent different regions of the country with distinct sociopolitical dynamics, making them suitable cases for comparison

The 2023 presidential election in Gombe State reflected a markedly competitive political environment, distinguishing it from the more predictable outcomes observed in states such as Ekiti. As part of the North-East geopolitical zone with a history of alternating support

between major political parties Gombe has developed a reputation for political pluralism and vibrant inter-party competition. This dynamic was clearly evident in the diverse voting patterns recorded across the various local government areas.



Source: INEC, 2023

Unlike Ekiti, where the APC dominated overwhelmingly across all LGAs, Gombe presented a mixed electoral map. Several LGAs demonstrated strong support for the PDP, while others leaned heavily toward the APC. For instance, Billiri LGA delivered a decisive victory for the PDP with 54.15%, and Kaltungo LGA followed a similar trend with the party leading at 48.29%. (INEC, 2023).

These victories underscored the sustained influence of the PDP in certain southern and central parts of the state, where ethnic, religious, and community leadership structures continue to shape local political preferences. Conversely, the APC maintained significant control in other segments of the state, securing commanding victories in LGAs such as Dukku with 68.29%, Funakaye with 62.34%, and Kwami with 64.08%. (INEC, 2023).

These strong APC showings reflect areas where the party's organisational strength, incumbency advantage, and long-standing political networks are deeply entrenched. The

contrasting voting outcomes across the LGAs demonstrate that neither party holds a uniform statewide dominance, thereby reinforcing Gombe's identity as a politically competitive terrain.

This diversity in electoral behaviour highlights several underlying factors. First, grassroots mobilisation remains a central determinant of electoral success in Gombe. Both the APC and PDP have strong local party structures capable of effectively mobilising voters, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities. Second, the state's ethnic and socio-religious pluralism contributes to varied political alignments, as different groups gravitate toward parties they perceive to best represent their interests. Third, the competitive atmosphere of the election suggests that many voters in Gombe approach elections with an issue- and performance-based mindset, evaluating candidates not only on party identity but also on perceived competence, national influence, and responsiveness to local needs. (kehinde Adeleke, Garafini, & Eikojonwa, 2025; Alahira, & Harisu, 2025).

Thus, the competitive nature of the 2023 election in Gombe illustrates a state where political pluralism thrives, electoral preferences are diverse, and both major parties maintain significant grassroots influence. This contrasts sharply with states with more predictable voting blocs, making Gombe a critical case for understanding electoral behaviour in Northern Nigeria.

2.2 Empirical Review

Distrust in Government institutions and Voters' Apathy in Nigeria

The issue of voter apathy and distrust in government institution have been a constant theme in the Nigerian democratic journey. Scholars over the years have carried out several studies on distrust of government, the political, social, and economic factors that further contributes to low voters turn out and the general participation in the electoral process in the country. Voter apathy manifests in the disengagement of citizens from the electoral process, resulting in low voter turnout, while distrust of government manifest in the skepticism or mistrust citizens havetowards the political system and its institutions (Ojo, 2022). These two phenomena are intrinsically linked, with a lack of trust in government institutions often

leading to political disillusionment, which, in turn, manifests in apathy towards elections and voting.

Several studies have indicated that Nigeria's political history marked by military rule, corruption, electoral fraud and violence has significantly influenced the attitudes of the electorates towards political participation (Aluko, 2020; Iroghama, 2012). According to Aluko (2020), the absence of trustworthy institutions and the widespread perception of electoral manipulation have fueled a deep-seated mistrust among Nigerians towards their political leaders and the electoral process. The legacy of electoral malpractices during Nigeria's military era, followed by the post-1999 democratic transition, has made it difficult for citizens to believe that their votes matter in effecting change (Akinola, 2022).

The experience of political violence in Nigeria, particularly in the 2015 and 2019 general elections, has undeniably heightened the crisis of trust and electoral participation, laying a fertile ground for voter apathy. In these elections and several other elections in the country, like the South-East and North-East witnessed widespread electoral violence, including intimidation, vote-buying, and ballot-box snatching, which left many citizens feeling unsafe and uncertain about the integrity of the voting process (Alahira & Harisu, 2025). The presence of armed thugs at polling units, the destruction of election materials, and the manipulation of results all pointed to a larger structural problem within Nigeria's electoral framework, a problem that has been amplified by political parties' attempts to seize power at all costs.

As Bello & Sule (2024) rightly observed, these malpractices, combined with a lack of political accountability and the involvement of state actors in undermining the credibility of the electoral process, have created an environment of deep distrust in the Nigerian government and its institutions. When citizens see their votes disregarded, or when electoral violence is seen as a means of influencing outcomes, they develop the belief that their participation is both unsafe and meaningless. This discourages voter engagement and perpetuates voter apathy.

This is crucially important while looking at the level of voter apathy in the 2023 elections in Ekiti and Gombe states, where similar patterns of electoral violence, socio economic factors and distrust shaped voter behavior. The 2023 elections were marked by heightened security concerns, particularly in states with volatile political environments. The South-East and

North-East witnessed political violence and ethno-religious conflicts, further intensifying citizens' doubts about the electoral system and the government's ability to ensure a free and fair process. This makes sense, considering that violence not only intimidates voters on election day but also prevents the free expression of their will, thus deepening their mistrust in the entire political system. (Ter Abagen & Yusuf, 2023)

Thus, distrust in government institutions and voter apathy, is not just an isolated problem but a symptom of deeper governance crisis in Nigeria. The persistent failure of the Nigerian government to address election violence, punish perpetrators, guarantee the safety of voters, provide public goods and been responsive to the plight of the common man and the open opulence lifestyle of elected and political appointees directly contributes to the erosion of citizens' trust in the Nigerian project. Trust is the bedrock of any functional democracy, and as Rosanvallon & Goldhammer (2008) argued, the crisis of trust in government leads to a counter-democracy, where the electoral process becomes less a means of political engagement and more an exercise in futility. This frustration over ineffective governance directly leads to voter apathy, where the fear of violence and mistrust of the political system cause voters to disengage. This becomes not just a simplistic view of voter apathy as a result of ignorance or political indifference, instead, it becomes a logical response by prospective voters to a system where trust is eroded by violence, corruption, and government failure. (Omotola, 2021)

Socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services have long been recognized as critical drivers of voter apathy in Nigeria. The argument is that citizens who are grappling with economic hardship often perceive political participation including voting as irrelevant, particularly when compared to the immediate challenges of life they face on a daily basis. As Nwangbo et al. (2024) asserted, economic deprivation, especially when combined with political exclusion, reinforces the idea that voting will not bring about any real change in the socio-political structure. This view is widely shared by those who feel that the political class is disconnected from the lived realities of ordinary Nigerians.

As Nigeria's poverty rates continue to soar, and youth unemployment remains a persistent issue, many citizens especially those from marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities feel disenfranchised. Their struggles with basic survival needs, including food

security, education, and healthcare, make political participation appear trivial. This is particularly true in rural areas, where access to political education and voter mobilization efforts is limited. The disillusionment that arises from these socio-economic hardships has led to a cultural disengagement from the electoral process, as many citizens believe that no matter how they vote, their circumstances will remain unchanged (Hycent, 2022; Mumuni, 2024). This economic disenfranchisement links directly to voter apathy in the 2023 elections, where youths, particularly in rural areas, were significantly disengaged from the voting process. For many of these young individuals, economic instability marked by unemployment, high cost of living and the lack of access to quality education drowned out any belief that their participation in the elections would have any bearing on their socio-economic advancement.

As Hycent (2022) pointed out, the youth population in Nigeria, already facing a lack of opportunities, found it increasingly difficult to trust the political class, who were often seen as ineffective in addressing their needs. This creates a vicious cycle of disillusionment and disengagement. Economic hardship breeds political distrust, which in turn perpetuates a lack of participation in the electoral process. The resultant voter apathy is not just a symptom of political dissatisfaction but also an outcome of structural inequality that leaves citizens, especially the youth in rural areas, feeling that voting is ineffectual in improving their economic conditions.

By addressing these socio-economic issues, Nigeria could potentially reverse some of the apathy and rebuild trust in its electoral system. Studies by Hycent (2022), Uzochukwu, (2023), Nwangbo et al. (2024), and Ayobolu, (2024) demonstrates that socio-economic inclusion, along with effective political engagement strategies, could empower citizens to view elections as an avenue for changing their socio-political environment. Without economic reform and inclusive governance, however, the cycle of apathy and disengagement is likely to continue, as citizens see no reason to invest in a political process that has consistently failed to improve their daily lives.

Political educational has long been considered a key determinant of political engagement and trust in government. Several studies have explored the relationship between education and political behavior, with evidence suggesting that individuals with higher levels of education are generally more politically aware and engaged. (Grogan, 2019; Tanny, & Al-Hossienie,

2019: Raj, Kushimo, & McIntyre, 2025) This connection is crucial for understanding voter apathy and distrust of the electoral system in Nigeria. Aluko (2020) argues that in Nigeria, there is a notable correlation between distrust of the electoral system and educational attainment, with more educated individuals tending to be more critical of the government's electoral practices, particularly in relation to transparency and fairness. This relationship is especially evident in urban areas, where the population tends to be more educated and better exposed to information regarding electoral processes. Educational attainment, therefore, acts as a marker for political engagement, as educated individuals are more inclined to scrutinize government actions and demand greater accountability.

Tanny and Al-Hossienie (2019) further emphasize that trust in government is influenced by several factors, including education. They argue that individuals with higher education possess greater cognitive resources to process and critically assess political information and government policies. While this critical engagement may enhance their political awareness, it can also lead to higher expectations, which, if unmet, can result in dissatisfaction and increased distrust in government institutions. Grogan (2019) refers to this phenomenon as a paradox: higher educational attainment fosters greater trust in government in some cases, but it can simultaneously heighten dissatisfaction when government failures do not align with the values and knowledge instilled through education. This paradox is particularly relevant in both state under consideration for this study ; Ekiti and Gombe, where citizens with higher education are often more aware of the systemic issues within the government, and their dissatisfaction is intensified by the growing disillusionment in the face of persistent corruption and poor governance.

In contrast, Nwangbo et al. (2024) highlight that despite the increased distrust among politically educated voters, they are also more likely to be proactive in seeking reforms. Educated citizens argue, tend to drive political activism and push for electoral reforms and better governance. These individuals often play a critical role in advocating for transparency, accountability, and democratic reforms aimed at improving the electoral system. Similarly, Raj, et al. (2025) argues that educated individuals are more likely to engage in discussions about electoral fairness, advocating for reforms that challenge the status quo. The impact of educational attainment on political participation in Nigeria is, therefore, undeniable. Higher education is linked to greater political efficacy and a willingness to demand government

accountability. In this sense, education is not only a determinant of political awareness but also a catalyst for political change.

However, this view was contested by Ojo (2022), who suggested that even educated citizens often display disengagement from electoral processes. Ojo (2022) pointed out that in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, a significant number of educated citizens exhibit a deep sense of disillusionment due to systemic corruption, electoral manipulation, and a general sense of political exclusion. Despite their higher levels of education, these citizens withdraw from the electoral process, believing that their participation will not lead to meaningful change. This suggests that educational attainment does not always equate to active political engagement. As Ojo's (2022) findings suggested, trust in government institutions plays a more pivotal role in determining whether educated individuals engage in the electoral process. If the political system is viewed as broken or unaccountable, educated citizens may feel that voting is an empty gesture and therefore opt out of the process.

Olasupo and Isike (2023) provided a counter-argument, suggesting that educational attainment alone may not significantly affect political participation in Nigeria. Their research posits that other contextual factors, such as political disenfranchisement and economic inequalities, are more powerful determinants of voter engagement. Olasupo and Isike (2023) argued that the political system's failure to address the needs and concerns of the masses, especially in the face of economic instability, results in declining political engagement, regardless of educational background. Thus economic struggles, limits access to political power, and a lack of belief in the electoral process may create barriers to political participation even in highly educated regions. In the case of Ekiti and Gombe states, these disparities in educational attainment became evident as the relationship between education and political engagement differs. Despite educational qualifications, citizens may still feel politically marginalized and disengaged due to systemic issues such as corruption and economic hardships.

Furthermore, socioeconomic status is a critical variable when analyzing distrust of government and voter apathy in Nigeria. Several studies have established that individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to participate in elections due to a perceived greater stake in political outcomes. A study by Mohammed et al. (2024) on

Nigeria's 2023 elections reveals that people with higher socioeconomic status are more inclined to vote because they view electoral outcomes as directly affecting their interests. This perception of vested interest is largely influenced by their access to resources, including information about candidates, the electoral process, and transportation to polling units. Furthermore, individuals from affluent backgrounds typically have better access to educational resources, media coverage, and civic organizations that raise awareness of the political process, thereby enhancing their political engagement (Aluko, 2020). This makes them more politically aware and encourages greater participation in elections.

In contrast, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly in rural areas, often experience disenfranchisement due to a lack of access to such resources, aggravating voter apathy. Daukere et al. (2024) highlights those economic barriers, such as inadequate transportation and financial constraints, prevent citizens from engaging in the electoral process. These individuals may struggle to meet basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and education, leaving political participation as a low priority. The physical barriers to voting, such as the inability to afford transportation to polling stations, further increases the disengagement from elections, leading to reduced voter turnout. This phenomenon is particularly observable in the Nigeria's electoral dynamics, where the affluent class is able to leverage their resources to participate in the electoral process, while the economically disadvantaged view voting as irrelevant to their daily struggles, further entrenching voter apathy (Daukere et al., 2024).

Aluko (2020) takes this argument further by asserting that when socioeconomic conditions fail to meet basic needs, citizens are less likely to participate in the political process. He argues that when individuals face poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic infrastructure, they often prioritize survival over engaging with the political system. This view is consistent with Wilford (2020), who explores the competing effects of economic hardship and income inequality on voter turnout. While economic hardship may lead to political disengagement, Wilford (2020) noted that it can also spur political participation when citizens view voting as a potential means to address systemic economic inequalities. In the present day Nigeria, where economic hardship is widespread, this interplay between poverty and political participation remains complex and plays out in various ways. While the political class may leverage on the poverty of the masses to offer financial incentives in form of vote buying, in

some cases the affluent may feel less interested in voting, as they are unwilling to go through the stress of voting as witnessed in some of the top urban states with low voters' turnout in the 2023 general elections. The aforementioned was evident during the last general election where states like Lagos posted less than 19% turnout, Rivers state posted less than 16% and Balyesa with only 15% turn out (INEC, 2023).

Tanny and Al-Hossienie (2019) argued that poverty and inequality increases the likelihood of political disengagement, as citizens often focus on survival rather than political participation. Their study emphasizes that immediate needs, such as securing basic necessities, take precedence over political engagement. For lower-income citizens, the electoral process may appear distant or unimportant compared to the pressing concerns of unemployment, healthcare, and food security. This sense of disillusionment with the electoral system further perpetuates voter apathy, particularly in regions where socioeconomic conditions are dire. The economic hardships faced by many Nigerians, especially in rural areas, create a vicious cycle of disengagement from the political system.

However, Hassan (2024) offers a different view, suggesting that economic hardship can also spur political engagement when citizens view voting as a means to bring about change. As Hassan (2024) asserted, disenfranchised citizens who experience economic inequalities may begin to view elections as a potential avenue for reform. The hope for change might stimulate political awareness, with citizens believing that voting could alleviate their economic struggles. This view emphasizes that the relationship between socioeconomic status and voter turnout is not linear and depends on how individuals perceive the potential for change. Disenfranchised citizens may be motivated by the belief that voting is an avenue for addressing their economic plight, thus potentially increasing political participation in the context of economic hardship.

Thus, socioeconomic status and economic inequality play pivotal roles in determining voter turnout and political participation in Nigeria. While higher socioeconomic status is typically associated with greater political participation, due to access to resources, lower socioeconomic status often correlates with voter apathy due to economic struggles and disenfranchisement. The complex relationship between economic hardship and political engagement suggests that socioeconomic factors must be considered alongside other elements

such as political trust and government accountability when analyzing voter behavior, highlighting the need for policy interventions that address economic disparities and actively engage citizens from all socioeconomic backgrounds in the electoral process, ensuring that every citizens' voice is heard and represented, irrespective of economic status (Oyuru, 2023).

Furthermore, the relationship between distrust of government and voter apathy in Nigeria is deeply rooted in structural flaws within the political system. Scholars such as Rosanvallon and Goldhammer (2008) have argued that political distrust naturally follows from the erosion of democratic values and governance failures. This argument is supported by the persistent challenges of electoral fraud, corruption, and lack of transparency. Adebayo et al. (2020) emphasizes that the frequent reports of vote rigging, violence, and mismanagement during elections have created an environment in which citizens no longer believe in the fairness of the electoral process, leading to low voter turnout. These issues, entrenched in the political culture, have perpetuated a cycle of distrust, undermining public confidence in the government's ability to ensure free and fair elections.

Igiebor (2022) builds on this argument by discussing how security challenges such as political violence and the activities of insurgent groups have intensified voter disengagement. The fear of violence at polling stations, especially in volatile regions, discourages citizens from participating in the electoral process. This is particularly true in areas like Benue, Borno where physical insecurity, electoral fraud, and government ineffectiveness combine to create an environment where voter turnout continues to decline. Igiebor's work highlighted low security concerns, alongside a lack of governmental will to secure elections deepen the distrust of the electoral process. This compounds voter apathy, as citizens are dissatisfied and feel that their participation is meaningless.

Akinola (2023) further links the political market orientation of Nigeria's electoral system. When citizens perceive that elections are manipulated or unfair, they disengage from the political process. Strategic manipulations such as vote-buying and electoral violence have led to political cynicism, where voters feel powerless to effect change through their votes. Akinola argues that these manipulations undermined democratic ideals, leaving citizens disillusioned and less inclined to vote in future elections. As Akinola (2023) pointed out, the

sense of futility, created by the erosion of political trust, is a major factor that leads to voter apathy.

In similar fashion, Tiwa (2024) examines the role of institutional distrust in voter disengagement, especially in relation to the police and security agencies. The complicity of security institutions in electoral violence and corruption further erodes trust in the government's ability to ensure free and fair elections. Tiwa (2024) suggested that institutional failures, especially when institutions like the police fail to maintain order during elections increases voter apathy. This failure to secure elections not only breeds distrust of government but also leads to cynicism, as citizens increasingly view the police and security agencies as part of the problem, rather than the solution.

Alemika (2004) added another layer to the discussion by addressing how corruption within government institutions fuels the perception that political systems are rigged. When corruption is perceived as widespread, citizens lose confidence in the legitimacy of electoral processes. Alemika's (2004) work suggests that perceptions of electoral manipulation make it difficult for citizens to see the electoral process as an effective tool for political expression. Many view elections as performances designed to maintain the status quo, further diminishing voter engagement. This disillusionment is entrenched in the widespread corruption and political manipulation that characterize the Nigerian political environment.

Dogan (2005) builds on this by suggesting that political distrust often leads to the discreditation of politicians, particularly in a political environment like Nigeria's, where scandals and corruption taint the reputation of elected officials. Distrust of government grows as citizens view politicians as self-serving rather than as public servants. This discrediting process contributes to voter apathy, as citizens feel alienated from a political class that is perceived to be corrupt and disconnected from the people's needs. As Dogan (2005) suggests, this result in a cyclical pattern of disengagement, where low voter turnout entrenches political mistrust, further inhibiting meaningful democratic participation.

Gumbi and Baba (2024) offered a fresh perspective by focusing on the relationship between political trust and legitimacy through the lens of the EndSARS protests that rocked the country. Public trust, they argue, is critical to the legitimacy of political institutions. When trust is eroded, particularly due to governmental failures like corruption or the suppression of

protests, voter turnout suffers. The EndSARS protests, which highlighted widespread dissatisfaction with police brutality and government handling of civil unrest, serve as a reflection of the larger legitimacy crisis that has plagued Nigeria's political system. This disconnect between the government and its citizens only serves to amplify electoral disengagement.

The effect of distrust of government on voter apathy in Nigeria is deeply embedded in the country's electoral and political dynamics. Alahira and Harisu (2025) opined that there are evidences that electoral violence and corruption played central roles in shaping an atmosphere of distrust of government, which directly influenced voter turnout. Their study of the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria states underscores the emotional toll caused by electoral violence. The pervasive fear and trauma experienced by citizens during these elections, coupled with a widespread perception of a rigged electoral system, have intensified disillusionment with the political process. This is particularly evident among the youths who, as Mohammed et al. (2024) highlights, are often vulnerable to political manipulation and violence. This group feels particularly alienated from a system they view as fundamentally unjust. The combined factors of electoral violence, government corruption, and a perceived lack of legitimacy in the electoral system have led to a growing cynicism, resulting in lower voter turnout and increased political disengagement.

A different perspective is offered by Chukwuma (2022), who suggested that while distrust in government institutions is undeniably a significant factor in voter apathy, a more powerful driver of disengagement is the belief that elections fail to produce the best candidate and meaningful change. In his analysis, Chukwuma (2022) posits that many citizens, despite holding high levels of distrust towards the government, still choose to vote. However, the motivation behind this participation is not faith in the electoral process or belief in the system's potential for reform. Instead, voting becomes more of a civic duty, a social obligation rather than a genuine political act or inducement. This implies that while voter participation is still observed, it does not stem from the desire to influence political outcomes or hold elected officials accountable. For many, voting becomes ritualistic, a civic obligation rather than an act of political efficacy, or time to cash out from politicians

This argument finds support in the work of Balogun and Nwakwo (2023), who looks into the psychological aspects of voter apathy in Nigeria. They suggest that the disillusionment with the political system, along with the perception that elections do not lead to tangible improvements, leads to apathy among the electorates. Citizens begin to view elections as symbolic rather than as genuine opportunities to influence government policies or leadership. The perception of elections as ceremonial rather than substantive means that political participation is often driven more by external forces, such as social norms, than by an intrinsic motivation to shape political outcomes. Balogun and Nwakwo (2023) argue that voter apathy in this context is a reflection of the psychological barrier created by the disconnect between electoral processes and real-world impacts.

Folu (2020) extends this analysis by pointing out that the systemic problems in Nigeria's governance, including corruption and the lack of accountability, have exacerbated the perception that voting is a futile exercise. Many Nigerians, particularly in urban areas, feel increasingly disconnected from the political process. This disconnection stems from a belief that elections primarily serve the interests of political elites, rather than addressing the needs of the general populace. As a result, voter turnout is further diminished, as citizens lose confidence that their vote can result in any meaningful political change. The alienation of urban voters is compounded by their growing belief that political participation is disenfranchised and that the political system is incapable of addressing their concerns. Thus, while distrust in government institutions is a significant contributor to voter apathy in Nigeria, the perception that elections do not lead to meaningful change complicate the issue of voter apathy. This suggests that voter participation may occur more out of a sense of obligation or social conformity than from genuine belief in the electoral system or its ability to drive political reform.

Further studies have shown that distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in Nigeria are deeply interconnected, often reinforcing one another in ways that shape electoral outcomes. Earlier studies consistently point to corruption, weak governance, and poor institutional performance as the core drivers of political distrust. For instance, Alemika (2004) found a strong relationship between citizens' perceptions of corruption and their willingness to trust electoral and state institutions. His analysis indicates that where corruption is believed

to be widespread, citizens tend to disengage politically because they see governance structures as serving elite rather than public interests. Similar patterns appear in Afrobarometer (2016), where survey data across African countries showed that corruption perceptions and dissatisfaction with service delivery significantly lower trust in institutions such as electoral commissions, police, and political parties.

Studies on elections further suggest that the credibility of electoral management bodies affects political behavior. Nigeria's elections over the past two decades offer countless practical examples of how the credibility of electoral management bodies shapes political behaviour in very immediate ways. The average voter's experience is rarely abstract; it is shaped by what they see on election day, what they hear from others, and how reliably the electoral process delivers on its own promises.

Aluko's (2020) observations about procedural failures and logistical delays mirror what many communities repeatedly encounter during elections. It is not unusual for polling units to open hours behind schedule because materials arrived late, or because the ad-hoc staff were not properly deployed. In some rural areas, voters often arrive as early as 7 a.m., only to wait until midday before accreditation begins. For many citizens who are economically vulnerable or have pressing daily responsibilities, such delays are discouraging enough to make them walk away. Over time, these experiences harden into a belief that the electoral system is unreliable, which directly fuels apathy.

Berebon's (2023) reference to BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) malfunction captures one of the most visible frustrations of the 2023 elections. In numerous polling units across Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, Kano, and even parts of Ekiti and Gombe, BVAS devices failed to accredit voters for hours. Lines grew longer, tempers rose, and voters began to suspect intentional sabotage rather than simple technical glitches. For older citizens who had been told that BVAS would finally end malpractice, the experience felt like a personal betrayal. Many eventually abandoned the queue altogether. In post-election interviews, some citizens admitted they did not bother returning for the gubernatorial elections because they felt the system could not be trusted.

INEC's inconsistent communication during the 2023 polls also had real consequences. For example, while the commission initially promised real-time uploading of results to the IReV portal, the sudden technical downtime on election day created widespread suspicion. The inability of election officials to give clear explanations only deepened public doubts. Social media amplified the confusion, and by evening, many Nigerians had already concluded that the process was compromised. That perception alone was enough to discourage participation in subsequent voting stages.

Jega's (2013) caution about persistent institutional challenges also reflects long-standing issues such as poorly trained ad-hoc staff, inadequate voter education, and weak internal systems to address complaints. In parts of northern Nigeria, for instance, miscommunication between polling officers and party agents sometimes leads to disputes that temporarily halt voting. In the South-East, fears of violence or late deployment often keep voters indoors. In the South-West, allegations of vote buying and intimidation continue to erode trust, particularly among young adults who feel their votes rarely count..

Security challenges have increasingly become one of the strongest deterrents to voter participation in Nigeria, especially in the northern region where insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes have reshaped everyday life. What Aghedo and Osumah (2012) identified more than a decade ago has only intensified: when communities live under the shadow of violence, elections begin to feel like a risky activity rather than a civic duty. Many voters step back not because they are uninterested, but because they are unsure if they will return home safely.

In states like Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, and Zamfara, the fear is not abstract. For much of the last decade, insurgent groups have repeatedly targeted public gatherings, including markets, religious centers, and political events. On election days, rumors of planned attacks often circulate widely, creating a kind of psychological barricade that keeps people indoors. In some rural communities, villagers have to travel long distances to reach their assigned polling units, and the fear of encountering armed groups on the road makes participation even more unlikely.

Igiebor's (2022) findings resonate with the reality of many northern voters who describe the atmosphere around elections as unpredictable. Banditry has displaced thousands of residents, leaving entire communities unable to vote because polling units have either been relocated or abandoned. In places where armed groups control territory or influence movement, the simple act of queuing at a polling station can feel like an act of courage. Unsurprisingly, turnout decreases in these high-risk zones, and trust in the government declines at the same pace, since citizens often blame authorities for failing to secure their communities.

Collier and Vicente's (2014) conclusion that exposure to violence reduces turnout aligns closely with what Nigerians have observed on the ground. When gunshots or clashes erupt around election periods, citizens quickly internalize the connection between voting and danger. Even if a polling unit is peaceful on the actual day of voting, the memories of violence in the weeks leading up to the election can be enough to keep people away. Some voters also become suspicious of security personnel, especially in areas where security forces have been accused of collusion with political actors. This breeds distrust not only toward politicians but toward the entire electoral environment.

There have also been incidents where armed groups explicitly warned communities not to participate in elections. In parts of Katsina, Sokoto, and Niger states, residents reported receiving leaflets or overhearing warnings that voting activities would be attacked. Faced with such threats, many simply prioritized survival over participation. Even in regions not directly under attack, the mere perception of insecurity spreads anxiety and undermines the motivation to engage in the electoral process.

Studies have shown that socioeconomic status plays a quiet but powerful role in shaping how Nigerian citizens perceive government institutions and whether they choose to participate in elections. Poverty, unemployment, lower political education, and persistent economic insecurity tend to heighten frustration with public authorities, especially when citizens feel their material conditions are not improving despite repeated electoral cycles. In this kind of environment, trust in government weakens, sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly. Several studies link socioeconomic pressures to voter apathy. Daukere et al. (2024) discovered that unemployment, low education levels, and financial strain correlate strongly

with reduced electoral participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Al-Khafaji (2023), in a comparative analysis of Middle Eastern and North African democracies, found similar patterns: lower socioeconomic status discourages turnout because individuals feel disempowered and unable to influence the political process. Dim and Asomah (2019) also observed that socioeconomic and demographic factors substantially predict political participation among women, suggesting that systemic social inequalities feed into political disengagement.

Studies by Agu, Falade, and Ibrahim (2013) make this connection quite clear. They argue that widespread unemployment and economic hardship are among the strongest predictors of voter abstention, because economically marginalized citizens often feel that elections do not translate into improved welfare. Madubuegwu et al. (2020) and Ariyo and Folorunso (2022) add that the perception of government indifference toward everyday economic struggles reinforces a sense of distance between citizens and state institutions, which naturally undermines trust.

Similarly, Ibrahim, Liman, and Mato (2015) found that poverty combined with electoral manipulation and intimidation sharply reduced participation in the 2015 elections. In communities where voters lacked financial stability or basic security, political engagement was treated more as a luxury than a civic duty. Economic vulnerability made individuals more susceptible to disillusionment, especially when public institutions seemed unresponsive to their socioeconomic needs.

On a broader African scale, the comparative turnout analysis by Pinto, Gratschew, and Sullivan (2001) showed that Nigeria's abnormally low participation rates were linked not only to political concerns but also to socioeconomic constraints that limited citizens' capacity or motivation to vote. Their findings place Nigeria among the countries where economic hardship correlates strongly with citizens' disengagement and distrust of government processes.

Thus these studies point to a consistent pattern: socioeconomic status doesn't just influence voter turnout indirectly. It actively shapes how people judge government performance, how

much confidence they place in institutions, and whether they believe voting holds any real value. In places where poverty is high and public services remain unreliable, distrust tends to deepen, and voter apathy follows closely behind.

Political parties themselves have been empirically shown to contribute to apathy. Agu et al. (2013) found that weak issue-based campaigning, patronage politics, and intra-party conflicts reduce voters' trust in parties as vehicles of representation. Aliyu et al. (2020) reached similar conclusions, arguing that parties often fail to articulate meaningful programmes that resonate with citizens' lived realities, thereby weakening participation.

Another growing area of empirical research focuses on the relationship between media, information flows, and political trust. Studies such as Klein and Robison (2020) showed that heavy social media exposure increases perceptions of institutional failure, especially when content highlights corruption, rigging, or elite misbehavior. Jimoh et al. (2025) empirically linked social media usage to lower political trust by demonstrating that online conversations amplify dissatisfaction and perceptions of corruption among Nigerian youth. Chukwuma (2022) argued that the spread of misinformation and sensational political messaging further deteriorates citizens' interest in participating in elections.

Electoral violence also appears repeatedly in empirical studies as a driver of apathy. Bamgbose (2012) examined Nigeria's 2011 general elections and found that widespread violence before and during elections discouraged turnout, especially among first-time and female voters. Alahira and Harisu (2025), comparing the 2019 and 2023 gubernatorial elections in Gombe State, reported similar findings: communities that witnessed pre-election tensions or thuggery showed significantly lower turnout and higher distrust in electoral institutions.

More recent empirical contributions explore psychological and attitudinal dimensions. Balogun and Nwakwo (2023) found that weak national identity and declining emotional attachment to the state predict political apathy among young Nigerians. Their study suggests that apathy is not merely a product of institutional failure but also a symptom of deeper sociopsychological disconnection.

Technological innovations have offered mixed empirical outcomes. Iwuoha (2018), studying biometric technology adoption, found that rural communities often lack adequate knowledge or trust in digital election tools, which inadvertently reduces confidence in the process. Amao (2022) further showed that while technology improved transparency in some areas, inefficiencies and inconsistencies in deployment weakened voters' confidence during the 2015 and 2019 elections.

Finally, broader democratic governance issues continue to shape distrust and apathy. Abdullahi and Saka (2007) demonstrated that ethno-religious tensions consistently erode democratic culture and weaken citizens' confidence in institutions. LeVan (2019) similarly asserted that poor governance outcomes, elite domination, and unaddressed security crises deepen distrust and discourage civic engagement over time.

Consequently, there is a consistent pattern as distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in Nigeria emerge from a combination of corruption perceptions, institutional failures, insecurity, socioeconomic inequalities, weak party systems, media influence, and governance deficits. These studies collectively affirm that voter apathy is not a simple behavioral choice but a symptom of deeper systemic and contextual conditions that shape how citizens interact with the state.

Distrust in government institutions, Institutional Weaknesses and Voter Apathy in Ekiti State and Gombe State

Studies on Ekiti State's elections provides a well-documented case of how institutional weaknesses, vote commodification, insecurity, and media/political communication shape distrust and reduce electoral participation. Studies of Ekiti repeatedly identify institutional failures and process breakdowns as central to declining public confidence in elections. Agiri and Morka (2022) provide an X-ray of the 2022 governorship election that foregrounds logistical problems, complaints about INEC's handling of materials and timelines, and local perceptions that administrative lapses advantaged particular actors. Udu, Nkwede, and Emmanuel (2015) earlier argued that credibility gaps in electoral operations undermine sustainable democratic development a conclusion borne out in later elections.

Electoral violence and criminality are documented contributors to distrust. Adebayo, Ikuomola, and Adeoye (2024) analyze the manifestation of violence in Oye Ekiti, showing how intimidation and clashes around polling centers turn elections into security risks for ordinary voters. Ilori (2019) similarly identifies security challenges that make citizens fear participation. When voting contexts are framed by insecurity or chaotic administration, citizens reasonably infer that institutions cannot guarantee free and fair expression of the popular will and some respond by withdrawing from the process.

Institutional complicity in vote commodification also erodes legitimacy. Amaechi and Stockemer (2022) and Olawole (2020) document the “Ekiti model” of vote buying and the broader political economy that treats votes as merchandise. When elections are visibly monetized candidates or brokers openly offer cash or goods in exchange for ballots many voters conclude that election outcomes are purchased rather than earned, which corrodes trust and dampens turnout. Adesiyani (2023) and Moliki and Dauda (2014) similarly note that the prevalence of inducements and transactional campaigning reduces citizens’ belief in the value of their autonomous vote.

Further studies highlights socioeconomic cleavages as key moderators of distrust and turnout. Communities and individuals with fewer resources lower incomes, less education, and limited access to reliable political information are more likely to experience both exclusion and discouragement.

Olawole (2020) and Amaechi and Stockemer (2022) show that vote-merchandisation tends to concentrate where voters are economically vulnerable: daily wage earners and the poor may be more likely to accept inducements because immediate material needs outweigh abstract civic goods. This creates an ironic pattern: the very socioeconomic precarity that increases susceptibility to vote buying can also increase cynicism about the integrity of elections, as voters perceive themselves as being targeted rather than empowered.

Mohammed (2023) (doctoral work) and Moliki and Dauda (2014) document the urban–rural divide in Ekiti: urban, more educated electorates are more likely to participate and to express civic engagement, whereas rural populations often poorer and less connected to verified

information sources show higher signs of withdrawal and distrust. Adebayo et al. (2024) show the same pattern at the micro level in Oye Ekiti, where poor neighborhoods experienced the twin problems of violent disruption and economic barriers (e.g., loss of daily income to queue or travel) that discouraged turnout.

Studies illuminate several behavioral adaptations that flow from distrust. For instance, transactional voting and abstention is a factor. As described by Amaechi and Stockemer (2022) and Adesiyani (2023), when voters expect money or goods will determine outcomes they sometimes switch from programmatic evaluation to transactional logic, or they abstain as a form of principled refusal or practical calculation. While Bello, Moliki, and Durotoye (2014; 2015) report that distrustful citizens skip rallies, avoid party meetings, and disengage from local political discussion, producing a “quiet” withdrawal even where formal registration figures rise.

Another strand of evidence from Ekiti shows that distrust does not always translate into total political withdrawal; in some cases, it reshapes the quality of participation rather than eliminating it. Durotoye (2014) notes that a segment of voters engage in what he terms “expressive dissent” casting protest ballots, intentionally spoiling ballot papers, or voting for minor political parties with no realistic chance of winning. These symbolic acts allow citizens to register dissatisfaction with the system while still participating at the margins. It is a way of saying, “I showed up, but I refuse to affirm the choices the system presents.” In a context where distrust runs deep, this type of participation becomes an outlet for frustration rather than a genuine attempt to influence outcomes.

Security-related concerns add another layer to this dynamic. Ilori (2019) and Adebayo et al. (2024) document the pervasive fear of violence that shapes voter behavior in parts of Ekiti. Even when people intend to vote, they often modify their routines in ways that reduce effective turnout: arriving late to avoid crowds and the early-morning tension that sometimes accompanies elections; leaving polling units before accreditation or collation is completed; or simply remaining indoors when rumours circulate about possible clashes. These small behavioral adjustments matter, because they shrink the pool of actual voters even among those who are formally registered. Election-day fear becomes a practical barrier to

participation, especially for women, the elderly, and economically vulnerable groups who may feel less capable of navigating risk.

Distrust in formal institutions also encourages citizens to shift their trust to more familiar and immediate structures. When INEC, the police, or political parties are seen as unreliable, people turn instead to local power brokers, kinship networks, and clientelistic patrons who feel more predictable. Omilusi (2015) describes how this “re-centering of trust” affects electoral choices: voters become less concerned with national manifestos and more attentive to local loyalties, community cues, and interpersonal obligations. This helps explain the persistence of bloc voting in certain Ekiti communities, where entire wards or families vote in alignment with a local leader who acts as the unofficial custodian of political direction. In such settings, distrust in the state does not eliminate voting but reorders its logic, making elections less about civic duty and more about protecting local interests or honoring social bonds.

Further evidence from Ekiti shows, in quite a consistent way, how distrust in government institutions quietly erodes people’s willingness to show up on election day. Scholars like Mohammed (2023) and Agiri and Morka (2022) point out that even though statewide turnout figures may look moderately stable, the real story hides inside local pockets: wards where INEC arrived late, or where materials were short, or where people whispered about manipulation, tended to record far fewer voters. In some places, intimidation by party thugs created a kind of psychological border voters simply stayed away because the atmosphere didn’t feel safe or meaningful. And once people begin to associate elections with stress or uncertainty, trust takes a hit.

This sense of futility shows up clearly in qualitative studies. Moliki and Dauda (2014) and Omilusi (2015) capture a recurring phrase among many residents: voting “changes nothing.” It’s not just cynicism it’s a conclusion drawn from repeated encounters with broken promises, compromised processes, and a political class perceived as distant. When someone believes that their vote cannot shift outcomes, apathy becomes a rational choice rather than a moral failing.

Younger voters, interestingly, display a slightly different pattern. Mohammed (2023) notes that Ekiti youth are politically vocal online sharing opinions, debating, even mobilizing yet their physical presence at polling units remains thin. They gravitate toward digital activism because it feels more responsive, more expressive, and frankly, less contaminated by the institutional weaknesses they see offline. This substitution effect creates an illusion of engagement, but the ballot box tells another story.

The final piece is the normalization of transactional politics. Amaechi and Stockemer's (2022) analysis of the "Ekiti model" of vote buying, along with observations by Adesiyun (2023), suggest that when elections resemble a marketplace, many citizens feel alienated. Those who dislike or refuse the transactional nature of elections withdraw entirely, and the ones who participate out of economic necessity often do so without any real sense of civic agency. Over time, this corrodes the symbolic value of the vote and deepens the belief that institutions lack integrity.

Put together, these factors weave a clear pattern: institutional distrust doesn't just sit in people's minds; it translates into quieter polling units, shrinking civic enthusiasm, and a generation that increasingly questions whether the formal electoral system deserves their time or trust.

Studies on political participation in Gombe State highlighted dynamics of institutional weaknesses, socioeconomic realities, and historical patterns of governance shape distrust and voter apathy. Several studies point to systemic institutional weaknesses as a core driver of declining trust and participation in Gombe State. Kehinde Adeleke, Garafini and Eikojonwa (2025) show that citizens often perceive political institutions as unresponsive, selective in enforcement, and heavily influenced by elite interests. Their study on political participation in Gombe reveals that many residents believe public institutions lack autonomy from political interference, a perception that undercuts faith in election administration and governance.

Alahira and Harisu (2025), in their comparative analysis of electoral violence and apathy during the 2019 and 2023 gubernatorial elections, report that recurring violence, inconsistent INEC logistics, and partisan behaviour of security actors deepened existing distrust. They

show that in LGAs such as Gombe, Akko, and Yamaltu-Deba, residents often stayed away from polling units due to fears that results would be manipulated or that violence could erupt after voting. This dynamic confirms that institutional fragility reinforces voter withdrawal.

Furthermore, Ediba, Arawa, Kunga and Abdullahi (2025) exposes how institutional tolerance of political thuggery weakens trust. Their study documents how the activities of the ‘Yan Kalare political thugs between 1999 and 2019 created a culture of impunity. Many residents internalized the belief that elections were controlled by violent actors rather than governed through transparent institutions, a perception that survived into the 2023 elections. The persistence of these groups reinforces distrust and directly contributes to apathy, especially among women, first-time voters, and low-income groups.

The socioeconomic dimension is also central to understanding why distrust and apathy vary across communities in Gombe. Bello and Sule (2024), examining media and political participation, find that access to political information differs sharply along income, education, and urban–rural lines. Poorer citizens in rural LGAs, who depend largely on informal information networks, tend to distrust government institutions more due to limited education, low civic exposure, and higher vulnerability to misinformation.

Magaji, Abubakar, Nomkuha and Aliyu (2025), in their work on democracy and community development across selected LGAs, show that socioeconomic deprivation fuels perceptions of government neglect. Where basic infrastructure is weak or absent, residents are more likely to believe that political institutions lack legitimacy or commitment to public welfare. This directly lowers electoral motivation. Their findings highlight the example of Nafada and Dukku LGAs, where weak development indicators correlated with lower voter enthusiasm and stronger expressions of distrust.

Gender also intersects with socioeconomic status. Aiyenigba, Hassan, Sambo and Terwase (2019) report that women in Gombe face structural barriers including financial dependence, social restrictions, and limited political education. These constraints reduce their confidence in political institutions and increase disengagement, particularly in households lacking economic stability.

Beyond participation levels, several studies examine how distrust affects types of electoral behavior. Mohammed and Kirfi (2024) show that social media mobilization for the APC gubernatorial election revealed a split: younger, urban voters expressed high online engagement but low physical turnout. Interviews showed widespread distrust in INEC and skepticism about whether digital activism would translate into credible results. Digital participation became an alternative to in-person voting, especially among distrustful youth.

Tal, Ismail, Shamsu and Adnan's study on ethnic identities in the 2019 National Assembly elections also offers relevant insight. Although not exclusively about distrust, their findings reveal that where institutional trust is low, voters rely more heavily on ethnic cues when choosing candidates. In Gombe, this was evident in LGAs like Kaltungo/Shongom, where voting patterns followed ethnic lines more than party manifestos. This suggests that distrust pushes citizens toward alternative bases of political judgment and loyalty.

The influence of money politics further shapes cynical electoral behaviour. Mohammed, Peter and Onimisi document how widespread monetization of the 2019 elections entrenched perceptions that politics prioritizes personal gain over public good. Many respondents expressed disengagement in later elections because they believed outcomes were already predetermined by financial muscle rather than voter preference.

Several studies consistently links distrust to declining participation. Alahira and Harisu (2025) demonstrate that apathy in the 2023 election was significantly higher in communities where residents had previously experienced electoral violence or perceived INEC failures. For example, in Gombe North, memories of the 2019 violence and fears of manipulation reduced turnout, especially among women and young people.

Kehinde Adeleke et al. (2025) find that citizens who believe the state government selectively implements development projects express the strongest levels of political withdrawal. Their interviews revealed citizens stating that "voting changes nothing," reflecting the classic mechanism through which distrust produces apathy.

Bello and Sule (2024) show that distrust in political communication especially in media messages perceived as partisan reduces political engagement. Voters who distrust media

content are less likely to attend rallies, follow debates, or participate in political discussions, all of which correlate with turnout.

Similarly, the persistence of political thuggery (Ediba et al., 2025) discourages participation by making elections appear unsafe and institutionally compromised. The fear that the state cannot guarantee electoral security directly fuels disengagement.

Gap in Literature

Despite a growing body of research on voter apathy in Nigeria, few studies have systematically examined the relationship between voter apathy and distrust in government institutions, particularly in Ekiti and Gombe states. Several critical gaps limit a comprehensive understanding of how these phenomena influence electoral participation and the broader democratic process. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on regional variations, socio-economic influences, electoral violence, media effects, and the role of education in shaping citizens' perceptions of government trustworthiness.

Few studies have explored comparative analyses of regions with distinct socio-political environments, neglecting the North–South dichotomy that may significantly shape voter behavior. This study fills this gap by comparing Ekiti and Gombe states, which differ markedly in political culture, security challenges, and civic engagement. Ekiti, characterized by relatively high literacy rates and active political participation, contrasts with Gombe, where ethno-religious tensions and security threats have historically influenced electoral outcomes. By examining these regions, the study provides a fresh perspective on how local dynamics shape distrust in government institutions and voter apathy.

Economic hardship has been widely acknowledged as a driver of voter apathy; however, the complex interplay between economic conditions and political disengagement, particularly among youths in rural areas, remains insufficiently examined. Previous research often discusses poverty and unemployment broadly but does not fully consider how economic deprivation intersects with political exclusion to shape participation. This study examines how youth unemployment, poverty, and limited access to political education contribute to voter

apathy in Ekiti and Gombe. It highlights how socio-economic disenfranchisement undermines confidence in the electoral process.

Although youth disengagement is frequently mentioned in the literature, few studies specifically investigate how young people in different regions navigate political participation amidst economic hardship, insecurity, and distrust in government. This study addresses this gap by focusing on youth apathy in the 2023 elections across Ekiti and Gombe. By exploring the combined effects of political manipulation, exposure to electoral violence, and socio-economic instability on youth participation, the study provides critical insights into the underlying factors of voter apathy and government distrust.

By addressing these gaps, this research contributes a comparative perspective on the socio-political, economic, and contextual factors shaping electoral participation in Nigeria. It offers fresh empirical insights that can inform policy reforms, voter education strategies, and civic engagement initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic consolidation in regions with distinct political dynamics.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Theory is a vital component of research work, serving as the foundational structure and framework upon which the research is constructed. This study is grounded in the integration of two theories: Structural-functionalism and Deliberative Democracy theory. To comprehend voter apathy and institutional distrust, it is essential to examine how political structures, socio-economic dynamics, and cultural factors interact to shape citizen behavior and political participation. Structural-functionalism is a theoretical framework that highlights the interconnectedness of various institutions within a society and how their roles and functions contribute to the stability and functioning of the overall system. It emerged as a dominant sociological perspective in the early 20th century, influenced by scholars like Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. The theory posits that social structures, such as institutions, norms, and values, function to maintain societal stability, and any disruption in these structures can lead to social instability (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993).

In its classical form, structural-functionalism views society as a complex system composed of various parts, each with specific roles or functions that contribute to the stability and continuity of society. The input-output model is central to this theory, where institutions or structures receive inputs (resources, policies, actions) and, through their functioning, produce outputs (such as societal stability, economic performance, or voter participation). This framework can be particularly insightful when analyzing government institutions and their impact on public trust and voter behavior, as is the case in this study on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. One of the central tenets of structural-functionalism is that when institutions perform their roles effectively, they contribute to societal stability. However, when institutions fail to perform their functions, they disrupt the social system, leading to negative consequences such as political instability, mistrust, and disengagement from civic duties (Harper, 2011).

Structural-functionalism offers a powerful lens for analyzing the relationship between political institutions and societal behavior. This can help explain the rise of voter apathy and distrust in Nigerian government institutions, particularly in the context of the 2023 elections. This theory, as articulated by scholars like Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond, and others, emphasizes the role of social structures and their functions within a given system. According to structural-functionalism, political institutions such as electoral bodies, the executive, the legislature, and security agencies play specific roles in the overall functioning of the political system. Their functions ensure societal stability, the smooth operation of the political process, and the maintenance of social order. However, the effectiveness of these institutions in performing their designated functions directly impacts citizens' trust in the political system and their willingness to engage in political processes.

Parsons (1971) posits that a society's proper functioning hinges on the effective operation of its social structures, including political institutions, education, and family. In Nigeria's democratic process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is a pivotal institution tasked with managing the electoral process. Structural-functionalism offers a framework to analyze how INEC's performance directly influences trust in the electoral system and voter participation. According to the Nigerian Constitution, INEC's role is to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. However, if INEC falls short of these expectations

due to systemic inefficiencies, electoral malpractices, or security lapses, distrust and voter apathy logically ensue. Structural-functionalism suggests that any failure in an institution like INEC undermines the political system's stability. When INEC's processes, such as voter registration, material distribution, and timely election day management, are flawed, the resulting trust and participation suffer. This creates a feedback loop where distrust and apathy lead to reduced participation, weakening the system's legitimacy and exacerbating the cycle of discontent (Delaney, 2016).

INEC's inability to produce satisfactory outputs disrupts the input-output relationship, prompting citizens to question the institution's legitimacy and the entire political system. Structural-functionalism explains this by emphasizing that social systems rely on constituent cooperation and trust. When key institutions like INEC fail to fulfill their roles, it undermines the system's credibility, leading citizens to disengage and perpetuating voter apathy (Lucas, 2007).

Besides INEC, other institutions, such as political parties, security forces, and the judiciary, play crucial roles in the electoral process. Structural-functionalism could provide an understanding on how disruptions in these institutions' functions affect trust and political behavior. For instance, when political parties engage in electoral fraud or manipulation, or when security forces fail to protect voters, trust in the system erodes. This discourages participation and contributes to voter apathy. Savage (1977) argues that social systems are interdependent, and when one component fails to perform its function, it affects the entire system. Thus, the failure of security forces to ensure safe election environments or the judiciary's inability to uphold electoral results can exacerbate distrust in government institutions, leading to further disengagement.

Moreover, economic hardship and socio-political inequality significantly impact the functioning and outcomes of these institutions. Structural-functionalism emphasizes that societal stability relies on the balanced operation of all social systems, including the economic system. In Nigeria, economic challenges like unemployment and poverty often intersect with political instability, creating conditions where citizens feel excluded from the political process. When government institutions fail to address economic grievances, it leads to

disillusionment, as individuals perceive the political system as unable to meet their needs. This disillusionment is evident in low voter turnout and disengagement, as individuals do not see the value in participating in a system that does not serve their interests (King, 2011).

The rise of voter apathy and distrust in government institutions during the 2023 Nigerian general elections can be understood through the lens of structural-functionalism. According to Talcott Parsons (1971), the stability of the social system depends on the effective functioning of its institutions. In Nigeria, when institutions like INEC fail to provide trustworthy election processes, or when security forces cannot maintain a peaceful election environment, the resulting distrust in these institutions diminishes citizens' willingness to engage in the electoral process. This leads to lower voter turnout and further exacerbates political instability. As Drazin (1990) suggests, when institutions fail to meet public expectations, they contribute to societal instability, which in turn reinforces disengagement from political processes.

Furthermore, institutions like INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission), the National Assembly, the security agencies, and other political structures are meant to function as mediators between the state and society. They should address the demands of citizens (inputs) and deliver policies that meet public expectations (outputs). When these structures fail to perform their duties adequately, such as through electoral fraud, manipulation, or violence, it leads to a breakdown in trust. This failure was evident in the 2023 Nigerian elections, where logistical challenges, electoral violence, and issues with electoral transparency led to widespread voter disengagement and apathy.

Almond's emphasis on policy outputs becomes pertinent here, as the ineffective functioning of these institutions contributes to political alienation, undermining the public's trust in the electoral system and leading to low voter turnout. Almond's input-output model also plays a crucial role in explaining how INEC's actions (or inactions) influence voter engagement. Political inputs, such as the demands of citizens for free and fair elections, are meant to be transformed into outputs, such as credible election results. However, when INEC or other institutions fail to meet these demands due to corruption, mismanagement, or violence the political system becomes dysfunctional, which, in turn, breeds voter apathy. This approach

aligns with the structural-functional view that social systems require functional coherence, where structures fulfill their roles effectively to maintain the integrity of the broader system. If these structures fail, the legitimacy of the entire system is compromised. (Almond, Powell, Dalton & Strom, 2008)

Another key point in Almond's work is how the political system must adapt to changing social environments. He notes that shifts in society such as demographic changes, economic shifts, or political movements demand corresponding adjustments in political structures and processes. This is particularly relevant to your study, as societal change, especially in Nigeria, often leads to new political demands. (Almond, Powell, Dalton & Strom, 2008)

For example, economic hardship, security threats, and socio-political conflicts in Nigeria necessitate adaptations in governmental responses, but when institutions tasked with these responsibilities fail to address these issues effectively, the resulting policy outputs such as flawed election results or perceived electoral fraud fail to meet public expectations, leading to a breakdown in trust.

Furthermore, Almond's expansive perspective on political systems highlights that the roles of political structures can vary across different systems, depending on societal needs. In Nigeria, challenges such as economic hardship, ethno-religious tensions, and insecurity pose distinct obstacles for political institutions. To address these societal shifts, INEC and other institutions must adapt their processes to maintain legitimacy. However, when they fail to do so, as seen in the 2023 elections, it triggers a political crisis where citizens lose faith in the system, resulting in decreased voter turnout. INEC, in particular, is a crucial component of the Nigerian political system, and its inability to effectively manage electoral processes can lead to political instability and a legitimacy crisis. According to the input-output theory, when INEC does not fulfill citizens' demands for free and fair elections, the resulting output, such as an unfair election outcome, leads to apathy and a breakdown in political engagement. The lack of institutional credibility in INEC, especially due to instances of electoral violence, manipulation, and logistical mismanagement, exacerbates voter disenchantment, prompting them to abstain from voting.

Deliberative Democracy Theory

Deliberative Democracy Theory, which underscores the importance of open and informed discourse, has its roots in the works of theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (1996) and John Rawls (1993). These theorists provide a robust framework for understanding and addressing the challenges of voter apathy and government distrust in Nigeria.

Deliberative democracy theory, a normative democratic theory, emphasizes the importance of reasoned, inclusive, and informed public deliberation in the political decision-making process. Originating from political philosophy, this theory posits that legitimate decisions emerge from open dialogue, rational argumentation, and equal participation among citizens. Habermas argues that inclusive public discourse, free from coercion, is essential for democratic legitimacy. His work emphasizes the communicative aspect of democracy, where citizens engage in rational dialogue to reach a consensus (Habermas, 1996; Elstub, 2010; Lubenow, 2012; Zakharchenko, 2014).

Rawls on the other hand focuses on the concept of "overlapping consensus" and the role of public reason in a just society. Rawls argues that citizens, despite their diverse moral and religious beliefs, can find a common ground through rational deliberation, contributing to a more just society (Saward, 2018). Fishkin (2018) emphasizes the active involvement of citizens in deliberative processes to arrive at collectively reasoned decisions. The central tenets include political equality, participation, deliberation, and non-tyranny. The theory posits that political decisions are legitimate if established through inclusive and informed deliberative procedures.

The concept of deliberative systems, introduced by Habermas and expanded upon by Elstub, (2010), emphasizes that deliberative ideals like equal status, mutual respect and inclusive political discussions can be realized through distributed mechanisms. Rather than focusing on a single deliberative location, thinking in terms of deliberative systems allows for varied venues, contributing to the overall deliberative landscape. Jovanoski, & Sharlamanov, (2021) also argued that the provisional status of deliberative democratic principles, including reciprocity, is a strength. They contend that substantive principles should not constrain the deliberative process excessively, allowing for flexibility and adaptation.

Deliberative democracy theory contends that a well-informed citizenry is more likely to actively participate in the democratic process. In Nigeria, where issues of political awareness and information accessibility persist, this theory offers insights into how creating spaces for informed deliberation can positively impact voter engagement. Deliberative democracy theory posits that informed public deliberation is crucial for democratic decision-making. In the Nigerian context, where accessibility to information can be challenging, citizens might experience voter apathy due to a lack of substantive deliberation. Limited access to information can lead to uninformed decision-making, contributing to citizens' rational choice to abstain from voting (Lubenow, 2012 ; Zakharchenko, 2014 ; Jovanoski, & Sharlamanov, 2021)

The theory emphasizes open dialogue as a means to build trust in political institutions. In Nigeria, historical instances of corruption and lack of transparency may contribute to government distrust. Deliberative processes, such as town hall meetings and inclusive policy discussions can address this distrust by providing citizens with opportunities for direct engagement and holding political actors accountable (Dryzek, 2000). Deliberative democracy theory suggests that civic engagement fosters trust. In Nigeria, promoting civic engagement through deliberative forums can counteract government distrust. When citizens actively participate in decision-making processes, they are more likely to develop trust in political institutions (Warren, 2001).

A crucial aspect of deliberative democracy theory is inclusivity, ensuring that diverse voices are heard in the decision-making process. In Nigeria, where issues of identity and diversity are prominent and often fuel political tensions, inclusive deliberative processes can address government distrust by ensuring that diverse voices are heard and considered in political decision-making (Cheneval, 2006). Despite the theoretical appeal of deliberative democracy, empirical studies highlight some challenges. Some deliberative processes may not meet the standards set by political theorists, leading to a gap between ideals and practical implementation. Freeman, (2000), found that political discussions often fall short of deliberative democracy ideals, opening the door for improvements, particularly in educational reforms.

Deliberative democracy theory provides a theoretical framework to address voter apathy and government distrust in Nigeria. By promoting informed decision-making, open dialogue, and inclusivity, this theory offers practical avenues for enhancing political engagement and rebuilding trust in democratic institutions. However, challenges such as information accessibility and structural barriers must be addressed to fully realize the potential of deliberative democracy in the Nigeria.

The integration of Structural-Functionalism and Deliberative Democracy Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding voter apathy and government distrust during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. Structural-Functionalism examines the roles and functions of political institutions in maintaining social order and stability, while Deliberative Democracy Theory emphasizes the importance of inclusive, informed and rational public discourse in fostering democratic legitimacy. Together, these theories provide a robust analysis of how the failure of key institutions and the lack of effective public deliberation contribute to electoral disengagement.

Structural-Functionalism provides a lens to assess how governmental institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and security forces are expected to perform functions that maintain political system stability. According to this theory, societal stability relies on the effective functioning of its institutions. When institutions like INEC fail to deliver free, fair, and credible elections, or when security agencies fail to protect voters, it disrupts the input-output relationship between the government and citizens, leading to political instability, distrust, and voter apathy. The input-output model central to structural-functionalism highlights that when citizens' needs for fair governance and transparency are unmet (inputs), resulting policy failures or untrustworthy electoral processes (outputs) undermine the political system, creating a feedback loop of disengagement and disenchantment.

For instance, INEC's performance during the elections, including logistical challenges, electoral fraud, and violence, directly influenced the political climate and contributed to voter apathy. The failure of political institutions to meet the electorate's demands led to an erosion of trust and a decline in political participation, consistent with the structural-functional

argument that the breakdown of key societal structures undermines societal cohesion and stability (Parsons, 1971; Lucas, 2007).

Conversely, Deliberative Democracy Theory complements this by focusing on public engagement processes and the importance of reasoned, informed discourse in democratic systems. According to deliberative democracy, a political system's legitimacy depends on decisions emerging from inclusive and rational public deliberation. In Nigeria's political context, where corruption, inequality, and a lack of transparency have long marred the government-people relationship, inclusive public deliberation can be a powerful tool for rebuilding trust. Deliberative processes, such as town hall meetings, citizen forums, and inclusive policy discussions, offer citizens opportunities to engage directly with political decision-makers, hold them accountable, and ensure diverse voices are heard.

The core principles of Deliberative Democracy political equality, participation, and the absence of coercion emphasize the significance of open dialogue in tackling voter apathy. In Nigeria, where public distrust arises from historical electoral fraud and systemic failures, promoting civic engagement through deliberative forums can serve as a means to combat apathy and restore trust in government institutions. By creating spaces for informed discussions and ensuring equal access to information, deliberative democracy fosters an environment where voters feel their voices are valued and political decisions are made transparently.

The integration of these two theories offers a fresh perspective into how the failure of political structures (as seen in Structural-Functionalism) and the lack of inclusive political discourse (as highlighted in Deliberative Democracy) contribute to voter apathy and government distrust. Structural-functionalism elucidates the adverse outcomes when institutions fail to deliver, while deliberative democracy theory posits that rebuilding trust requires more than just functional institutions it necessitates cultivating a culture of inclusivity, accountability, and open dialogue within these institutions.

Thus, Structural-Functionalism stresses the importance of the effective functioning of institutions like INEC, while Deliberative Democracy highlights the need for inclusive,

rational deliberation to ensure these institutions maintain legitimacy in the public's eyes. Together, these frameworks not only explain the prevalence of voter apathy and government distrust in Nigeria but also propose a way forward by enhancing institutional performance and encouraging public deliberation. This dual approach will guide the research in examining both the systemic failures of institutions and the potential for deliberative practices to engage citizens and restore trust in the Nigerian political system.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

To meet the objectives of this study, a cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, for data collection. The choice of this research design is to examine a sample of the population from which the result could be generalized. Survey research design requires the researcher to systematically ask questions about the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of respondents about a given social phenomenon under study (Obasi, 1999, Osemwota, Okhaku&Tonwe, 2007). Bryman (2012) posited that survey research has become popular in modern times as a scientific method of discovering the impact and inter-relationships of social and psychological variables from given populations.

A cross-sectional survey research design is one of the most commonly used research designs, particularly in social sciences, health studies, and political science. It involves collecting data at a single point in time or over a short period from a sample that represents a larger population. This design is often employed to provide a "snapshot" of the current situation, attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a population at a specific moment. (Kumar, 2002; Weber, 2017). By this research design, both quantitative and qualitative data was derived from the respondents through opinion, survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with critical stakeholders. This was to ensure that information and data not adequately captured from respondents' questionnaire are complemented by the interviewee, and key informant. This research instruments generated data that was used for the study, specifically doing a comparative study of the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe states. The data derived was used to test hypotheses using the quantitative and thematic techniques of data analysis.

The choice of a cross-sectional survey research design for this study was to enable the study to capture a representative snapshot of the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of the target population at a specific moment in time. This design was particularly useful for examining the prevalence and patterns of phenomena, such as distrust of government and voter apathy, which are central to the research focus. By collecting data from both Ekiti and Gombe states, the study aims to provide insights into regional variations in these issues during the 2023

general elections. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. The quantitative aspect allows for statistical testing and generalization of findings, while the qualitative component enriches the study by capturing deeper understanding through interviews with key informants who possess specialized knowledge of the political and electoral landscape. This methodological triangulation enhanced the validity and richness of the data, providing a better understanding of the factors influencing political engagement and electoral participation in Nigeria (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Study Area

The study area for this research comprises Ekiti and Gombe states, two distinct regions in Nigeria, selected for their contrasting socio-economic, political, and demographic characteristics.

Ekiti State is located in the southwestern region of Nigeria, bordered by Kwara, Kogi, Ondo, and Osun states, and covers an area of approximately 6,353 square kilometers (Adebayo, 2004). The state is predominantly rural, with agriculture being the backbone of its economy. Ekiti is characterized by a hilly terrain, which has shaped its agricultural practices, with crops such as cassava, yams, maize, and cocoa playing a significant role (Babatola, 2018). Ekiti also boasts of a rich cultural heritage, with a substantial portion of the population practicing traditional Yoruba customs, alongside Christianity and Islam (Adebayo, 2004). Although the state has a high literacy populace and a competitive political system, challenges like unemployment, poverty and voter apathy still persists. Furthermore, political dynamics in the state has been shaped by both historical and contemporary challenges, including political instability and issues related to electoral participation and governance (Moliki & Dauda, 2014).

Ekiti State is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group, with a population of approximately 2.8 million people (National Population Commission, 2021). The state is known for its high literacy rate, with a strong emphasis on education and civil service employment. The majority of Ekiti's citizens are engaged in agriculture and education (Babatola, 2018). The strong educational foundation in Ekiti is integral to understanding the

state's political settings, particularly how education and literacy influence voter behavior and political participation (Moliki & Dauda, 2014).

In Ekiti State, agriculture remains a dominant economic activity, with key crops such as cassava, maize, yams, and cocoa providing the main source of livelihood for many residents (Babatola, 2018). Despite the state's educational progress, challenges such as high unemployment rates and rural poverty persist, affecting voter behavior and political participation (Adebayo, 2004). Moreover, political engagement is often shaped by the socio-economic conditions in rural areas, where there may be limited access to modern political education and fewer opportunities for civic engagement (Moliki & Dauda, 2014). These socio-economic challenges play a significant role in shaping the political behavior of Ekiti residents, particularly in relation to voter apathy and government trust (Omilusi, 2015).

The political environment in Ekiti State is marked by competitive elections, particularly in the gubernatorial elections, where political ties and allegiances often shape electoral outcomes (Olatunde & Olayanju, 2019). Political participation in Ekiti is influenced by relatively educated electorates, but challenges such as voter apathy and rural disengagement remain significant (Moliki & Dauda, 2014). Additionally, electoral processes in Ekiti are often shaped by state-level issues, such as infrastructure development and agricultural policies, which directly impact political behavior and government accountability (Babatola, 2018).

In contrast, Gombe State is situated in the northeastern part of Nigeria, bordered by Yobe, Bauchi, Taraba, and Adamawa States, covering an area of approximately 20,265 square kilometers (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's terrain is a mix of savannah and semi-arid land, with agriculture, particularly crop and livestock farming as the primary economic activity. The state serves as a key political and economic center for the northeastern region of Nigeria (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's political environment is influenced by a blend of traditional governance structures, religious dynamics and regional political affiliations which play a crucial role in shaping political participation and governance (Sule, 2019).

Gombe State, with a population of about 3.2 million people (National Population Commission, 2021), is predominantly inhabited by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. Islam is the dominant religion, and Gombe has a relatively younger population, with a significant proportion living in rural areas (Tijani, 2012). The socio-political dynamics in Gombe are

deeply rooted in religious, ethnic, and traditional practices, which impact political participation patterns and electoral outcomes (Olayinka et al., 2024). The region's economic activity is largely centered on agriculture, and a significant proportion of the population depends on farming and local trade for their livelihood (Tijani, 2012).

In Gombe State, the economy is largely dependent on agriculture, particularly crop and livestock farming, although the region faces significant challenges such as vulnerability to climate change, drought, and limited access to modern agricultural techniques (Tijani, 2012). Gombe's poverty levels are relatively high, especially in rural areas, where access to essential services such as healthcare, education and infrastructure remains limited (Sule, 2019). These socio-economic difficulties contribute to a lack of political efficacy among Gombe residents, influencing their participation in the electoral process and their trust in government institutions (Bello & Sule, 2024).

In Gombe State, the political dynamics is shaped both locally and politically. The state has experienced political mobilization driven by ethnic and religious factors, with elections frequently centered on issues such as security, infrastructure, and economic development (Tijani, 2012). Despite efforts to improve democratic governance, Gombe faces challenges related to political violence, voter disenchantment and a lack of trust in electoral processes (Sule, 2019). These challenges impact voter turnout and participation, especially in rural areas where civic education and political literacy may be limited (Bello & Sule, 2024).

Furthermore, Gombe faces challenges such as high poverty levels, limited access to services and vulnerability to climate change. Political participation here is influenced by ethnic, religious, and traditional dynamics, and the state struggles with voter disenchantment and political violence (Tijani, 2012; Sule, 2019).

The selection of Ekiti and Gombe states is strategic for this study. These states represent two contrasting regions in Nigeria, with differing socio-economic, political, and demographic characteristics that significantly influence political behavior and trust in government institutions. By examining these states, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how factors such as education, economic conditions, political environment and social identity impact citizens' participation in democratic processes.

3.3 Population of Study

Kotari (2004) defined the research population as the totality of the components of the units of analysis that the study is interested in. The collection of examples that a researcher wants to draw broad conclusions about is referred to as the population. A population, according to Bryman (2012), is the totality of cases that satisfy a predetermined set of requirements. A population, according to Osemwota, Okhakhu, and Tonwe (2007), is the theoretically defined combination of the research items from which the sampled population is taken.

The target population of this study comprises all registered voters residing in the six selected local government areas (LGAs) in Ekiti and Gombe States. For Ekiti State, Ikere-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, were selected while for Gombe State, Gombe, Kwami, and Kaltungo were selected. These LGAs were selected in a multistage manner, with one local government representing each of the three senatorial districts from each state. The population figures of the six (6) LGAs from the two states stand at 8,912,228 (INEC, 2022).

The selection of Ekiti and Gombe states for this study was particularly significant for several reasons. Despite the overall low voter turnout in the 2023 general election across Nigeria, there are marked variations in voter participation rates among different geo- political zones and states. For instance, Gombe state exhibited a higher voter turnout rate of 33.87%, making it the fifth state with the highest turnout, (INEC, 2023) This is in comparison to Ekiti state which had a lower voter turnout of 31.84% (INEC, 2023). This discrepancy raises important questions about the underlying factors influencing distrust of government and voter behavior . Thus, the target population of this study was made up of all registered voters residing in the six selected (Ikere-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Gombe, Kwami, Kaltungo) local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states. Instructively, these local governments were selected in multistage with one local government representing each of the three senatorial districts from each state, the population figures of the six (6) LGAs from the two States are 8912,228 (INEC, 2022).

Table 3.1: Respondents Distribution in the Selected Six States

State	LGAs	Population Figure For each LGAs	Population Figure For total LGAs
Ekiti	Ikere-Ekiti	85, 054	324,491
	Ado-Ekiti	162,785	
	Oye-Ekiti	76, 652	
Gombe	Kwami	153,651	566,737
	Gombe	285,532	
	Kaltungo	127,554	
Total		891,228	891,228

Source: INEC (2022)

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample size refers to the number of observations or participants selected from the population for the purpose of data collection. The determination of an appropriate sample size is critical to ensuring that the results of the study are statistically valid and representative of the larger population (Weber, 2017). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2022), Ekiti State has 987,647 registered voters, while Gombe State has 1,575,794 registered voters. These population figures served as the basis for determining the study's sample size using the Taro Yamane formula

A multistage sampling method was employed to ensure geographical representation, and the sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula.

These six LGAs were chosen using a multistage sampling method, The multistage sampling process employed in this study was carefully designed to ensure broad geographical representation and a reliable sample of respondents across the selected local government areas (LGAs) in Ekiti and Gombe states. The process followed a systematic Two-stage approach:

Stage One: Stratification by Senatorial Districts

The first step involved dividing each state into its respective senatorial districts. This stratification created primary sampling strata that reflected the political boundaries within

each state, ensuring that the selection process accounted for regional diversity and provided a comprehensive view of the state's electorate.

Stage Two: Selection of Local Government Areas (LGAs)

From each senatorial district, one local government areas (LGAs) was selected using a purposive sampling techniques. The purposive selection allowed for the inclusion of areas of particular interest. The population figures for the selected LGAs are provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2022) and total 891,228 voters across all six LGAs.

To ensure a representative sample, the research employed a multistage sampling technique. This technique is commonly used when the population is large and geographically dispersed, as it allows the researcher to first divide the population into smaller, manageable subgroups (in this case, senatorial districts, LGAs), then randomly select participants from each subgroup.

The computation of sample size using Taro Yamane’s formula for each state:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

- Where: n = Sample size
- N = Population size
- e = Sample error or level of significance is 0.05.

Ekiti State

Ikere LGA

$$n = \frac{85,054}{1+ 85,054 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{85,054}{1+ 371.4}$$

$$n = \frac{85,054}{372.0}$$

$$n = 398.4$$

$$n = \text{Sample size} = 398$$

Ado-Ekiti LGA

$$n = \frac{162,785}{1 + 162,785 (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{162,785}{1 + 783.2}$$
$$n = \frac{162,785}{783.6}$$
$$n = 399.6$$
$$n = \text{Sample size} = 400$$

Oye LGA

$$n = \frac{76,652}{1 + 76,652 (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{76,652}{1 + 343.5}$$
$$n = \frac{76,652}{344.5}$$
$$n = 38.8$$
$$n = \text{Sample size} = 398$$

GombeState

Kwami LGA

$$n = \frac{153,651}{1 + 193,995 (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{153,651}{1 + 484}$$
$$n = \frac{153,651}{485}$$
$$n = 398.2$$
$$n = \text{Sample size} = 398$$

Gombe LGA:

$$n = \frac{285,532}{1 + 285,532 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{285,532}{1 + 667.1}$$

$$n = \frac{285,532}{668.1}$$

$$n = 399.4$$

$$n = \text{Sample size} = 399$$

Kaltungo LGA

$$n = \frac{127,544}{1 + 127,544 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{127,544}{1 + 400.21}$$

$$n = \frac{127,544}{400.21}$$

$$n = 398.0$$

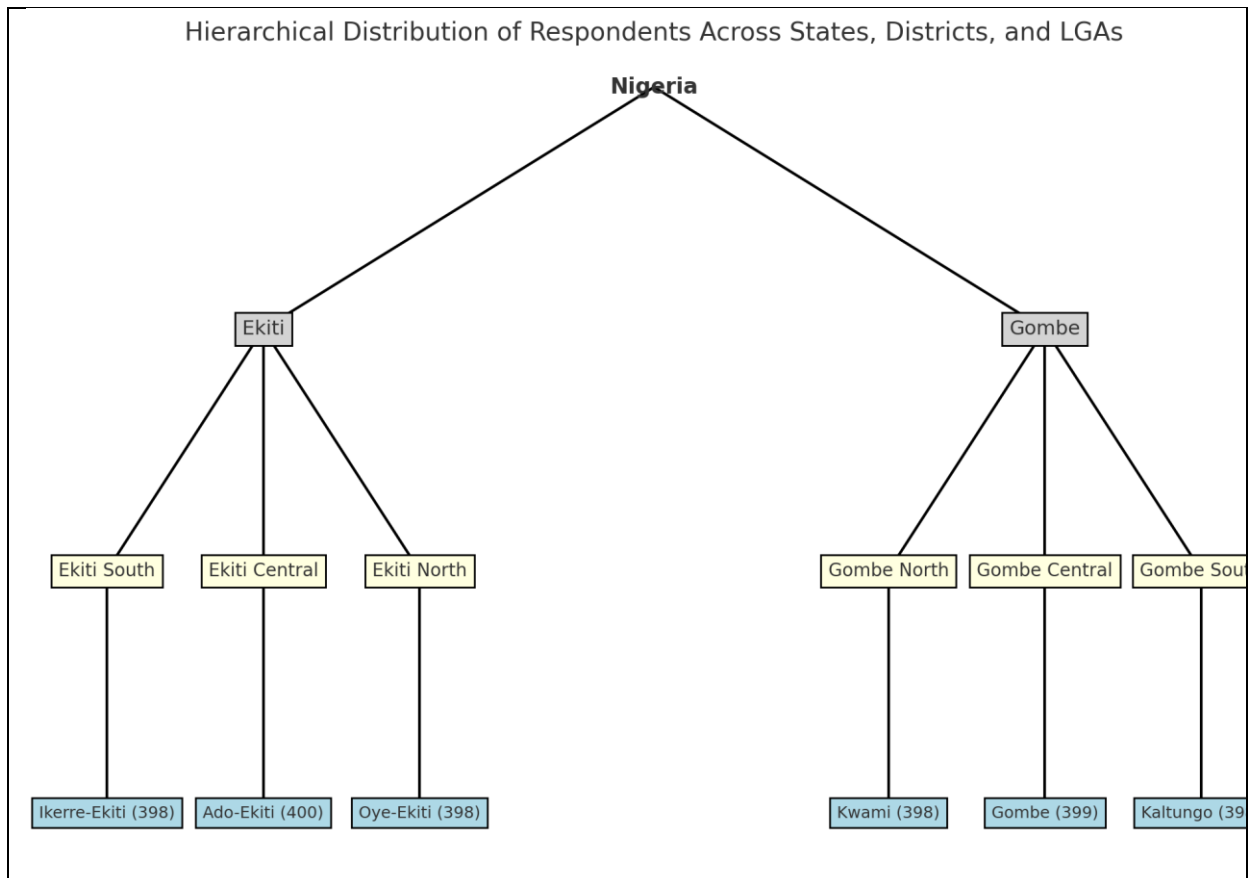
$$n = \text{Sample size} = 398$$

Thus, the sample distribution for the survey questionnaire is shown below.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Respondents for the Research Instrument

Geo-political zone	State	Senatorial District	Local Govt. Areas	Number of respondents	Total
South West (Southern Nigeria)	Ekiti	Ekiti South	Ikerre-Ekiti	398	1,196
		Ekiti Central	Ado-Ekiti	400	
		Ekiti North	Oye-Ekiti	398	
North East (Northern Nigeria)	Gombe	GombeNorth	Kwami	398	1,195
		GombeCentral	Gombe	399	
		Gombe South	Kaltungo	398	
Total	2	6	6	2391	2391

Source: Field work, 2025



Author's Design, 2025

The distribution of respondents for the survey questionnaire was done by administering the research instruments in six senatorial districts and local government areas in the two states of Ekiti and Gombe.

The first stage involved the selection of three LGAs from each state, representing each of the three senatorial districts. While for the second stage the sample was drawn within each LGA, through a simple random sampling techniques, ensuring that each voter has an equal opportunity to be selected.

For the purpose of this study, two thousand three hundred and ninety-one (2,391) sample size was drawn from six LGAs (three from each state) in Ekiti and Gombe states to constitute the sample of the study using the Taro Yamane formula. The Taro Yamane formula was used to derive sample size from the (target population) of six LGAs (three from each state) in Ekiti and Gombe states to give a total sample size of 2391. This was done to gather and collect more quantitative data from the field considering the nature of the study.

In addition to the survey respondents, twelve (12) key informants were selected for in-depth interviews six from each state. These participants were selected using judgmental sampling because they possessed specialised knowledge relevant to the study. The experts included INEC officials, Community leaders, political analysts, civil society representatives, and academics with expertise in elections and voter behaviour. Judgmental sampling was most appropriate for this category because it allowed the researcher to deliberately select individuals with the required expertise and experience needed to provide deeper insights into the subject matter

The simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents in each of the six (6) local government areas in order to ensure significant representation of respondents for the study area.

3.5 Instruments of Data Collection

The research instruments utilized for this study were questionnaire and interview guide. The researcher adopted a structured questionnaire as the research instrument, tagged the “Distrust in Government institution and Voters' Apathy in Nigeria” (DGIVAN) formatted on a four-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was organized into two sections; section A

and B. Section A encapsulates the demographic information of the respondents such as gender, age, educational attainment, religion, marital status and occupation. On the other hand, Section B of the questionnaire comprises closed-end questions pertaining to individual values and perceptions that measure the effect of government distrust on voters' apathy in Nigeria. Specifically, structured items were designed to assess key variables influencing voter apathy in the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe states.

The qualitative data was divided into four thematic subsections, each corresponding to a central research question. The first subsection focuses on the factors that influence perception of distrust of government and voter apathy beyond education. Respondents were asked to indicate whether a lack of education contributes to disinterest in voting and whether educational programs could motivate increased participation. The second subsection addresses the impact of socio-economic status on voter turnout. It included items that examine how economic hardships, financial barriers, and limited access to voter information may have contributed to distrust in Government institution and voters apathy. The third and final subsection investigates the role of distrust of government as a driver of voter apathy. This part of the instrument assesses perceptions of electoral fraud, dissatisfaction with government responsiveness, and the belief that elected officials fail to represent citizens' interests. Collectively, the items in section B were measured using a 4-point Likert scale (SA = 4, A = 3, D = 2, SD = 1). The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected to capture the degree of agreement with each statement, thereby providing vital information on the underlying socio-political factors affecting voter behavior in the study areas.

3.6 Validity of Research Instrument

The validity of a research instrument is crucial for ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data collected. Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. It is a fundamental aspect of research quality and plays a key role in drawing meaningful and trustworthy conclusions. In determining the validity of the research instrument, expert views in measurement and evaluation were used. In this respect, the questionnaire was subjected to scrutiny, criticisms and inputs of experts on governance and

voters' apathy such as my supervisors and other academics whose research interests are on or related to the subject matter of this study.

3.7 Reliability of Research Instrument

Reliability is a critical aspect of research instrument quality, ensuring consistency and dependability in measurement. It refers to the extent to which a research instrument produces consistent and stable results over time and across different conditions. A reliable instrument is one that yields similar outcomes when administered under similar circumstances. Drost (2011) defined reliability as “the extent to which measurements are repeatable when different people perform the measurement on different occasion, under different condition, supposedly with alternative instruments which measure the construct or skill”. A research instrument is considered reliable when it yields consistent results after several administrations.

A reliability test was carried out as part of a pilot study to confirm the research instrument's reliability. To ensure the research instrument's reliability, the researcher administered it to twenty (20) respondents who were not included in the sample size. The researcher employed the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient test. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24) was used to code and analyze the data produced by the administrated research instrument. The results of the test were statistically acceptable, ensuring the questionnaire's internal consistency.

The average result of the pilot study was 0.816 which was above the minimum required coefficient value of 0.70, and this was considered reliable for the study. This is as stipulated by Stephanie (2016) that reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above are adequate and are considered reliable.

Table: 3.3 Cronbach Alpha Reliability Value by Research Questions

S/N	Research Questions/Variable	Cronbach Alpha Value
1.	How does education influence voter apathy in Nigeria, particularly in the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe States?	0.801
2.	What is the impact of socioeconomic status on voter turnout in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, with	0.821

	a focus on Ekiti and Gombe States?	
3.	How does distrust of government contribute to voter apathy in Nigeria, especially in Ekiti and Gombe states?	0.796
	The mean result	0.816

3.8 Method of Data Collection

The research instrument was administered to the research participants by the researcher with the help of 6 trained research assistants. In order to promptly retrieve the questionnaires from the respondents, the researcher and the field assistants patiently waited for them to fill the questionnaire. In cases where the researcher or research assistants were unable to retrieve the questionnaire immediately from the respondents, they scheduled another visits to retrieve the completed questionnaires. While the interview was done and recorded with the consent of the interviewee for easy transcription. This study employed a multi-stage sampling approach for the systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to explore factors influencing voter apathy in the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe states. A total of 2,391 registered voters was selected from six randomly selected LGAs, three from each state. Respondents were proportionally allocated across the LGAs, with approximately 398–400 respondents per LGA. In addition to the survey, 12 expert interviews were conducted. Six from each state, using purposive and judgmental sampling to select individuals with expertise in electoral behavior, governance, or community leadership. These interviews provided qualitative data to complement the quantitative data, enriching the overall understanding of voter apathy. By combining both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study ensures a comprehensive and representative collection of data to address the factors influencing voter behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The data from the field work was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative data, a combination of simple percentage, Pearson Correlation, regression analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed. The simple percentage

technique was used to analyze the social characteristics of the respondents and the questions relating to the role of government distrust in voter apathy. This method was chosen for its descriptive nature, providing a clear overview of the data. To test the formulated hypotheses, Pearson Correlation and regression analysis were utilized. These methods helped determine the relationships between different variables, particularly in understanding the impact of socio-economic factors, education, and distrust in government on voter behavior.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), an advanced multivariate analysis technique, was used to examine the relationships between multiple variables simultaneously. SEM allows for the analysis of complex relationships, including direct and indirect effects, and enables the exploration of both measurement models and structural models. This technique was particularly useful in social science research for understanding latent constructs and their interrelations, such as the connections between educational attainment, socio-economic status, and voter turnout (Gonzalez, de Boeck, & Tuerlinckx, 2008).

For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed for the in-depth interviews conducted with the 12 selected expert participants. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of information provided by the experts regarding voter apathy, the role of political trust, socio-economic conditions, and the impact of electoral fraud. The analysis focused on capturing key themes, perceptions, and experiences shared by the experts, which complemented the quantitative findings and provided contextual depth to the study. By triangulating both quantitative and qualitative data, this research provided a well-rounded analysis of distrust of government, voter apathy and the electoral process in Nigeria.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in social research, ensuring that studies are conducted in a responsible and respectful manner, while safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals involved. Ethical considerations in social research, especially researches that deal with human subject revolve around several key principles that include principle of safety or security, principle of informed consent, principle of objectivity, principle of anonymity, principle of neutrality, principle of justice. Informed consent is essential,

ensuring that participants are fully informed about the research purpose, procedures, and any potential risks or benefits (Aghedo 2017; Chalmers, 2018).

Research ethics are crucial. Though it can be challenging for researchers, adhering to these guidelines can be challenging in practice. Aghedo (2017) advocates for researchers to self-regulate and adopt practical, context-specific strategies to navigate ethical dilemmas. Particularly, it emphasizes the importance of 'giving voice' to foster a better rapport between researchers and respondents. Maintaining impartiality, informed consent, confidentiality and objectivity will be upheld throughout this research, as this helps ensure the accuracy and reliability of data gathered and enhances the validity of the research findings. This study followed key ethical principles to ensure the protection and respect of participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the department before data collection began.

To ensure safety, the researcher avoided sensitive topics and maintained professionalism throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from participants as they were made aware of the study's purpose and their rights. Furthermore, permission were sought from the interviewees for recording and pictures while Respondents were told that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences.

To maintain objectivity, the researcher used neutral questions and avoided any personal biases during data collection. Anonymity was ensured by using unique identifiers instead of personal names, and all data were securely stored. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and participants were assured their responses would be used solely for academic purposes.

Thus, the researcher abstained from actions that could have endangered him or his field assistants in accordance with the principle of safety or security. This was accomplished by remaining diplomatic at all times and refusing to comment on delicate subjects. Throughout the study, the researcher remained neutral, refraining from expressing personal opinions or influencing the data in any way. These steps ensured that the study was conducted ethically, with respect for participants' rights and privacy.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data from the study's field survey that focused on Distrust in government institutions and voters' apathy: A comparative study of the 2023 General Elections in some selected Local Government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states, Nigeria

The first section of the questionnaire deals with the demography of the respondents, while the other sections analyze the main items which provide answers to the research questions and hypotheses on which this study is based.

4.1 Data Analysis

4.1.1: Research Instrument Administration

Table 4.0: Questionnaire Administration and Collection

Administration of Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Number issued	2,391	100
Number of valid responses	2,020	84.53
Number of invalid responses	371	15.47

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

A total of 2,391 copies of questionnaires were administered to the respondents to elicit information for the study, 2,020 was retrieved and analyzed, representing a response rate of 84.53% of the participated respondents, where the remaining 371 representing 15.47% of the sampled respondents were either wrongly answered, destroyed and un-retrievable. Out of the 2,020 copies of questionnaires retrieved from the respondents, 1,028 (50.89%) was from Ekiti state where data was gathered on distrust of government and voters apathy while 992 (49.11) was from Gombe state where data was gathered on distrust of government and voters apathy. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 was used for the analysis of data from field, using the statistical instrument of simple percentage, pie-chart, mean, pearson

moment correlation, ANOVA, logistic regression and structural equation model in analyzing the variables in the study. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis

Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Gender

Table 4.1

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	1209	59.9	59.9	59.9
Valid	Female	811	40.1	40.1	100.0
	Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source Field survey, 2025

Data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents presented in Table 1 shows that the respondents were predominantly male, with 59.9% identifying as male and 40.1% as female. This indicates a higher proportion of male respondents in the study, suggesting a gender imbalance in the sample population

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Age

Table 4.2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	18-34	652	32.3	32.3	32.3
	35-45	664	32.9	32.9	65.1
Valid	46-56	478	23.7	23.7	88.8
	57 and Above	226	11.2	11.2	100.0
	Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source Field survey, 2025

Data on the age distribution of the respondents presented in Table 2 shows that the age distribution of the respondents was quite varied. The largest age group was those aged between 35-45, comprising 32.9% of the respondents, followed closely by the 18-34 age group at 32.3%. This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents were young adults,

with a balance between the younger and older age ranges. A smaller proportion (23.7%) fell within the 46-56 age range, while only 11.2% were aged 57 and above. This age distribution highlights a predominance of younger to middle-aged adults, which could have implications for their political engagement and social concerns.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Education

Table 4.3

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	502	24.9	24.9	24.9
Secondary	637	31.5	31.5	56.4
Tertiary	881	43.6	43.6	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data on the educational distribution of the respondents presented in Table 3 shows that, the majority of the respondents (43.6%) had tertiary education, followed by 31.5% who had secondary education and 24.9% who had primary education. This shows that the sample consisted largely of educated individuals, with a higher percentage holding tertiary qualifications. This education profile suggests that the study may have captured informed perspectives on various socio-political issues.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Marital Status

Table 4.4

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	686	34.0	34.0	34.0
Married	1010	50.0	50.0	84.0
Divorced	304	15.0	15.0	99.0
Others	20	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data on Marital status of the respondents presented in Table 4 shows 50% of the respondents were married, with 34% being single, 15% divorced, and only 1% selecting "Others." This distribution indicates that a majority of the respondents were married, with a substantial proportion being single. The presence of divorced respondents also highlights the diversity in marital experiences, which could influence their socio-political opinions and behaviors.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Religion

Table 4.5

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Christianity	832	41.2	41.2	41.2
Islam	1064	52.7	52.7	93.9
Valid African Traditional religion (ATR)	124	6.1	6.1	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data in Table 5 presented the respondents' religious affiliations. 52.7% were Muslims, 41.2% were Christians, and 6.1% practiced African Traditional Religions (ATR). This reflects a predominantly Muslim population, with a significant Christian minority, as well as a small proportion practicing ATR. This religious diversity may contribute to varied cultural and political viewpoints among the respondents.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Occupation

Table 4.6

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Public/Civil Servant	774	38.3	38.3	38.3
Valid Self Employed	814	40.3	40.3	78.6
Unemployed	432	21.4	21.4	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data on the occupational distribution of the respondents presented in Table 6 shows that 40.3% of respondents were self-employed, 38.3% were public or civil servants and 21.4% were unemployed. The relatively high proportion of self-employed individuals suggests that economic factors, particularly the informal sector, might influence political participation and views on governance.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents by State of Residence

Table 4.7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ekiti State	1028	50.9	50.9	50.9
Valid Gombe State	992	49.1	49.1	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data presented in Table 7 shows the respondents' state of residence, 50.9% resided in Ekiti state, while 49.1% were from Gombe state. This geographical distribution indicates a fairly balanced representation between these two states, suggesting that the study may reflect perspectives from different regions.

Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Senatorial Districts

Table 4.8

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ekiti South	351	17.4	17.4	17.4
Ekiti Central	341	16.9	16.9	34.3
Ekiti North	336	16.6	16.6	50.9
Valid Gombe North	355	17.6	17.6	68.5
Gombe Central	319	15.8	15.8	84.3
Gombe South	318	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 8 shows the respondents' senatorial districts, with 17.6% of respondents were from Gombe North, 17.4% from Ekiti South, 16.9% from Ekiti Central, 16.6% from Ekiti North, 15.8% from Gombe Central, and 15.7% from Gombe South. This shows a fair spread across the various senatorial districts, ensuring that the study captured a broad range of regional perspectives

Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Local Government

Table 4.9

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ikerre-Ekiti	351	17.4	17.4	17.4
Ado-Ekiti	341	16.9	16.9	34.3
Oye-Ekiti	336	16.6	16.6	50.9
Valid Kwami	355	17.6	17.6	68.5
Gombe	319	15.8	15.8	84.3
Kaltungo	318	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	2020	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 9 shows the distribution of respondents across local government areas (LGAs) showed that 17.6% were from Kwami, 17.4% from Ikere-Ekiti, 16.9% from Ado-Ekiti, 16.6% from Oye-Ekiti, 15.8% from Gombe, and 15.7% from Kaltungo. This reflects a balanced representation of respondents from different LGAs, contributing to a diverse and comprehensive dataset.

SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS. (EKITI STATE)

Table 4.10: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency(N=1, 028)	Percentage (100%)
Age		
18-34	374	36.4
35-45	354	34.4
46-56	206	20
57 and above	95	9.2
Sex		
Male	571	55.5
Female	457	44.5
Education		
Primary	137	13.3
Secondary	254	24.7
Tertiary	637	62
Marital Status		
Single	329	32
Married	494	48
Divorced	185	18
Others	20	2
Religion		
Christianity	477	46.4
Islam	427	41.6
Traditional	123	12
Occupation		
Public/Civil Servant	457	44.5
Self Employed	432	42.1
Unemployed	148	14.4

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents in Ekiti.

Data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in Ekiti State presented in Table 10 and Figure 10 shows that the respondents were a predominantly younger group, with 36.4% aged between 18-34 and 34.4% in the 35-45 age range. This suggests that the larger percentage of registered voters were younger population as confirmed by INEC. Only a small proportion (9.2%) were 57 and above, reflecting the youth-driven nature of voter apathy and participation. Also a higher percentage of male respondents (55.5%) compared to female respondents (44.5%) were involved in the study. This indicates a fairly balanced gender representation in the survey with the majority of respondents (62%) having acquired tertiary education, followed by 24.7% with secondary education, and 13.3% with primary education. This is a positive indicator of the respondents' literacy levels, with Ekiti state having 85% literacy rate, suggesting that the study may have captured well-informed opinions on political engagement, voter apathy, and government distrust.

Furthermore, more than 48% of the respondents were married, while 32% were single. A significant number (18%) were divorced, while 2% selected "Others". These statistics suggest that the family dynamics of voters might play a role in their political participation or apathy. Also, the majority of the respondents (46.4%) were Christians, followed by 41.6% Muslims and 12% practicing traditional religions. This reflects the religious diversity in Ekiti,

Finally, public/civil servants represented 44.5% of the respondents, while 42.1% were self-employed and 14.4% were unemployed. The high proportion of self-employed individuals suggests that economic factors may influence voter turnout and apathy, especially when considering that unemployment might correlate with political disengagement.

Socio demographic Characteristics of Respondents (Gombe State)

Table 4.11: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency(N=992)	Percentage (100%)
Age		
18-34	278	28
35-45	310	31.3
46-56	272	27.4
57 and above	132	13.3
Sex		
Male	588	59.2
Female	404	40.8
Education		
Primary	365	36.8
Secondary	383	38.6
Tertiary	244	24.6
Marital Status		
Single	357	36
Married	516	52
Divorced	119	12
Others		-
Religion		
Christianity	235	23.7
Islam	757	76.3
Traditional	-	-
Occupation		
Public/Civil Servant	317	32
Self Employed	382	38.5
Unemployed	293	29.5

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

Data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in Gombe state, as presented in Table 11, reveals that the majority of the respondents were of a younger demography, with 28% aged between 18-34 years and 31.3% in the 35-45 age range. This suggests that the study primarily captured the opinions of a younger, more active demography, reflecting a higher rate of political engagement among the youth. Only a small percentage of 13.3%, were 57 years and above, indicating that older individuals made up a smaller proportion of the respondents. This trend may be reflective of the general higher percentage of younger registered voters for the 2023 general elections.

Regarding gender distribution, male respondents made up 59.2% of the sample, while female respondents accounted for 40.8%. This slightly higher male representation suggests a relatively balanced gender distribution in the survey, highlighting the inclusion of both male and female respondents in the study.

In terms of education, a significant portion of respondents had completed secondary education, with 38.6% holding this qualification. A further 36.8% had attended primary school, while 24.6% had received tertiary education. These educational levels suggest that a good proportion of the respondents were literate and likely had the capacity to form well-informed opinions about political matters, making them suitable for assessing issues such as political participation and voter engagement.

Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents were married (52%), followed by 36% who were single, and 12% who were divorced. This data may reflect the familial dynamics that could influence the respondents' engagement with political and social issues, where married individuals might feel more invested in policies that affect their families.

Religion-wise, the majority of the respondents identified as Muslims, making up 76.3%, with 23.7% identifying as Christians. This distribution reflects the predominantly Muslim demographic of Gombe State.

Lastly, the occupation data shows that 38.5% of respondents were self-employed, 32% worked as public/civil servants, and 29.5% were unemployed. The high proportion of self-employed individuals suggests that economic self-sufficiency might play a role in voter turnout, as self-employed individuals may have different political priorities compared to those

in formal employment. Unemployment, being a significant factor at 29.5%, could potentially correlate with political disengagement or apathy, as individuals facing economic challenges may be less inclined to engage with politics.

Analyses of Research Questions one and In-Depth Interview (EKITI STATE)

Research Question one: How do institutional weaknesses contribute to distrust in government and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

TABLE 4.12: (n-1028)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F(%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.	388 (37.7)	363 (35.2)	97 (9.4)	180 (17.5)	2.64	Accepted
2	The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.	372 (36.2)	377 (36.7)	198 (19.3)	81 (7.9)	2.72	Accepted
3	The lack of sufficient voters mobilization affected the electorate decision to participate in the 2023 elections	415 (40.4)	319 (31)	171 (16.6)	123 (12)	3.00	Accepted
4	The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributes to voters' decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general election?	421 (41)	278 (27)	134 (13)	195 (19)	2.71	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1
Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

Interpretation

The mean results of the data in items 1, 2, 3, and 4 of research question one in Table 12 of the study are 2.64, 2.72, 3.00, and 2.71 respectively. Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 all have means within the range of 2.50 to 3.49, which indicates that the respondents accepted the statements related to these items.

The results from table 12 highlights the various factors that influenced voter apathy in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections. The data examines multiple variables beyond educational attainment, such as political violence, insecurity, the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), voter mobilization, and perceptions of corruption. Each factor shows varying levels of agreement among the respondents, reflecting the complex nature of voter behavior in the region.

Item 1: The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.

Table: 4.14

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	388	37.7	37.7	37.7
A	363	35.3	35.3	73.1
Valid D	97	9.4	9.4	82.5
SD	180	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

For this item, the responses revealed that the inability of security agencies to prevent political violence were seen as major factors affecting voter participation, with a mean score of 2.64. A combined 73% of respondents (37.7% strongly agreeing and 35.3% agreeing) felt that these factors directly influenced their decision to vote or abstain. However, 27% (9.4% disagreeing and 17.5% strongly disagreeing) did not feel that political violence or inability of security agencies to prevent it impacted their participation. This indicates that while many respondents saw insecurity as a barrier to participation, others either perceived their areas as secure or were less concerned about the risks involved.

Item 3: The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.

Table: 4.15

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	372	36.2	36.2	36.2
A	377	36.7	36.7	72.9
Valid D	198	19.3	19.3	92.1
SD	81	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Data from table 15 and figure 15 revealed that majority of respondents (72.9%) agreed that perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced had an impact on their voting decisions, with a mean score of 2.72. Of these, 26.5% strongly agreed, and 36.7% agreed that trust in INEC influenced their voting behavior. However, 27.1% (19.3% disagreeing and 7.9 % strongly disagreeing) did not believe INEC's transparency was a significant factor. This shows that while trust in electoral institutions is crucial for many, a

notable portion of the electorate either has confidence in INEC or does not perceive its transparency as a barrier to their participation.

Item 4: The Lack of Sufficient Voter Mobilization Affected the Electorate’s Decision to Participate in the 2023 Elections.

Table:4. 16

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	415	40.4	40.4	40.4
A	319	31.0	31.0	71.4
Valid D	171	16.6	16.6	88.0
SD	123	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

A mean score of 3.00 reflects a strong agreement with the statement that inadequate voter mobilization impacted voter turnout. The majority of respondents (71.4%) agreed that they were affected by the lack of voter mobilization efforts, with 40.4% strongly agreeing and 31% agreeing. However, 28.6% (16.6% disagreeing and 12% strongly disagreeing) did not feel that voter mobilization played a significant role in their decision. This suggests that while mobilization is essential for many, a portion of the electorates either received sufficient mobilization or did not see it as a crucial factor in their participation.

Item 5: The Corruption Perception in the Political System in Nigeria Contributes to Voters' Decision to Abstain from Voting in the 2023 General Elections.

Table: 4.17

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	421	41.0	41.0	41.0
A	278	27.0	27.0	68.0
Valid D	134	13.0	13.0	81.0
SD	195	19.0	19.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

Data from table 17 shows that corruption was also a significant factor influencing voter apathy, with a mean score of 2.71. A large 68% of respondents (41% strongly agreeing and 27% agreeing) believed that perceptions of corruption deterred voters from participating. Conversely, 32% (13% disagreeing and 19% strongly disagreeing) did not see corruption as a key factor in their decision to abstain from voting. This suggests that while many respondents are disillusioned by political corruption, others either perceive the issue as less impactful or still believe in the possibility of reform.

The data reveals that various factors, beyond educational attainment could affect voters' perception of distrust of government and voter apathy in Ekiti state. The findings indicate a significant agreement on issues such as the influence of educational attainment, political violence, INEC's credibility, voter mobilization efforts, and perceptions of corruption. However, the substantial variation in responses suggests that there is a diversity of opinions within the electorates. These results highlight the complexity of voter behavior, suggesting that multiple factors, rather than educational level alone, contribute to both voter apathy and distrust of government. The respondents in Ekiti State acknowledged that these factors play a

significant role in influencing voter participation and apathy during the 2023 elections. Notably, all items received acceptance, as indicated by the mean values, which fall within the acceptable range, underscoring the overall agreement on the importance of these factors.

Interview from Respondents

To buttress the view of the surveyed respondents, one of the key political office holder in Ekiti state interviewed asserts that:

"The question raised is very much in line with what we are seeing at the government level. Political violence, insecurity, and a lack of trust in the electoral process are widespread issues. The government has worked hard to improve security, but there's a deep-seated perception of corruption that undermines the faith people have in the elections. The fear of violence keeps many people from even considering voting, and those who do often wonder if their votes will count. Also on our parts as politicians, we work hard to mobilize voters. It's not an easy task to mobilize, through inducement of any form, a very educated person, say a professor. What do you want to tell him/her? So as politicians, we need to do better in terms of governance and proper ideology, as well as in terms of security, to make people feel that going out to vote could put their lives in danger and that its worth the stress and effort they put in. It's not just about voter education it's about making sure people feel safe and that their vote will matter. Corruption also plays a major role, as people feel their votes are often ignored, and nothing changes after the elections."(IDI 1, 2025).

Another key political appointee respondent reiterates that:

"Despite our efforts to inform the public and mobilize voters, the threat of violence and insecurity had a much greater impact. Insecurity scares people into abstaining from voting, especially in volatile regions. Moreover, corruption, which is an issue we all must face, remains a major barrier to voter participation. People just don't believe in the

system anymore, and this sense of disillusionment has made it harder to motivate the electorate to go to the polls."(IDI 2, 2025).

Another key INEC official respondent shared the following:

"While we have made significant efforts to ensure the transparency and security of the electoral process, the survey's findings reflect the reality of voter apathy in Ekiti. Political violence and insecurity continue to be major deterrents. We also face challenges in voter mobilization, particularly in remote areas where people are either uninformed or feel disconnected from the process. The perception of corruption, whether real or imagined, also contributes to a lack of faith in the system."(IDI 3, 2025).

A first class traditional ruler emphasized:

"In our community, while education is certainly important, what's more concerning is the lack of sufficient ways to voter's mobilization. Many of our people feel disconnected from the electoral process because they haven't been properly represented, which discouraged our people to actively participate. There's a significant gap in efforts to reach the electorate, particularly in rural areas. People are simply not motivated to vote because they don't see how it will bring any meaningful change. Furthermore, the perception of corruption within the political system has only compounded this issue. When people believe that the system is corrupt and that their votes won't make a difference, they lose interest in voting altogether. The combination of inadequate mobilization and widespread corruption has created a sense of disillusionment that is difficult to overcome. This lack of trust in the system has led to many choosing not to participate in the election."(IDI 4, 2025)

The youth leader of the Coalition of Civil Society in Ekiti state offered this perspective:

"We made every effort to engage the youth in the elections, but the truth is that disillusionment and a deep sense of hopelessness are widespread. Despite the high literacy rate in Ekiti, many young people feel that their education doesn't equip them to change anything within the current political system. They are skeptical about the entire process, feeling that no matter how many times they vote, it does not result in meaningful change. This sense of futility is compounded by the perception that the political system is riddled with corruption, where decisions are made behind closed doors, and public interest is rarely prioritized. Even with the security measures and mobilization efforts, the prevailing sentiment among the youth is that their participation doesn't matter. They see politicians making promises during campaigns, but once elected, the status quo remains the same. This cycle of broken promises and the lack of trust in the political system has led to a significant number of young voters opting out of the election, feeling as though the system is simply too corrupt to produce real change."(IDI 5, 2025).

A top official from the Ekiti state Interparty Affairs stated:

"In my role, I work closely with all the political parties in Ekiti, and the issue of political violence continues to surface as a major concern. It's not just about the competition between political parties during campaigns, it's about ensuring that the entire electoral process remains credible and that voters feel safe enough to participate. Unfortunately, political violence in some areas has created an environment of fear, which discourages many potential voters from coming out to cast their ballots. But beyond that, one of the main barriers to voter participation in Ekiti is the failure of political parties to truly engage with the electorates. Over the years, we've seen a lot of empty promises during campaigns, but little action once the politicians are in office. This has led to a growing mistrust of the entire political system, making it

harder for parties to mobilize voters effectively. Many people feel disconnected from the process, believing that their votes won't result in meaningful change. Despite these challenges, there has been a concerted effort to address the low voter turnout. We, as a body that oversee interparty affairs, have been working with political parties to improve their engagement with the people. This includes pushing for greater transparency in their campaigns, fostering dialogue between parties and voters, and ensuring that the electorate understands the importance of their participation in shaping the future of the state. However, this is not enough. The most significant issue still lies in the perception of corruption within the political system. If people feel that the system is rigged, no amount of voter education or mobilization will convince them to show up at the polls. The government needs to guarantee not just security but also fairness in the electoral process. Until that happens, many voters will continue to disengage, feeling that their voices are drowned out by a system that doesn't work in their favor."(IDI 5, 2025).

Analyses of Research Questions and In-Depth Interview (GOMBE STATE)

Table 4.18: (n-992)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.	319 (32.2)	561 (56.6)	72 (7.3)	40 (4.0)	3.17	Accepted
2	The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.	102 (10.3)	176 (17.7)	434 (43.8)	280 (28.2)	2.10	Rejected
3	The lack of sufficient voters mobilization affected the electorate decision to participate in the 2023 elections	222 (22.4)	157 (15.8)	382 (38.5)	231 (23.3)	2.37	Rejected
4	The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributed to voters' decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general election?	261 (26.3)	157 (15.8)	358 (36.1)	216 (21.8)	2.47	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1

Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

Interpretation:

The mean results of the data in items 1, 2, 3, and 4 of research question one in Table 4.51 of the study are 3.17, 2.10, 2.37, and 2.47, respectively. Based on the mean values, only Item 2 has a mean value within the accepted range of 2.50 to 3.17, which indicates that respondents accepted the statement related to this item. The other items (1, 3, 4, and 5) have mean values below 2.50, indicating that they were rejected.

The results from table 13 highlight the various factors that influenced voter apathy in Gombe state during the 2023 general elections. The data examines multiple variables beyond educational attainment, such as political violence, insecurity, the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), voter mobilization, and perceptions of corruption. Each factor shows varying levels of agreement among the respondents, reflecting the complex nature of voter behavior in the region.

Item 1: The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.

Table: 4.20

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	319	32.2	32.2	32.2
A	561	56.6	56.6	88.7
Valid D	72	7.3	7.3	96.0
SD	40	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.17, indicating that it was accepted by respondents. A combined 88.58% of respondents (32.2% strongly agreeing and 56.6% agreeing) agreed that The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in their area affected their decision to participate in the election. The relatively high percentage of agreement emphasizes

that many respondents felt insecure in their localities and recognized that insecurity significantly influenced their willingness to vote. The smaller proportion 11.42% (7.3% disagreeing and 4% strongly disagreeing) suggests that for some respondents, political violence or insecurity may not have been a major deterrent. Nevertheless, the overall sentiment reflects the impact of security concerns on electoral participation.

Item 3: The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.

Table: 4.21

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	102	10.3	10.3	10.3
A	176	17.7	17.7	28.0
Valid D	434	43.8	43.8	71.8
SD	280	28.2	28.2	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

The mean score for this item was 2.10, which indicates it was rejected by respondents. Only 10.3% strongly agreed, and 17.7% agreed with the statement, while a significant 43.8% disagreed, and 28.2% strongly disagreed. This shows that a majority of respondents did not consider the perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections to be a key factor in their decision to vote or abstain. The rejection of this item suggests that for many respondents, issues such as security or personal interests might have been more influential in determining their participation in the elections.

Item 4: The Lack of Sufficient Voter Mobilization Affected the Electorate’s Decision to Participate in the 2023 Elections.

Table: 4.22

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	222	22.4	22.4	22.4
A	157	15.8	15.8	38.2
Valid D	382	38.5	38.5	76.7
SD	231	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.37, this item was also rejected by the respondents. Only 22.4% strongly agreed, and 15.8% agreed, while 38.5% disagreed, and 23.3% strongly disagreed. This indicates that a majority of respondents did not feel that the lack of voter mobilization was a decisive factor in their voting behavior. It is possible that respondents in Gombe were either adequately mobilized or that other factors, such as security concerns or local political dynamics, played a more significant role in their decision to vote.

Item 5: The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributes to voters’ decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 General Election.

Table: 4.23

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	261	26.3	26.3	26.3
A	157	15.8	15.8	42.1
Valid D	358	36.1	36.1	78.2
SD	216	21.8	21.8	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

The mean score for this item was 2.47, signaling that it was rejected by respondents. 26.3% strongly agreed, and 15.8% agreed, while a large proportion, 36.1%, disagreed, and 21.8% strongly disagreed. This result suggests that while there was some awareness of corruption in the political system, it was not viewed as the primary driver of voter apathy in Gombe state. The rejection of this item indicates that respondents may have placed more emphasis on factors like security and the local political environment rather than corruption when deciding whether to vote.

Thus,for Gombe state, the analysis suggests that political violence and insecurity are key factors influencing voter participation in the 2023 general elections. A significant number of respondents agreed that insecurity in their localities affected their decision to vote or abstain. However, the study revealed that factors such as educational attainment, INEC's credibility, voter mobilization efforts, and perceptions of corruption were not seen as critical influences on voter apathy in the region. This reflects a distinct set of priorities for voters in Gombe, where security and local issues may have taken precedence over the factors typically cited as influencers of voter behavior.

Interview from Respondents

To buttress the view of the surveyed respondents, one of the top INEC officials in Gombe state offered this perspective:

'To me, generally in the North, political violence and insecurity were indeed key deterrents to voter participation, especially in certain areas where there were concerns about safety. Many voters expressed fear for their lives, which made them reluctant to go to the polls. On the other hand, educational attainment is often seen as a significant factor in voting behavior in many parts of the country, it doesn't have as much weight in the North. In many communities here, the primary influence on voters is the political mobilization from political parties or traditional authorities, not necessarily their level of formal education. In this region, party loyalty and influence from local leaders often

outweigh the impact of education on whether someone will vote or not. Furthermore, political parties in Gombe have become very effective at mobilizing voters through community networks, traditional rulers, and religious leaders. They don't rely solely on formal voter education campaigns. Instead, they tap into existing social structures to encourage participation, which proves to be much more effective in driving voter turnout, regardless of educational levels. However, the lack of faith in the electoral process and issues like security are also major deterrents."(IDI 7, 2025).

A respondent from one of the civil society shared his thought:

"Our organization has been involved in mobilizing voters, but the problem lies in the broader political environment. Political violence and insecurity have been the biggest obstacles to voter participation in Gombe. It's important to note that in Northern Nigeria, educational attainment does not always translate to greater voter engagement. In Gombe, for example, people often rely more on the social and political networks established by party leaders or community influencers than on formal education when making decisions about elections. Despite high literacy rates in some areas, many people feel disconnected from the electoral process, primarily because they don't believe it will bring about any real change. In addition to that, there is a palpable sense of disillusionment among voters, particularly when they feel that no matter their education, the system is rigged. We need to focus more on creating safe and secure spaces for voters and improving the political environment for voters to trust the process. Political mobilization efforts in Gombe are highly organized and effective. Parties are well-positioned to rally voters by tapping into local customs and social networks. These tactics often overshadow educational efforts, as people are more likely to participate when they feel that they are part of a community effort. However, this doesn't mean people are satisfied with

the process; they just feel that the system works through informal channels rather than education."(IDI 7, 2025).

A traditional ruler from Gombe state noted:

"In my community, the issue of insecurity is paramount. Despite provision of security personnel in some areas, many people chose not to vote because they feared political violence. The idea of corruption in the system, though real, did not seem to drive their decisions as much as their fear of personal harm during the election process. Also in our community, political mobilization plays a much larger role in determining voter participation than education. While literacy rates is a little low as you pointed out, the real deciding factor for people in this region is often the political affiliation and influence of local leaders, not their level of formal education. During elections, traditional authorities and political parties are the ones who rally people to vote. These leaders use their influence over local populations to ensure voter turnout. In Northern Nigeria, education isn't necessarily a barrier to voting; it's more about the connection that people have with their local leaders and the trust they place in the political process. Voter mobilization in this context is vital, and when it's done correctly through influential figures, it becomes a powerful tool for increasing turnout."(IDI 8, 2025).

A respondent who is a political office holder stated:

"As someone who works directly with political parties in Gombe, I can tell you that while we have made efforts to engage voters, the issue of insecurity remains the main deterrent. Political violence and insecurity have overshadowed our mobilization efforts. Even though we've tried to improve the transparency of political parties and encourage greater participation, people are hesitant to get involved because they don't

trust the process, largely due to the violence and corruption they've witnessed. The issue with educational attainment in Northern Nigeria, including Gombe, is that it doesn't always lead to higher voter engagement. We find that people here are more likely to be influenced by the political and social mobilization efforts of political parties or traditional leaders. Political mobilization in Gombe is intense; parties know how to get people to the polls through networks of local supporters, religious groups, and influential figures in the community. That being said, education does play a role, but it is often secondary to party loyalty and the power of local leadership. The effectiveness of mobilization efforts, including door-to-door campaigns and community meetings, often outweighs formal education campaigns, especially in the face of insecurity and mistrust in the electoral system.” (IDI 10, 2025).

An official from the Hope Foundation for Disabled, Gombe state explained that:

"Our work, particularly with marginalized communities shows that a lot needs to be done to motivate our people to take part in elections. Many of the disabled persons we work with mentioned that insecurity was their primary concern during the elections. They were afraid of violence and felt unsafe to leave their homes. There was also a general sentiment of mistrust towards the political system. The lack of educational impact on voting behavior in Gombe is a reality we face every election cycle. In Northern Nigeria, including Gombe, education does not have as strong an effect on voter turnout as one might expect. People tend to vote based on communal relationships, political party loyalties, and the influence of local leaders factors that sometimes eclipse education. Political mobilization, on the other hand, is quite effective. Political parties have learned how to leverage traditional structures to mobilize people. For example, in our region, leaders in the community, including religious and traditional authorities, play a

large role in encouraging participation. Education may raise awareness about voting, but without mobilization, it's less likely to translate into action at the polls.” (IDI 11, 2025).

A top official from the Arewa Youth Forum in Gombe offered this reflection:

"As youth leaders, we worked hard to encourage young people to vote. However, many were disillusioned by the violence that marred the election period. There was a strong belief that political violence and corruption rendered the election results unreliable. As much as we tried to mobilize them, the overall sentiment was that participation wouldn't change anything, and this discouraged many from voting. In Gombe, the youths are not as swayed by their level of formal education when it comes to voting decisions. While education can help raise awareness, political mobilization through community leaders, political parties, and even religious figures is far more effective. There's a strong sense of community loyalty that dictates voting behavior, and education sometimes takes a backseat to these stronger social bonds. Mobilization is a powerful tool here, as parties and influential community leaders know how to rally the youths to the polls. They work through traditional channels to motivate participation, something that formal educational efforts often fail to do. However, many young voters, despite being educated, remain disengaged due to the lack of perceived fairness and transparency in the system."(IDI 12, 2025).

Analysis of Research Question Two and In-Depth Interview (EKITI STATE)

Research Question Two: To what extent does socioeconomic status influence distrust in government institutions and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

Table 4.24: (n-1028)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F (%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F (%)		
1	Economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, high cost of living, unemployment and poverty, influenced the level of distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections.	510 (49.6%)	444 (43.2%)	19 (1.8%)	55 (5.4%)	3.37	Accepted
2	Improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections.	442 (43.0%)	325 (31.6%)	127 (12.4%)	134 (13.0%)	3.05	Accepted
3	Socio-economic status significantly influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government.	372 (36.2%)	415 (40.4%)	99 (9.6%)	142 (13.8%)	2.99	Accepted

4	Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints.	368 (35.8%)	373 (36.3%)	194 (18.9%)	93 (9.0%)	2.98	Accepted
5	Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout.	333(32.4%)	410 (39.9%)	196 (19.1%)	89 (8.7%)	3.42	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1

Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

The data from table 12 highlights the role of socio-economic factors in shaping distrust in government government institutions and voter turnout in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Item 1: Economic Struggles, such as the State of the Economy, Rising Cost of Living, Unemployment, and Poverty, Influence the Level of Distrust in Government and the Decision to Abstain from Voting in the 2023 General Elections.

Table:4.25

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	510	49.6	49.6	49.6
A	444	43.2	43.2	92.8
Valid D	19	1.8	1.8	94.6
SD	55	5.4	5.4	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.37, this item was accepted by respondents. A significant 92.8%, (49.6% strongly agreeing and 43.2% agreeing) of the respondents agreed that economic struggles contributed to a sense of distrust in the government and influenced their decision to abstain from voting. This finding indicates that economic hardships, such as high costs of living, unemployment, and poverty, are key drivers of voter apathy, as these struggles create a sense of disillusionment and alienation from the political system. Only 7.2% (1.8% disagreeing and 5.4% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, suggesting that economic factors play a critical role in shaping electoral decisions for most people.

Item 2: Improving the Socio-economic Conditions of Citizens would likely Reduce Distrust in Government and Increase Voter Turnout in Future Elections.

Table: 4.26

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	442	43.0	43.0	43.0
A	325	31.6	31.6	74.6
Valid D	127	12.4	12.4	87.0
SD	134	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.05, indicating that it was accepted by respondents. A combined 74.6% of respondents, (43.0% strongly agreeing and 31.6% agreeing) believed that improving socio-economic conditions would reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout. This suggests that many respondents recognize a direct link between the state of the economy and their engagement with the political process. However, 25.4% (12.4% disagreeing and 13% strongly disagreeing) disagreed with the statement, which may reflect a belief that socio-economic improvements alone will not necessarily lead to increased political participation or trust in government.

Item 3: Socio-economic Status Significantly Influences Individuals' Access to Information and Education on Government Policies, Affecting their Level of Trust in Government.

Table: 4.27

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	372	36.2	36.2	36.2
A	415	40.4	40.4	76.6
Valid D	99	9.6	9.6	86.2
SD	142	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

Data from table 27 reveals a mean score of 2.99, this item was accepted by respondents. A total of 76.6% (36.2% strongly agreeing and 40.4% agreeing) agreed that socio-economic status influences access to information about government policies, which in turn affects their trust in the government. This highlights that those in lower socio-economic groups may face greater barriers to accessing reliable information, which could lead to greater mistrust in the government. However, 23.4% (9.6% disagreeing and 13.8% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, indicating that some respondents felt socio-economic status did not significantly affect their access to information or their trust in government.

Item 4: Individuals with Lower Socio-economic Status are more likely to Distrust Government and are less likely to Participate in Elections due to Financial Constraints.

Table: 4.28

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	368	35.8	35.8	35.8
A	373	36.3	36.3	72.1
Valid D	194	18.9	18.9	91.0
SD	93	9.0	9.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

The mean score of 2.98 indicates that this item was accepted by the majority of respondents. A combined 72.1% (35.8% strongly agreeing and 36.3% agreeing) agreed with the statement that lower socio-economic status increases distrust in government and reduces participation due to financial constraints. This suggests that individuals facing financial difficulties may feel excluded from the electoral process, leading to both distrust in government and voter apathy. However, 27.9% (18.9% disagreeing and 9.0% strongly disagreeing) disagreed with the statement, indicating that some respondents did not feel that financial constraints were a major barrier to their participation.

Item 5: Distance and Restrictions on Vehicular Movement Deter Voters with Lower Socio-economic Status from Accessing Polling Units, Further Increasing their Distrust in Government and Reducing Voter Turnout.

Table: 4.29

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	333	32.4	32.4	32.4
A	410	39.9	39.9	72.3
Valid D	196	19.1	19.1	91.3
SD	89	8.7	8.7	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.42, making it one of the most strongly accepted items in the survey. A total of 72.3% (32.4% strongly agreeing and 39.9% agreeing) agreed that distance and movement restrictions significantly deter voters from lower socio-economic backgrounds from reaching polling units. This further contributes to a sense of distrust in the government and reduces voter turnout. Only 27.7% (19.1% disagreeing and 8.7% strongly disagreeing) disagreed with the statement, suggesting that logistical barriers are a significant issue for many voters, particularly those in disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

The data from table 29 underscores the significant influence of socio-economic factors on voter behavior in the 2023 general elections. Respondents largely agreed that economic struggles, socio-economic status, and logistical barriers such as distance and vehicular movement restrictions contributed to distrust in government and lower voter turnout. In particular, issues like the state of the economy, unemployment, and poverty were identified as key factors driving voter apathy. Furthermore, respondents also recognized that improving socio-economic conditions could lead to greater political engagement and increased voter turnout. However, a smaller proportion of respondents expressed differing opinions,

suggesting that while socio-economic factors are important, other variables may also play a role in shaping voter participation.

Interview from Respondents (IDIs)

To buttress the view of the surveyed respondents, the following in-depth interviews (IDIs) provide further knowledge into how socio-economic factors influence distrust of government and voter participation in the 2023 general elections in Ekiti state.

One of such respondent, a prominent political office holder in the state, emphasized the profound challenges that political violence, insecurity, and corruption present to the electorates, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Reflecting on these issues, the respondent highlighted the pervasive sense of disillusionment among many citizens, who feel that their participation in the electoral process is futile due to these systemic barriers. He aptly offered his perspective on the urgent need for electoral reform and increased political engagement, especially for marginalized communities:

"The concerns raised about political violence, insecurity, and the erosion of trust in the electoral process are not just abstract issues; they are real, everyday struggles for the people of Ekiti. Despite the government's efforts to improve security, there is a pervasive perception that corruption has thoroughly infiltrated the system. Many citizens, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, no longer feel that their vote matters. In fact, they are disillusioned by the idea that no matter who they vote for, the outcome will be decided by forces beyond their control. It's heartbreaking to see people in my constituency, many of whom struggle with unemployment and rising costs of living, losing faith in a system that is meant to serve them. They often ask: 'Why bother voting when the system is rigged against us?' The fear of violence also keeps many from even considering voting. When you're already struggling to survive financially, risking your life to vote seems an overwhelming decision. We, as politicians, need to rethink how we engage with

the electorates particularly those who are disenfranchised by both the political and economic systems" (IDI 5, 2025).

This underscores the critical challenges that hinder voter participation and contributes to the growing distrust in the political system, particularly among the economically disadvantaged groups in the state. It serves as a poignant reminder of the need for significant improvements in both the electoral process and governance to address the socio-political concerns that prevent many from actively participating in democracy.

Another notable contribution made by KII highlighted the profound sense of disillusionment and fear that plagues many voters, particularly those from economically disadvantaged communities. This respondent emphasized the limitations of traditional voter education and mobilization efforts in the face of deeply rooted issues such as insecurity, corruption, and lack of economic opportunities. In his words:

"The reality is that no amount of voter education or public outreach will overcome the deep sense of fear and hopelessness that many people, especially from poorer communities, feel about the electoral process. Yes, we make efforts to inform and mobilize voters, but these efforts often seem like a drop in the ocean when set against the backdrop of insecurity, corruption, and a lack of real economic opportunities. People see politicians make promises, but once in office, nothing changes. Worse, in areas where insecurity is rampant, voters are often too afraid to leave their homes, let alone go to the polls. For many, the fear of violence far outweighs any hope that their vote will lead to real change. They feel disconnected from the political system, and this has created an atmosphere where voter turnout is increasingly low. It's incredibly frustrating to see this happen, especially when we're aware that the very people who are most in need of change are the ones who choose to abstain from the process" (IDI 6, 2025).

The above crucially reveals a crucial perspective on the barriers to political participation in Ekiti State, particularly among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It underscores the role of fear and disenchantment in shaping distrust of government and voter turnout

Furthermore, as part of the investigation into the factors influencing voter turnout and political engagement during the 2023 general elections, one of such interviews with an INEC official shed light on why voter apathy persisted and how socio-economic divides contribute significantly to the lack of trust in the electoral process. The respondent pointed out that, despite efforts to enhance transparency and security, many people, particularly in rural areas, feel disconnected from the system, leading to widespread disengagement. He noted that:

"We have certainly taken steps to enhance transparency and improve the security of the electoral process, but then, we still have to do more and build on the success of previous election and take the lessons from what we could have done better. Voter apathy is pervasive, and a significant part of that stems from the socio-economic divide that continues to plague our society. People in rural areas, particularly those with limited access to information, are more likely to be disillusioned by the system. They often feel disconnected from the electoral process, as though the outcomes are determined by elites far removed from their daily struggles. I will also add that the political parties are the direct beneficiary of elections. They can do more in terms of mobilization however they are lacking in this aspect because they didn't do well and the perception of corruption doesn't help either. When people believe that their votes are being ignored or that the system is fundamentally broken, they are less likely to participate. Moreover, lower-income individuals face numerous logistical barriers to voting long distances to polling units, lack of transportation, and the added financial burden of taking time off work to vote. These barriers create a sense of helplessness and further discourage participation in the electoral process"

He also added that *'the lawmakers should look into amending the law ensuring that INEC staffs and officials taking part in elections are not allowed to vote thereby disenfranchising*

them as this could improve turnout. However that means looking into e-voting as these officials are most certainly not going to be on ground in their registered polling booth on election day'(IDI 3, 2025).

This highlights the systemic challenges faced by rural voters and lower-income individuals, emphasizing the complexity of the issues that contribute to voter apathy. It underscores the need for not only improved security and transparency in the electoral process but also for addressing the socio-economic factors that create barriers to participation, such as distance, transportation, and the perception of corruption.

Another KII, a first-class traditional ruler highlighted the deep-rooted feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation among certain segments of the electorates, particularly those in rural areas. Stressing the issue goes beyond lack of education or awareness; it is a matter of perceived neglect and the absence of meaningful development and political representation.

He noted:

"In our community, the issue isn't just about the lack of education or awareness about the elections. The problem runs much deeper. Many people feel utterly disenfranchised. They have not been properly represented by the politicians they voted for in the past, and that has created a widespread sense of alienation. There's a severe gap in the way we engage voters, particularly in rural areas where people have limited access to information or resources. The government often doesn't reach out to these people effectively. They've been ignored for so long that many no longer see the point in voting. They feel that their voices don't matter and that no matter who is elected, their lives won't improve. The lack of trust in the system is compounded by the widespread perception of corruption. When people believe that their votes are essentially meaningless, they are less inclined to participate, and that's what we see happening here. The challenge isn't just about voter mobilization; it's about restoring people's belief that the system can actually work for them, that their votes can bring real change" (IDI 3, 2025).

Analysis of Research Questions and In-Depth Interview (GOMBE STATE)

Research Question Two: To what extent does socioeconomic status influence distrust in government institutions and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

Table 4.30: (n-992)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	Economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, influence the level of distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections.	322 (32.5)	381 (38.4)	176 (17.7)	113 (11.4)	2.92	Accepted
2	Improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections.	365 (36.8)	521 (52.5)	61 (6.1)	45 (4.5)	3.22	Accepted
3	Socio-economic status significantly influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government.	116 (11.7)	161 (16.2)	373 (37.6)	342 (34.5)	2.05	Rejected

4	Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints.	123 (12.4)	184 (18.5)	402 (40.5)	283 (28.5)	2.15	Rejected
5	Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout.	151 (15.2)	166 (16.7)	413 (41.6)	262 (26.4)	2.21	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1

Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

Interpretation:

The mean results of the data from table 30 in items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of research question two in table 12 are 2.92, 3.22, 2.05, 2.15, and 2.21, respectively. Items 1 and 2 have mean values of 2.92 and 3.22, which fall within the accepted range of 2.50 to 3.49. This indicates that respondents accepted these statements. Specifically for item 1, economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, high cost of living, unemployment and poverty influence the level of distrust in government. The decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections received strong agreement, showing that respondents acknowledge the significant impact of economic factors on political disengagement. As for item 2, improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections. This also received strong support, indicating that respondents believe improving socio-economic conditions would help restore trust in government and motivate greater participation in future elections. However, items 3, 4, and 5 have mean values of 2.05, 2.15, and 2.21, which fall below the accepted range of 2.50 to 3.49, indicating that these items were rejected by the respondents. Specifically, item 3 socio-economic status significantly

influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government, suggesting that respondents did not strongly agree that socio-economic status significantly impacts access to political information and trust in government.

As for item 4, individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government, and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints. This was also rejected, indicating that while financial constraints may play a role in discouraging participation, the respondents did not fully agree that this is a major factor influencing voter apathy. Finally, for item 5, distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout was similarly rejected, suggesting that logistical challenges related to distance and movement restrictions were not viewed as significant barriers to voting among the respondents.

The results suggested that economic struggles, such as unemployment, high costs of living and poverty, are major factors influencing distrust in government and decisions to abstain from voting. Furthermore, respondents strongly agree that improving socio-economic conditions could reduce this distrust and increase voter turnout in future elections. However, other factors such as socio-economic status affecting access to political information, financial constraints, and barriers to voting due to distance and movement restrictions were not viewed as significant influences on voter participation or distrust in government.

Item 1: Economic Struggles, Such as the State of the Economy, Rising Cost of Living, Unemployment, and Poverty, Influence the Level of Distrust in Government and the Decision to Abstain from Voting in the 2023 general elections.

Table: 4.31

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	322	32.5	32.5	32.5
A	381	38.4	38.4	70.9
Valid D	176	17.7	17.7	88.6
SD	113	11.4	11.4	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.92, this item was accepted by respondents in Gombe state. The data shows that 32.5% strongly agreed and 38.4% agreed with the statement, while 17.7% disagreed and 11.4% strongly disagreed. The majority of respondents acknowledged that economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, influence distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting.

This suggests that economic factors were seen as significant influences on voter behavior, with a clear recognition that these issues have a direct impact on the political engagement and trust levels of the electorate. The mean score of 2.92 places this item within the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), confirming that respondents in Gombe state viewed these economic struggles as substantial in shaping distrust of government and their decision to either vote or abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections. The acceptance of this item reflects the respondents' belief that socio-economic challenges play a major role in fostering political disengagement, especially when it comes to distrust of government. Economic factors are considered as key drivers of voter apathy and dissatisfaction with the electoral process.

Item 2: Improving the Socio-economic Conditions of Citizens would likely Reduce Distrust of Government and Increase Voter Turnout in Future Elections.

Table: 4.31

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	365	36.8	36.8	36.8
A	521	52.5	52.5	89.3
Valid D	61	6.1	6.1	95.5
SD	45	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.22, indicating that it was accepted by respondents. A combined 89.3% of respondents (36.8% strongly agreeing and 52.5% agreeing) agreed with the statement that improving socio-economic conditions would likely reduce distrust of government and increase voter turnout in future elections. The high level of agreement suggests that most respondents believe that addressing socio-economic challenges can enhance public trust and increase political engagement. The relatively small percentage of disagreement (6.1% disagreeing and 4.5% strongly disagreeing) indicates that only a minor portion of respondents felt that improving socio-economic conditions would not have a significant effect on reducing distrust in government or improving voter turnout. These respondents may have had different views on the key factors influencing voter behavior, such as political engagement or institutional trust. The mean score of 3.22 places this item within the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), affirming that improving socio-economic conditions is seen as a viable solution to boost voter participation and reduce political disengagement in future elections. This suggests that respondents view socio-economic improvement as crucial for restoring trust in government and enhancing electoral participation.

Item 3: Socio-economic Status Significantly Influences Individuals' Access to Information and Education on Government Policies, Affecting their Level of Trust in Government.

Table: 4.32

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	116	11.7	11.7	11.7
A	161	16.2	16.2	27.9
Valid D	373	37.6	37.6	65.5
SD	342	34.5	34.5	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

The mean score for this item was 2.42, which indicates it was rejected by respondents. 16.2% strongly agreed, 28.3% agreed with the statement, while a significant 36.3% disagreed, and 19.2% strongly disagreed. This shows that a majority of respondents did not consider INEC's credibility and transparency to be a key factor in their decision to vote or abstain. The rejection of this item suggests that for many respondents, issues such as security or personal interests might have been more influential in determining their participation in the elections.

Item 4: Individuals with Lower Socio-economic Status are more likely to Distrust Government and are less likely to participate in Elections due to Financial Constraints

Table:4. 33

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	123	12.4	12.4	12.4
A	184	18.5	18.5	30.9
Valid D	402	40.5	40.5	71.5
SD	283	28.5	28.5	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.37, this item was rejected by respondents. Only 12.4% strongly agreed, while 18.5% agreed with the statement that individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints. In contrast, a significant 40.5% disagreed and 28.5% strongly disagreed.

This suggests that a majority of respondents did not consider financial constraint as the primary factor that influences distrust of government or discourages electoral participation. The rejection of this item indicates that respondents in Gombe may have believed other factors, such as security concerns, local political dynamics, or issues of voter mobilization, played a more significant role in their decision to vote or abstain. The mean score of 2.37 falls below the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), confirming that this item was not supported by the majority of respondents. This suggests that financial constraints were not viewed as the primary barrier to political participation, and other socio-political factors were likely considered more influential in shaping voter behavior during the 2023 elections.

Item 5: Distance and Restrictions on Vehicular Movement Deter Voters with Lower Socio-economic Status from Accessing Polling Units, Further Increasing their Distrust in Government and Reducing Voter Turnout

Table:4. 34

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	151	15.2	15.2	15.2
A	166	16.7	16.7	32.0
Valid D	413	41.6	41.6	73.6
SD	262	26.4	26.4	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.46, this item was rejected by respondents. 15.2% strongly agreed and 16.7% agreed with the statement that distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout. However, a large proportion of respondents (41.6% disagreed) and 26.4% strongly disagreed, indicating that they did not see distance and movement restrictions as significant deterrents to voting. The rejection of this item suggests that, for the majority of respondents, logistical issues related to distance and transportation were not considered major factors in shaping their decision to vote or abstain. Instead, other socio-political factors, such as security concerns or local political dynamics, may have been viewed as more influential in determining voter participation and trust in the electoral process.

The mean score of 2.46 falls below the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), reinforcing that this item was not supported by the majority of respondents. This implies that while distance and transportation restrictions may have affected some voters, they were not viewed as the primary barriers to participation in the 2023 elections.

Interview from Respondents

To support the views of the surveyed respondents, one of the top INEC officials in Gombe state shared the following perspective:

"Economic struggles, such as the rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, have a significant impact on voters' decisions in Gombe. Many people, especially from lower socio-economic backgrounds, feel disconnected from the political process due to their daily economic challenges. They believe the government is not addressing their issues, which increases their distrust in the system. For many, voting becomes a secondary concern when survival becomes the priority. This sentiment was reflected in the 2023 elections, where voters in economically disadvantaged areas expressed apathy towards the polls. Many felt that the system would not change, regardless of their participation. Furthermore, socio-economic status could play a huge role in determining who gets access to information, particularly in rural areas where most people don't have the resources to stay informed about government policies. Those in lower socio-economic classes often rely on informal sources for information, which can sometimes be inaccurate or biased. When people don't have the information they need, they become disengaged. In many cases, this lack of access to reliable information can breed a sense of distrust towards the government, especially when they feel decisions are being made without their input. It's harder to encourage participation when people feel excluded from the process. This directly impacts their trust in government because they feel left out of the formal channels of communication that shapes political decisions. Also, let me point out that logistical challenges are a real issue, especially in rural areas. Many people cannot afford transport to polling units, and even if they could, the distance is often too far. For people already struggling with financial challenges, this becomes another reason not to vote. In many

cases, they simply can't afford the time or money to go to the polls. These challenges definitely increase distrust in the government. When people face barriers that prevent them from voting, it sends the message that the government doesn't care about their needs. The feeling that the system is rigged or designed to exclude them from participation leads to greater disillusionment and further erodes trust in the electoral process.” (IDI 7, 2025)

A respondent from one of the civil society shared his thought:

"In Gombe, economic struggles are compounded by insecurity, making voter participation more challenging. The rising cost of living and unemployment directly influenced the decision of voters' to stay at home during the elections. For people living on the edge of poverty, voting often takes a backseat to more immediate concerns. It's not just financial constraints; there's also a significant sense of distrust in the political system. People from low socio-economic backgrounds often feel that their voices don't matter, and this is exacerbated by a lack of economic opportunities. I agree that financial constraints are a big barrier. But beyond just money, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds often feel disconnected from the political process. They've seen little changes in their lives despite elections, so there's a strong sense of apathy. They feel their vote won't make a difference in changing the conditions they live in. Political violence and insecurity also play a huge role in voter disengagement. When people feel that voting doesn't guarantee a safer or more prosperous life, they see no value in it. Even if they wanted to vote, many of them worry about their safety. Another significant issue is logistical challenge faced by lower socio-economic groups. In many rural areas, polling units are far from the communities, and transportation is either scarce or too expensive. This effectively discourages many from voting, especially when they feel that their vote won't change anything. These factors, combined

with financial hardship, make it even harder to encourage participation” (IDI 7, 2025).

A traditional ruler from Gombe state noted:

"In my community, the constant struggle with poverty and the lack of economic opportunities is a major concern for many. Despite some security personnel being stationed, voters still felt unsafe to go to the polls. The financial strain many of our people face only heightens their reluctance to participate in elections. It's not just about the cost of voting; it's about the broader economic challenges that make people question the importance of voting. The government needs to focus more on socio-economic improvements to regain public trust and encourage higher voter participation. Also, the financial constraints faced by lower-income individuals often prevent them from fully participating in elections. When people struggle to make ends meet, the idea of voting can feel irrelevant, especially when they don't see how it will change their situation. Financially, it's difficult for some to even afford the transport to polling units, which compounds the problem. Beyond financial constraints, other factors include insecurity and political violence. When people feel unsafe going to the polls, they stay home, regardless of their financial situation. Additionally, political mobilization in Gombe is often driven by local leaders or political parties, and when people don't feel aligned with those influences, they disengage from the electoral process." (IDI 8, 2025)

A political office holder stated:

"From my experience, while political mobilization is crucial, the economic situation in the region is a huge barrier to voter engagement. The lack of economic opportunities, high unemployment, and the increasing cost of living discourage people from voting. They feel that

the system is not built for them, and even if they vote, nothing will change. Economic hardships lead to increased political apathy, and without addressing these issues, it's hard to improve voter turnout. Insecurity and fear of violence also play a significant role in keeping people away from the polls."(IDI 10, 2025)

An official from the Hope Foundation for the Disabled, Gombe state, explained that:

"Many people from marginalized communities, including those with disabilities, have expressed an overwhelming fear of violence during the election period. This fear is not unfounded. In many parts of the country, elections are often accompanied by political unrest, violence, and intimidation. For individuals with disabilities, the risk is even higher. In some instances, polling stations are inaccessible, and the infrastructure is not designed to accommodate those with mobility challenges. The fear of being physically harmed, or even targeted due to their perceived vulnerability, has created an atmosphere of deep apprehension among these individuals. In addition to these safety concerns, the rising cost of living and the increasing unemployment rate have contributed to a sense of hopelessness. For many in marginalized communities, the struggle to meet basic needs like food, healthcare, and housing takes precedence over civic duties such as voting. The economic instability has left many feeling that their votes won't have any real impact on their daily lives. It's a difficult reality when survival becomes a much more pressing concern than participating in an electoral process that feels disconnected from their struggles. What we're also seeing is a pervasive belief that the government is not adequately addressing the economic challenges that these communities face. Despite the promises made by politicians during election campaigns, the issues of poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to healthcare or education remains unresolved. This growing disillusionment is further fueled by the perception that

politicians only care about these communities during election periods. Once they are in power, the promises are forgotten, and the struggles of marginalized groups are ignored. For people with disabilities, this often translates into a complete sense of abandonment by the system. For many, voting becomes less of a priority when their basic needs aren't being met. The feeling is that the system is working for others, not for them, and that their participation in the electoral process won't lead to any meaningful change. This was evident in the survey findings, where a significant number of respondents from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those from rural areas or with disabilities, felt disconnected from the political process. Many of them mentioned that they simply didn't see the point in voting because they had never felt the tangible benefits of participating in past elections. So, it's important to acknowledge that voting is not just a right but also a privilege. A privilege that, for many, feels unattainable when their daily reality is one of economic hardship, insecurity, and social exclusion. Until these communities see real improvements in their living conditions, and until they feel that their voices matter in the political sphere, the engagement of marginalized groups in the electoral process will continue to be limited."(IDI 11, 2025).

A top official from the Arewa youth forum in Gombe offered this reflection:

"As youth leaders, we've seen how disillusionment affects voter turnout. The youth in Gombe are often caught up in the struggle to survive as unemployment and economic hardship dominate their daily lives. They feel that political participation won't change their situation. While we tried to encourage them to vote, many remained disengaged because they didn't believe it would make a difference. The survey also highlighted this disillusionment, showing that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds often feel disconnected from the political system due to economic struggles. The lack of economic security contributes to a

sense of helplessness, further discouraging political engagement."(IDI 12, 2025).

The survey and interviews collectively reveal that socio-economic struggles, including the rising cost of living, unemployment and poverty, play a central role in shaping voter participation and trust in government in Gombe state. Economic difficulties, combined with insecurity and political violence, have created a cycle of political disengagement, particularly among lower socio-economic groups. Addressing these socio-economic barriers is crucial for restoring trust in the electoral system and encouraging higher voter participation in future elections.

Research Question Three: How did distrust in government institutions shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?(Ekiti)

Table 4.35: (n-1028)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	Distrust of government manifested in failed campaign promises. Lack of good governance discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 elections.	346 (33.7%)	538 (52.3%)	104 (10.1%)	40 (3.9%)	3.37	Accepted
2	Electoral fraud is one of the likely causes of citizen's lack of trust in government.	371 (36.1%)	576 (56.0%)	47 (4.6%)	34 (3.3%)	3.28	Accepted
3	Voters abstained from the 2023 elections because elected officials do not often involve citizens in key policies and do not adequately represent the interests of the people.	381 (37.1%)	566 (55.1%)	51 (5.0%)	30 (2.9%)	3.28	Accepted
4	Lack of satisfaction with the responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of citizens causes distrust of government	476 (46.3%)	415 (40.4%)	96 (9.3%)	41 (4.0%)	3.30	Accepted
5	The electorates trust in the electoral process is low because of perceived government interference.	426 (41.4%)	472 (45.9%)	68 (6.6%)	62 (6.0%)	3.23	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1

Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

The data in table 35 examines how distrust in government shaped electoral behavior during the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe states. The respondents were asked about various factors related to distrust of government, such as broken campaign promises, electoral fraud, lack of citizen involvement in policymaking, government's unresponsiveness, and perceptions of government interference in the electoral process. Below is an interpretation of the findings based on the responses provided.

Item 1: Distrust in Government institutions Manifested in Failed Campaign Promises, Lack of Good Governance Discouraged Voters from Participating in the 2023 Elections.

Table: 4.36

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	346	33.7	33.7	33.7
A	538	52.3	52.3	86.0
Valid D	104	10.1	10.1	96.1
SD	40	3.9	3.9	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.37, this item was accepted by respondents. A combined 86.0% (33.7% strongly agreeing and 52.3% agreeing) agreed that failed campaign promises and lack of good governance contributed to voters' decision to abstain from voting. This suggests that respondents viewed the government's failure to deliver on promises as a significant factor in their lack of trust and, consequently, their decision not to participate in the election. Only 14.0% (10.1% disagreeing and 3.9% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, further reinforcing that distrust arising from unfulfilled promises played a key role in voter apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states.

Item 2: Electoral Fraud is one of the likely Causes of Citizens' Lack of Trust in Government.

Table : 4.37

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	371	36.1	36.1	36.1
A	576	56.0	56.0	92.1
Valid D	47	4.6	4.6	96.7
SD	34	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

The mean score for this item was 3.28, which indicates that it was accepted by the respondents. A total of 92.1% (36.1% strongly agreeing and 56.0% agreeing) agreed that electoral fraud contributed to citizens' distrust in the government. This highlights a strong belief that the electoral process itself is compromised and that electoral fraud undermines public confidence in the system. Only 10.0% (4.6% disagreeing and 3.3% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, suggesting that electoral fraud is a prominent factor in shaping the distrust of government, thus influencing voter participation.

Item 3: Voters Abstain From the 2023 Elections because Elected Officials do not often Involve Citizens in Key Policies and do not Adequately Represent the Interests of the People.

Table: 4.38

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	381	37.1	37.1	37.1
A	566	55.1	55.1	92.1
Valid D	51	5.0	5.0	97.1
SD	30	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.28, which also indicates that it was accepted by respondents. A combined 92.2% (37.1% strongly agreeing and 55.1% agreeing) agreed that the lack of citizen involvement in key policies and inadequate representation by elected officials led to voters abstaining. This suggests that the electorate felt disconnected from their representatives and disillusioned by the lack of responsiveness, leading to disengagement in the electoral process. Only 7.9% (5.0% disagreeing and 2.9% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, reinforcing the idea that the lack of adequate representation is a major factor in voter apathy.

Item 4: Lack of Satisfaction with the Responsiveness of Government Institutions to the Needs of Citizens Causes Distrust of Government.

Table: 4.39

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SA	476	46.3	46.3	46.3
A	415	40.4	40.4	86.7
D	96	9.3	9.3	96.0
SD	41	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Sources: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.30, this item was accepted by the respondents. A total of 86.7% (46.3% strongly agreeing and 40.4% agreeing) agreed that the lack of responsiveness from government institutions contributed to distrust in government. This finding indicates that when citizens feel their needs are ignored or inadequately addressed by government institutions, their trust in the government declines, leading to disengagement from the political process. Only 13.3% (9.3% disagreeing and 4.0% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, suggesting that government responsiveness is a significant factor in shaping political behavior.

Item 5: The Electorate’s Trust in the Electoral Process is Low Because of Perceived Government Interference.

Table: 4.40

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	426	41.4	41.4	41.4
A	472	45.9	45.9	87.4
Valid D	68	6.6	6.6	94.0
SD	62	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

This item had a mean score of 3.23, indicating that it was accepted by the majority of respondents. A combined 87.3% (41.4% strongly agreeing and 45.9% agreeing) agreed that government interference contributed to a lack of trust in the electoral process. This suggests that the perception of government manipulation in the electoral process discouraged voters from participating, as they believed the process was unfair or biased. Only 12.7% (6.6% disagreeing and 6.0% strongly disagreeing) disagreed, further confirming the impact of perceived electoral interference on voter apathy.

The findings from table 12 indicate that distrust of government played a significant role in shaping citizens’ electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections. Respondents strongly agreed that factors such as failed campaign promises, electoral fraud, lack of citizen involvement in policymaking, poor government responsiveness, and perceptions of government interference in the electoral process contributed to voter apathy. These results highlight the importance of good governance, transparency, and the need for greater representation of citizens’ interests in reducing distrust and increasing voter participation. The overwhelming agreement on these issues underscores the deep-seated disillusionment with the political system, which in turn influences electoral behavior and voter turnout.

Interview from Respondents (Ekiti State)

To buttress the view of the surveyed respondents, the survey results indicate that distrust of government, stemming from factors such as failed campaign promises, lack of good governance, electoral fraud, and poor responsiveness of government institutions, had a significant impact on voter behavior during the 2023 general elections in Ekiti state. This is corroborated by the extracts from in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted to look into these factors

A prominent political office holder, highlighted a critical issue that contributed to the widespread voter disengagement, the disconnect between campaign promises and the reality faced by citizens. She emphasized that when politicians fail to deliver on their promises, it breeds a sense of disillusionment, making participation in elections seem futile for many voters, as unmet promises and poor governance have led to decreased faith in the political system and, consequently, lower voter turnout:

"The underlying issue for many people is the stark gap between the promises made during campaigns and the reality they face once politicians are in office. People feel let down, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The disconnect between what politicians promise and what they deliver has left many disillusioned with the system. In fact, some of them will disappear once they win elections only to reappear in the next election circle. Many voters we spoke to during this election period expressed frustration that they hadn't seen the changes they were promised, whether it's in terms of employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, or basic services. When citizens no longer trust that the government can fulfill its promises, participation in elections becomes a meaningless exercise for them. This lack of faith in the system, coupled with poor governance, discourages many from voting altogether. They feel that their votes won't lead to any real change, which is why voter turnout was low in many areas" (IDI 1, 2025).

This shows the impact of unmet campaign promises and the resulting disillusionment that undermines electoral participation, and contributes to voter apathy. It reflects the central argument of this research, which suggests that when citizens perceive the political system as ineffective or unresponsive to their needs, distrust sets in and they are less likely to engage in the electoral process.

In addition, poor governance shapes voter trust and participation. A key official of the INEC in Ekiti state revealed that electoral fraud is a critical issue that undermines public confidence in the electoral system. The respondent emphasized that many citizens, particularly those in Ekiti state, have significant concerns about the legitimacy of the electoral process due to widespread fears of fraud, such as ballot box snatching and vote manipulation. This lack of trust in the fairness of the process has created a sense of futility among voters, discouraging them from participating in the 2023 general elections. He noted that:

"Electoral fraud remains a core reason why many citizens lose trust in the political system. In my conversations with voters, it became apparent that people were concerned about the legitimacy of the electoral process. They often talked about the fear of rigged elections, ballot box stuffing, and other forms of fraud that they believe happen behind closed doors. These concerns are not just isolated incidents, they are widespread. People see examples of fraud in almost every election cycle and that leads to a feeling of helplessness. When citizens no longer believe their vote counts because of the perceived manipulation of the electoral process, their level of trust in the government diminishes. Many felt that voting was a futile effort if the process was not fair. The electoral system is supposed to be transparent and trustworthy, but people's lack of confidence in it, particularly due to perceived fraud, was a major deterrent to participation in 2023" (IDI 2, 2025).

KII4 buttresses the above, he observed: *"We observed that in many areas, especially those with lower socio-economic statuses, people didn't participate in the election because they were convinced the system was rigged. The perception that the government interferes with the electoral process was very*

strong. Citizens believe that no matter how hard they try to vote, the government and political elites have already decided the outcome. This, combined with economic struggles, left many feeling that there was no point in participating. They weren't interested in voting because they didn't trust that the election process would lead to any meaningful change" (IDI 4, 2025).

These highlights the pervasive sense of disillusionment felt by many voters, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who believe that their votes will not make a difference in the outcome of the election. Thus, when citizens perceive the electoral system as manipulated and influenced by political elites, it leads to a decrease in voters' trust and a significant decline in voter turnout. Economic struggles further exacerbate this disengagement, making it difficult for people to find motivation to participate in the electoral process. These underscore the critical role that perceptions of electoral fraud play in eroding trust in the electoral system, aligning with the high percentage of respondents who identified electoral fraud as a likely cause of distrust of government, which subsequently influenced their decision to abstain from voting.

Furthermore, KII3 revealed the significant impact of government responsiveness, or the lack thereof, on citizens' distrust of government and the political system. He noted that many citizens felt disconnected from the political process, especially when they perceived that their elected officials failed to represent their interests or consult them on key policy decisions. This sense of alienation has contributed to voter disillusionment, particularly among those who feel their voices are ignored, asserting:

"One of the most telling signs of distrust in the system is the way voters talk about the government's lack of responsiveness. Citizens want to feel like they matter, that their concerns are being addressed, but over the years, there's been a growing perception that elected officials don't care about the needs of the people. This is particularly evident when it comes to the participation of citizens in key policy decisions. Many people have expressed that they don't feel represented by their elected officials, especially when decisions are made without consultation or input from the public. In fact, this sense of alienation is

one of the reasons many people didn't vote in the 2023 elections. They feel left out of the decision-making process and it leaves them with a deep sense of disillusionment with the government" (IDI 3, 2025).

This corroborates the survey result, showing that voters abstained due to their lack of involvement in the political process, and a failure by elected officials to adequately represent their interests. It highlights that when people feel excluded from decision-making, their faith in the electoral process wanes, leading to lower voter turnout. This aligns with the survey data indicating that citizens' lack of trust is influenced by a perceived disconnect between the government and the electorates. Restoring trust in the government requires not only political representation but also genuine efforts to engage citizens in meaningful dialogue about the policies that affect their lives.

Also, a crucial issue was raised by KII6 on the perception that the government has not genuinely invested in the well-being of its citizens. She pointed out that, particularly in rural areas, the disconnect between citizens' needs and the government's actions has led to widespread disillusionment and a lack of trust in the political system. This lack of responsiveness, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and employment, has significantly contributed to voter disengagement and lower voter turnout. She noted:

"One of the biggest problems we face in this community is the perception that the government is not truly invested in the well-being of its citizens. There's a widespread belief that government officials are more concerned with their own interests than with improving the lives of ordinary people. In rural areas, this is even more pronounced. When the government fails to respond to the needs of its citizens whether it's in terms of healthcare, education, or employment the people begin to lose faith in the political system altogether. The impact of this lack of responsiveness is felt in every election. People simply don't trust the process, and many choose to stay home on election day because they believe their votes won't change anything" (IDI 6, 2025).

This statement highlights the deep-rooted dissatisfaction that arises when citizens perceive that their government is not meeting their fundamental needs. The above remarks align with the survey findings on the low trust in government institutions' responsiveness to citizens' needs. The perception of poor governance and lack of adequate service delivery was identified as a significant factor leading to voter apathy. As long as government institutions fail to adequately address the concerns of the electorates, voter trust and engagement are severely undermined. The resulting sense of futility leads many to disengage from the electoral process altogether, which contributes to low voter turnout.

In an effort to understand the factors contributing to the low voter turnout among young people, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth leaders in Ekiti State. One such interview with the youth leader revealed the extent to which distrust in the political system has particularly affected the younger generation. KII 4 emphasized that many young people feel disconnected from the political process, viewing politicians as out of touch with their daily struggles, such as unemployment, poor education, and limited opportunities. This perception of neglect, coupled with a deep sense of disillusionment over unmet promises, has led to widespread disengagement from the electoral process. He asserted that:

"Young people are particularly affected by the lack of trust in the system. Many of them feel that politicians are disconnected from the realities they face every day, unemployment, poor education and lack of opportunities. They feel like their voices don't matter, especially when politicians make promises they never intend to keep. There's also a general mistrust in the electoral process, as many young people believe elections are rigged or manipulated. The government's failure to engage with the youth meaningfully and the corruption they perceive in the system have made many young people feel like voting is a waste of time. They feel disenfranchised and believe that no matter what they do, the government won't change" (IDI 4, 2025).

This mirrors the survey findings that indicated a significant level of distrust among young voters, which is largely driven by perceived corruption, unmet promises and the government's failure to engage with youth effectively. This perspective highlights the deep-rooted sense of

disenfranchisement that prevents young people from participating in the electoral process. When young citizens feel that their voices are ignored and that the system is rigged against them, they are less likely to vote, further exacerbating the problem of low voter turnout.

The findings from the in-depth interviews support the survey data that indicates distrust in government, stemming from failed campaign promises, electoral fraud, lack of representation, poor governance, and perceived interference in the electoral process. This played a central role in shaping citizens' electoral behavior during the 2023 general elections in Ekiti and Gombe states. The interviews reveal that many citizens, particularly those in rural areas and from lower socio-economic backgrounds, felt disconnected from the political system and saw no point in participating in an election they believed would not bring meaningful change. This sense of disillusionment, compounded by corruption and poor governance, significantly contributed to low voter turnout and voter apathy in the election.

Analysis of Research Questions and In-Depth Interview (GOMBE STATE)

Research Question Three: Research Question Three: How did distrust in government institutions shape citizens’ electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?

Table 4.41: (n-992)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F(%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	Distrust of government manifested in failed campaign promises. Lack of good governance discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 elections.	364 (36.7%)	329 (33.2%)	186 (18.8%)	113 (11.4%)	2.95	Accepted
2	Electoral fraud is one of the likely causes of citizen's lack of trust in government.	331 (33.4%)	423 (42.6%)	186 (18.8%)	52 (5.2%)	3.04	Accepted
3	Voters abstain from the 2023 elections because elected officials do not often involve citizens in key policies and do not adequately represent the interests of the people.	310 (31.3%)	226 (22.8%)	342 (34.5%)	114 (11.5%)	2.74	Accepted
4	Lack of satisfaction with the responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of citizens causes distrust of government	314 (31.7%)	429 (43.2%)	132 (13.3%)	117 (11.8%)	2.95	Accepted
5	The electorates trust in the electoral process is low because of perceived government interference.	332 (33.5%)	334 (33.7%)	178 (17.9%)	148 (14.9%)	2.86	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1
Decision Rule: The cut–off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean ≥ 2.50 = Accepted While Mean < 2.50 = Rejected

Interpretation:

The data in Table 41 examines how distrust in government shaped electoral behavior during the 2023 general Elections in Gombe states. The respondents were asked about various factors related to distrust of government, such as broken campaign promises, electoral fraud, lack of citizen involvement in policymaking, government responsiveness, and perceptions of government interference in the electoral process. Below is an interpretation of the findings based on the responses provided.

Item 1: Distrust in the Government has Discouraged me from Participating in the 2023 Elections.

Table: 4.42

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	364	36.7	36.7	36.7
A	329	33.2	33.2	69.9
Valid D	186	18.8	18.8	88.6
SD	113	11.4	11.4	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

Data from table 42 and figure 38 shows a mean score of 2.87, this item was rejected by respondents. 36.7% strongly agreed and 33.2% agreed with the statement that distrust in the government discouraged them from participating in the 2023 elections, while 18.8% disagreed and 11.4% strongly disagreed. This suggests that while a significant portion of respondents acknowledged the role of distrust in their decision to abstain from voting, the majority of respondents did not consider this the primary factor influencing their decision. The mean score of 2.87 is within the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), but the disagreement from a large

portion of respondents indicates that other factors may have been more influential, such as political dynamics or security issues.

Item 2: Electoral fraud is one of the likely Causes of Citizens' Lack of Trust of Government.

Table: 4.43

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	331	33.4	33.4	33.4
A	423	42.6	42.6	76.0
Valid D	186	18.8	18.8	94.8
SD	52	5.2	5.2	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.05, this item was accepted by respondents. 33.4% strongly agreed and 42.6% agreed that electoral fraud contributed to the lack of trust in the government, while 18.8% disagreed and 5.2% strongly disagreed. The high level of agreement (76%) reflects the widespread belief among respondents that electoral fraud is a significant factor undermining their trust in government and the electoral process. The mean score of 3.05 falls within the accepted range, confirming that respondents view electoral fraud as a major cause of distrust in the government.

Item 3: I did not Vote in the 2023 Elections because I feel that Elected Officials do not represent the Interests of the People.

Table: 4.44

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	310	31.3	31.3	31.3
A	226	22.8	22.8	54.0
Valid D	342	34.5	34.5	88.5
SD	114	11.5	11.5	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.60, this item was rejected by respondents. 31.3% strongly agreed and 22.8% agreed that elected officials do not represent the interests of the people, which influenced their decision to abstain from voting. However, a significant 34.5% disagreed and 11.5% strongly disagreed, indicating that the majority of respondents did not consider inadequate representation by elected officials as a major factor in their decision to not vote. The mean score of 2.60 falls below the accepted range, suggesting that other factors, such as personal interests, political engagement, or security concerns, may have been more influential in their voting behavior.

Item 4: Lack of Satisfaction with the Responsiveness of Government Institutions to the Needs of Citizens Causes Distrust of Government.

Table:4. 45

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	314	31.7	31.7	31.7
A	429	43.2	43.2	74.9
Valid D	132	13.3	13.3	88.2
SD	117	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.98, this item was accepted by respondents. 31.7% strongly agreed and 43.2% agreed that dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of government institutions to citizens' needs causes distrust in government. Only 13.3% disagreed and 11.8% strongly disagreed, indicating that the majority of respondents see government responsiveness as an important factor influencing trust in government. The mean score of 2.98 is within the accepted range, confirming that dissatisfaction with government responsiveness is viewed as a significant cause of distrust.

Item 5: My trust in the Electoral Process is low because of Perceived Government Interference.

Table: 4.46

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SA	332	33.5	33.5	33.5
A	334	33.7	33.7	67.1
D	178	17.9	17.9	85.1
SD	148	14.9	14.9	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.01, this item was accepted by respondents. 33.5% strongly agreed and 33.7% agreed that their low trust in the electoral process was due to perceived government interference. 17.9% disagreed and 14.9% strongly disagreed, indicating that a significant portion of respondents believed that government interference negatively affected their trust in the electoral process. The mean score of 3.01 is within the accepted range, confirming that government interference is a significant factor in shaping respondents' trust in the electoral process.

The findings from table 46 and figure 42 suggested that distrust of government significantly shapes citizens' electoral behavior in Gombe states. Factors such as electoral fraud, lack of government responsiveness, and government interference were seen as major contributors to distrust of government, which ultimately influenced voter turnout. However, other issues such as electoral representation and dissatisfaction with responsiveness were not seen as primary drivers of voter behavior.

Research Question Four: What were the effects of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria? (Ekiti)

Table 4.47: (n-1028)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	Election turnout is persistently low because electorates with distrust in government are less inclined to participate.	439 (42.7%)	368 (35.8%)	159 (15.5%)	62 (6.0%)	3.15	Accepted
2	The actions and decisions of government institutions in Nigeria are less transparent.	373 (36.3%)	556 (54.1%)	82 (8.0%)	17 (1.7%)	3.24	Accepted
3	There is perceived electoral inefficacy as voters believe their votes do not count due to widespread electoral fraud and manipulation, discouraging participation.	492 (47.9%)	453 (44.1%)	60 (5.8%)	23 (2.2%)	3.38	Accepted
4	Distrust in government promotes vote buying as voters participate only when financially induced.	494 (48.1%)	444 (43.2%)	65 (6.3%)	25 (2.4%)	3.37	Accepted
5	Persistent distrust delegitimizes and erodes the electoral institutions' credibility.	457 (44.5%)	485 (47.2%)	49 (4.8%)	37 (3.6%)	3.32	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1
Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

Interpretation

Item 1: Election Turnout is Persistently Low because Electorates with Distrust in Government are Less Inclined to Participate.

Table: 4.48

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	439	42.7	42.7	42.7
A	368	35.8	35.8	78.5
Valid D	159	15.5	15.5	94.0
SD	62	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.15, this item was accepted by respondents. 42.7% strongly agreed and 35.8% agreed that low voter turnout is primarily due to distrust in government, which leads electorates to be less inclined to participate. The high agreement percentage (78.5%) indicates that the majority of respondents believe that distrust in government is a significant factor contributing to low voter turnout. The mean score of 3.15 falls within the accepted range, confirming that respondents feel the negative impact of distrust in government on voter participation.

Item 2: The Actions and Decisions of Government Institutions in Nigeria are Less Transparent.

Table: 4.49

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	373	36.3	36.3	36.3
A	556	54.1	54.1	90.4
Valid D	82	8.0	8.0	98.3
SD	17	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.24, this item was accepted by respondents. 36.3% strongly agreed and 54.1% agreed that government institutions in Nigeria are less transparent. The vast majority of respondents (90.4%) agree with this statement, indicating a widespread belief that transparency issues are contributing to distrust in government. The mean score of 3.24 places this item within the accepted range, confirming the respondents' strong view that government transparency is a critical issue in fostering distrust.

Item 3: There is Perceived Electoral Inefficacy as Voters Believe their Votes do not Count Due to Widespread Electoral Fraud and Manipulation, Discouraging Participation.

Table:4. 50

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	492	47.9	47.9	47.9
A	453	44.1	44.1	91.9
Valid D	60	5.8	5.8	97.8
SD	23	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.38, this item was accepted by respondents. 47.9% strongly agreed and 44.1% agreed that electoral fraud and manipulation contribute to the belief that votes do not count, discouraging voter participation. This strong agreement (92%) reflects the belief that electoral inefficacy is a significant factor leading to voter apathy. The mean score of 3.38 is within the accepted range, reinforcing the idea that perceived electoral manipulation undermines trust and participation in the electoral process.

Item 4: Distrust in Government Promotes Vote Buying as Voters Participate Only when Financially Induced.

Table:4. 51

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	494	48.1	48.1	48.1
A	444	43.2	43.2	91.2
Valid D	65	6.3	6.3	97.6
SD	25	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.37, this item was accepted by respondents. 48.1% strongly agreed and 43.2% agreed that distrust in government leads to vote buying, as voters are financially induced to participate. The overwhelming agreement (91.2%) indicates that many respondents perceive a connection between political distrust and the prevalence of vote buying. The mean score of 3.37 confirms that respondents view this issue as a significant concern influencing electoral behavior.

Item 5: Persistent distrust delegitimizes and erodes the electoral institutions' credibility.

Table:4. 52

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	457	44.5	44.5	44.5
A	485	47.2	47.2	91.6
Valid D	49	4.8	4.8	96.4
SD	37	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	1028	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.32, this item was accepted by respondents. 44.5% strongly agreed and 47.2% agreed that persistent distrust in government erodes the credibility of electoral institutions. A total of 91.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, highlighting the significant impact of distrust on the legitimacy of electoral bodies. The mean score of 3.32 confirms that respondents view the erosion of institutional credibility as a serious consequence of ongoing political distrust.

The results from table 12 show that distrust in government significantly affects voter apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states. Respondents strongly agree that factors such as electoral fraud, lack of transparency and government interference contribute to distrust and voter disengagement. Additionally, respondents acknowledge that persistent distrust not only discourages participation but also promotes vote buying and undermines the credibility of electoral institutions. These findings indicate that addressing political transparency and institutional trust is crucial for enhancing voter participation and restoring confidence in the electoral process.

Interview from Respondents IDI

Interview from respondents on the effects of distrust of government on voters' apathy in Ekiti: Election turnout in Ekiti has consistently been low, a trend that reflects a deep-rooted distrust of the government among the electorates. One of the top INEC officials in Ekiti noted that

"Elections turnout in Ekiti has been on a steady decline compared to what we have in the 70s and the aborted third republic, and distrust of government plays a significant role in this. Many voters in Ekiti feel that their votes don't matter, and that the entire political process is rigged. This feeling of disillusionment is widespread, and it's not just a passing concern, it's become a pervasive mindset. From our experience, we've seen that voters who hold these beliefs are less likely to show up at polling stations. This distrust is not something that can be easily dismissed. It stems from years of feeling unheard and unrepresented, particularly in areas where the government has not

addressed the pressing needs of the people. When people believe that their participation won't lead to any tangible change, they lose faith in the system and disengage from the electoral process altogether. Also, political apathy is most visible in areas where poverty is rampant. In these communities, the everyday struggle to survive often overshadows the idea of participating in an election. People are more focused on finding ways to put food on the table or addressing their immediate economic needs than on casting their vote. For many, the electoral process seems irrelevant when their basic needs remain unmet, and their concerns are not addressed by the government. It's a stark reality when people are disillusioned with the system, when they feel neglected and unheard, their participation in elections becomes a lower priority. It's a vicious cycle. Low turnout leads to fewer voices being heard, and that in turn reinforces the belief that their participation doesn't matter. This is not just a matter of indifference; it's a direct result of years of broken promises and unfulfilled expectations. The effect of this is that few electorates make choices for the larger population. So, whether these decisions are the best or not, everyone will suffer the consequences irrespective of those who voted or not" (IDI, 3, 2025)

The lack of transparency in the actions and decisions of government institutions in Nigeria is a pressing issue that directly impacts voter engagement, leading to widespread apathy. A respondent from a civil society organization in Ekiti shared:

"One of the most significant challenges we face is the deep-rooted perception of a lack of transparency in government actions. This is not just a passing concern, it's a core issue that affects every interaction the public has with the government. Majority of citizens believe that government institutions are not transparent enough in their operations. Without transparency, it becomes difficult for people to believe that government actions are being made in their best interest. This perception breeds a sense of exclusion and reinforces the view that the

political system serves only a small elite, rather than the everyday citizen. In many parts of Nigeria, especially in Ekiti, there is a prevailing belief that the government operates in secrecy. People see policies being enacted without their consultation or consent, and this lack of openness isn't merely frustrating, it's alienating. It sends a clear message to the electorates that their opinions are irrelevant, that their struggles are ignored, and that their needs are not a priority for those in power. This sense of detachment from the decision-making process has a direct and profound effect on voter participation. When people feel that they have no voice in shaping policies that affect their daily lives, and when they believe the system is rigged or operates in secrecy, their faith in the political process begins to deteriorate. For many, the idea of participating in an election when they already feel excluded from the decision-making process is not just disappointing, it's demoralizing. How can they be expected to cast a meaningful vote when the decisions that govern their lives are being made without their input or approval? The pervasive belief that political power is concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful elite only exacerbates this disillusionment. Voters begin to feel as though their participation in elections will have no impact because the system, in their eyes, is designed to benefit only those in power. This cycle of distrust and disengagement has a powerful and destructive effect on voter turnout. When people lose faith in the system, they are less likely to engage with it. If they believe their voice will be drowned out by the political elites, or that the entire electoral process is a façade, they see little point in voting. This apathy undermines the legitimacy of elections and further perpetuates the sense that political participation is futile. The more this pattern repeats, the harder it becomes to reinvigorate meaningful political engagement and restore trust in the system. Voter apathy becomes entrenched, and the political system continues to alienate the very people it is supposed to serve." (ID1 4, 2025)

Widespread perception that electoral processes are ineffective due to electoral fraud and manipulation has deeply eroded trust in the voting system. A traditional ruler in Ekiti shared:

The widespread perception that electoral processes are ineffective due to electoral fraud and manipulation has deeply eroded trust in the voting system. A traditional ruler in Ekiti shared:

"As community leaders, we have consistent worries about the rising disillusionment with the electoral system especially at the grassroots level. Just look at the local government's elections conducted over the years. How many of these elections could pass the barest standard of free and fair elections? The belief that votes do not count because of electoral fraud and manipulation is not only common but pervasive. This belief is discouraging many from voting. It's not unusual for people to say, 'Why bother voting if the system is rigged?' This sentiment speaks to a deeper issue of perceived electoral inefficacy, which is one of the key reasons we see such low turnout during elections. When people feel that their votes will not matter, when they believe that the outcome is already decided by those in power their motivation to participate is greatly diminished. This widespread disillusionment with the fairness and legitimacy of the system leads many to stay home during elections, convinced that their participation is pointless. I can remember vividly that there was a time election was held in this town and we had more than 50,000 votes as at 1993. After that election this town never passed the 20,000 votes mark. The perception of electoral fraud does more than just create disillusionment. It undermines the very integrity of the system. People begin to believe that the political process is skewed in favour of the powerful elite, and no matter how many votes are cast, the outcome will always be shaped by those with the most influence and resources. This sense of powerlessness reinforces a cycle of disengagement. As a result, individuals, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, choose to completely withdraw from the system. The sentiment that the

election is "rigged," that results are decided behind the scenes before voters even step into the polling booth becomes a powerful deterrent. People see the system as broken, and they feel they have no place in it. This sense of electoral futility is compounded by the consistent failure of electoral reforms and the unmet promises of free and fair elections. Every election cycle brings with it vows of reform of transparency, fairness, and accountability but when these promises remain unfulfilled, they only reinforce the belief that the system is irreparably flawed. When the government and electoral institutions fail to live up to their promises of transparency, it entrenches the notion that voting is futile. In this environment, it's easy to see why voter participation continues to decline. The low turnout isn't just a sign of disinterest; it is a reflection of a much deeper issue: the failure of the electoral system to restore trust and legitimacy. The more this cycle repeats, the more difficult it becomes to reinvigorate the political process and encourage meaningful participation in future elections." IDI2

The practice of vote-buying in Nigeria has become deeply entrenched, and one of the primary drivers of this phenomenon is the pervasive distrust in the government. A political office holder in Ekiti shared:

"The issue of vote-buying is a direct consequence of the pervasive distrust of government. This distrust has reached such alarming levels that, many voters are now only motivated to participate when there is a financial incentive. In Ekiti, the phenomenon of stomach infrastructure and (dibo ko sebe) that is, 'vote and cook' has serious consequences for the electoral system. Voters often feel that without some form of financial compensation, there is little hope for meaningful change through the electoral process. It's disheartening, but this has unfortunately become the reality we face. The widespread belief that the electoral system cannot deliver results unless there is some form of financial reward is a major driver of vote-buying. The political system

has lost so much credibility that, for many, receiving money or goods for their vote seems like the only tangible benefit they can derive from engaging in the process. This isn't just an isolated issue it has become a normalized practice in certain areas. With the present economic realities, economic hardship plays a significant role in making people more susceptible to vote-buying. For many, survival is a daily challenge. When people struggle to meet their basic needs, and the promises of change from political leaders remain unfulfilled year after year, the immediate financial incentives that comes with vote-buying becomes more appealing than any abstract notion of civic duty. Voters who are disillusioned with the electoral process begin to see vote-buying as a way to secure something, however small, in return for their participation. Politicians, recognizing this vulnerability, exploit the situation by offering money, food, or other material incentives to sway votes, which only deepens the cycle of distrust and electoral corruption. This situation is not just disempowering, it is a clear form of exploitation. It underscores the failure of the political system to restore any meaningful faith among the electorates. When citizens engage in the process solely because they are financially motivated, it starkly reflects the extent to which the system has eroded public trust. The continued disconnection between political promises and real outcomes amplifies the belief that elections are not about making a genuine choice, but about who can offer the most immediate reward. The very notion of democracy is undermined, as the process is reduced to transactional exchanges rather than a reflection of the people's collective will. The reality is that many voters in Ekiti, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, have lost faith in the idea that their vote can bring about real, lasting change. With vote-buying becoming a regular and expected feature of elections, the sense of cynicism towards the political system deepens. In such a scenario, electoral outcomes are seen as pre-determined by financial transactions, which not only

diminishes the integrity of the voting process but also perpetuates a dangerous cycle of dependency and corruption. People begin to believe that their participation has little impact unless there is something to gain in return, further eroding the very foundation of democratic engagement."

The persistent distrust in electoral institutions has become a major barrier to political engagement, with many feeling that the system has failed to live up to its promises. A top political office holder in Ekiti shared:

"Many people in our community, much like the broader population across Ekiti, feel that the electoral institutions have fundamentally failed them. This sentiment is echoed in the survey results, which show that the persistent distrust in these institutions has delegitimized them in the eyes of the people. When people feel that the system is unreliable and unresponsive to their needs, their belief in the credibility of the entire electoral process is shattered. As a result, a large portion of the electorates, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, feel disconnected and disengaged from the political system. This lack of trust is not a new phenomenon. It has been built up over many years of unfulfilled promises, reports of electoral malpractice, and the perception that the system works primarily for the benefit of the powerful elites rather than the ordinary citizen. The consequences of this lack of faith are profound. The constant erosion of trust in electoral institutions leads to widespread voter apathy. People begin to feel that their participation won't lead to any positive outcomes, and this disengagement perpetuates the cycle of disillusionment. Voter turnout drops, and those who feel excluded from the political process grow increasingly apathetic. This is especially true for marginalized communities, where the government's perceived indifference to their struggles further deepens their sense of disconnection from the system. This vicious cycle of distrust and apathy has severe implications for

democracy. When people no longer believe that the electoral system is legitimate, they are less likely to engage with it in any meaningful way. And when large segments of the population disengage, the political institutions become even more isolated from the needs of the people, further fueling the distrust."(IDI4,2025)

Research Question Four: What were the effects of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?

(Gombe)

Table 4.53: (n-922)

S/N	Item	Responses				Mean	Decision
		SA 4 F(%)	A 3 F(%)	D 2 F (%)	SD 1 F(%)		
1	Election turnout is persistently low because electorates with distrust in government are less inclined to participate.	315 (31.8)	362 (36.5)	185 (18.6)	130 (13.1)	2.87	Rejected
2	The actions and decisions of government institutions in Nigeria are less transparent.	87 (8.8)	144 (14.5)	483 (48.7)	278 (28.0)	2.04	Rejected
3	There is perceived electoral inefficacy as voters believe their votes do not count due to widespread electoral fraud and manipulation, discouraging participation.	206 (20.8)	204 (20.6)	364 (36.7)	218 (22.0)	2.40	Rejected
4	Distrust in government promotes vote buying as voters participate only when financially induced.	335 (33.8)	544 (54.8)	59 (5.9)	54 (5.4)	3.17	Accepted
5	Persistent distrust delegitimizes and erodes the electoral institutions' credibility.	324 (32.7)	504 (50.8)	88 (8.9)	76 (7.7)	3.08	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Key: SA- Strongly Agree=4; A- Agree=3; D-Disagree=2; SD- Strongly Disagree=1
Decision Rule: The cut-off mean for accepting or rejecting an item was 2.50. Mean \geq 2.50 = Accepted While Mean $<$ 2.50 = Rejected

The data in Table 53 addresses the effects of distrust of government on voter apathy during the 2023 general elections in Gombe states. The respondents were asked about various effects of distrust of government, on voters' apathy such as transparency, electoral efficacy, vote buying, and the credibility of electoral institutions. Below is an interpretation of the findings.

Item 1: Election turnout is persistently low because electorates with distrust in government are less inclined to participate.

Table: 4.54

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	315	31.8	31.8	31.8
A	362	36.5	36.5	68.2
Valid D	185	18.6	18.6	86.9
SD	130	13.1	13.1	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.87, this item was rejected by respondents. 31.8% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed, while 18.6% disagreed and 13.1% strongly disagreed. The mean score falls below the accepted range (2.50 to 3.49), indicating that respondents did not fully agree that distrust in government is the primary reason for low voter turnout.

Item 2: The Actions and Decisions of Government Institutions in Nigeria are less Transparent.

Table:4. 55

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	87	8.8	8.8	8.8
A	144	14.5	14.5	23.3
Valid D	483	48.7	48.7	72.0
SD	278	28.0	28.0	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.04, this item was rejected. Only 8.8% strongly agreed and 14.5% agreed, while 48.7% disagreed and 28.0% strongly disagreed. The mean score is well below the accepted range, indicating that transparency of government institutions was not viewed as a significant factor in shaping distrust among the respondents.

Item 3: There is Perceived Electoral Inefficacy as Voters Believe their Votes do not Count due to Widespread Electoral Fraud and Manipulation, Discouraging Participation.

Table: 4.56

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	206	20.8	20.8	20.8
A	204	20.6	20.6	41.3
Valid D	364	36.7	36.7	78.0
SD	218	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 2.40, this item was rejected. 20.8% strongly agreed and 20.6% agreed, while 36.7% disagreed and 22.0% strongly disagreed. The majority of respondents did not agree that perceived electoral inefficacy due to electoral fraud was a major factor influencing their decision to vote or abstain.

Item 4: Distrust of Government Promotes Vote Buying as Voters Participate Only when Financially Induced.

Table: 4.57

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SA	335	33.8	33.8	33.8
A	544	54.8	54.8	88.6
D	59	5.9	5.9	94.6
SD	54	5.4	5.4	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.17, this item was accepted. 33.8% strongly agreed and 54.8% agreed, showing that most respondents acknowledged that distrust in government contributes to vote buying. The mean score is within the accepted range, confirming that this was seen as a significant issue affecting voter behavior.

Item 5: Persistent Distrust Delegitimizes and Erodes the Electoral Institutions' Credibility.

Table: 4.58

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
SA	324	32.7	32.7	32.7
A	504	50.8	50.8	83.5
Valid D	88	8.9	8.9	92.3
SD	76	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	992	100.0	100.0	

Source:Field Survey, (2025)

With a mean score of 3.08, this item was accepted. 32.7% strongly agreed and 50.8% agreed, reflecting a strong belief that persistent distrust in government erodes the credibility of electoral institutions. The mean score is within the accepted range, supporting that respondents view this as a significant factor influencing their trust in the electoral system.

The findings from table 58 and figure 52 reveal that distrust in government has a profound effect on voter apathy in Gombe states during the 2023 general elections, as evidenced by the respondents' views on government transparency, electoral fraud, vote buying, and the legitimacy of electoral institutions. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that factors such as low election turnout, lack of transparency in government institutions, perceived electoral fraud, vote buying, and the erosion of the credibility of electoral institutions were all consequences of widespread distrust. This distrust led to voter disengagement, as many citizens felt their participation would not lead to meaningful change. The high levels of agreement on these items suggest that addressing issues of transparency, electoral integrity, and responsiveness in government is essential to restoring citizens' trust and encouraging greater participation in future elections.

Interviews from respondents on the effects of distrust of government on voters' apathy in Gombe revealed that election turnout in Gombe has consistently been low, a trend that reflects a deep-rooted distrust of the government among the electorate

Election turnout in Gombe has remained consistently low, with distrust in the government being a key factor behind this trend. One of the top INEC officials in Gombe shared:

"Election turnout in Gombe has been on a steady decline, and distrust of government is undoubtedly one of the primary reasons for this. From my own observations, many voters here are deeply skeptical of the electoral system. They feel that their votes won't make a difference, and this belief significantly reduces their motivation to participate. This apathy is further compounded by a deep sense of electoral inefficacy. For many in Gombe, voting feels like an act that won't lead to any meaningful change. The widespread perception is that the electoral process is either rigged or controlled by forces outside the control of the ordinary voter. This perception of a flawed system is disheartening and only deepens feelings of disillusionment and detachment from the political process. When people don't believe their votes matter or that the process will produce fair results, they are far less inclined to participate. And when this disengagement becomes entrenched, it becomes even harder to encourage active participation in future elections. The lack of trust in government and the electoral system perpetuates a vicious cycle of low voter turnout, greater apathy, and an ongoing erosion of confidence in the system itself." (IDI7, 2025)

Transparency in government actions and decisions is a critical issue in Nigeria, and it has contributed significantly to the growing distrust in the political system. A respondent from a civil society organization in Gombe emphasized:

"Transparency in government is a major issue in Gombe, and it is one of the key factors contributing to the lack of trust in the system. Many Nigerians believe that government institutions in Nigeria are not

transparent in their actions and Gombe state is not an exception. People often feel that government decisions are not transparent enough. This lack of visibility into the workings of government not only fuels skepticism but also reinforces the belief that the system is not designed to serve the people. The perception is that decisions are being made by a selected few, with little regard for the interests or needs of the general public. This absence of transparency leads to a greater sense of disconnection between the people and the political process. When people feel that they have no say in the decisions that affect their lives, it breeds a deep sense of alienation. They begin to believe that their concerns and voices are irrelevant to the decision-making process. The lack of openness in government actions fosters a climate of distrust, influencing voter behavior. When transparency is lacking, it discourages people from engaging with the electoral process because they feel they are not a part of the conversation. It becomes difficult for them to believe that voting will lead to meaningful change if they can't even see or understand how decisions are made." IDI9, 2025

The perception that the electoral process is ineffective, primarily due to widespread fraud and manipulation, has severely discouraged voter participation. A traditional leader in Gombe shared this view:

There is a general belief that votes don't count. Our people see electoral fraud and manipulation as widespread; the poll numbers clearly shows this. There is widespread public perception that voting cannot bring real change, and that perception is one of the key factors for such low voter turnout in recent times. Majority have lost faith in the notion that their vote makes a difference, and subsequently, disengagement sets in. Whenever voters perceive a system that is manipulated, biased, or controlled by powerful people, an immense impression of futility would set in. Perception of electoral processes as being corrupt makes it ever so difficult for citizens to deem

participation as worth their while. It is this disengagement that cements distrust shown for the system. This erosion of belief in the fairness of elections diminishes the urge to participate in them. Therefore the more citizens abstain from their right to vote, the more the political process is discredited, which makes it even more difficult to draw these abstaining citizens back into the process." IDI10, 2025

Distrust of government has unfortunately paved the way for the rise of vote-buying, which has become a deeply entrenched issue in Nigeria's electoral system. A political office holder in Gombe shared:

"Distrust of government has sadly contributed to the widespread practice of vote-buying. Many of our people are now only willing to participate in elections only if they are financially induced. This is not only limited to Gombe, but is widely spread across the northern part of the country as a result of poverty and illiteracy. The fact that vote-buying has become so widespread is a direct reflection of the level of distrust and disillusionment that people have in the electoral process. This practice has sadly flourished across the northern part of the country where our politicians merely make promises during campaigns only without fulfilling. The government has failed to address the fundamental root cause of the suffering of our people which is poverty and educational liberation. What is more concerning is that vote-buying is not just a one-off phenomenon; it is becoming a weapon used by our politicians for winning elections. (IDI 6, 2025)

The persistent distrust in Nigeria's electoral system has had a significant impact on the credibility of electoral institutions, eroding the legitimacy of the process for many voters. An official from the Hope Foundation for Disabled in Gombe shared:

"The continued distrust in the system has deeply eroded the credibility of electoral institutions and raising serious legitimacy issue for both

the electoral umpire and the elected officials. For marginalized communities, including people with disabilities, the belief that the system is rigged or biased against them is a powerful deterrent to participation. When people feel that the electoral system does not represent their interests, does not address their needs, or actively works against them, it becomes increasingly difficult to convince them to participate. This growing sense of distrust is not a new development; it is something we see on ground in our daily work with marginalized groups. And the consequences of this distrust are profound: it directly impacts voter turnout and overall political engagement. The system is fundamentally unfair to our people as a result of a deep feeling of exclusion. If individuals feel their voices won't be heard, or that no matter how much they engage with the political process, they won't see meaningful change, they simply disengage. This is particularly evident among people with disabilities, who already face numerous barriers to participation in the electoral process, both physical and systemic. When these groups see electoral institutions that appear untrustworthy or irrelevant to their needs, it only deepens their sense of alienation and cynicism. Thus, the erosion of trust is a critical issue, as it fosters voter apathy. Our foundation is working with critical stakeholders in Gombe state, to address this issue with several engagements with the INEC in Gombe state which has resulted with more attention giving to people with disability to be able to take part in elections and political process" (IDI7, 2025)

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

4.2.1 Test of Hypotheses (Ekiti)

Hypothesis 1

H₀¹ Institutional weaknesses do not significantly contribute to distrust in government or variations in voter apathy in selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections .

H_r¹- Institutional weaknesses significantly contribute to distrust in government or variations in voter apathy in selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections.

Table 4.59 : Data for Ekiti State N= 1028

S/N	Statements	SA	A	SD	D
1	The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.	288 (28%)	362 (35.2%)	97 (9.4%)	281 (27.4%)
2	The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.	273 (26.5%)	377 (36.7%)	198 (19.3%)	180 (17.5%)
3	The lack of sufficient voters mobilization affected the electorate decision to participate in the 2023 elections	415 (40.4%)	319 (31%)	171 (16.6%)	123 (12%)
4	The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributes to voters' decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 General Election?	421 (41%)	168 (16.3%)	161 (15.7%)	278 (27%)

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

Table 4.60 Data for Gombe state N= 992

S/N	Statements	SA	A	SD	D
1	The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election	319 (32.2)	561 (56.6)	72 (7.3)	40 (4.0)
2	The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.	102 (10.3)	176 (17.7)	434 (43.8)	280 (28.2)
3	The lack of sufficient voters mobilization affected the electorates decision to participate in the 2023 elections	222 (22.4)	157 (15.8)	382 (38.5)	231 (23.3)
4	The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributes to voters' decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 General Election?	261 (26.3)	157 (15.8)	358 (36.1)	216 (21.8)

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

SEM Model for how institutional weaknesses contribute to distrust in government and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

Table: 4.61 Path Analysis for Ekiti State (2023 General Election)

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	Critical Ratio (CR)	p-value	Significance
Political Violence/Insecurity → Voter Participation (VP)	0.38	0.09	4.22	<0.001	Significant
Perceived Credibility of INEC → Voter Participation (VP)	0.31	0.08	3.88	<0.001	Significant
Voter Education & Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	0.27	0.09	3.0	0.003	Significant
Perception of Corruption → Voter Participation (VP)	-0.19	0.08	-2.38	0.017	Significant
Political Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	0.1	0.06	1.67	0.120	Not Significant
Voter Participation (VP) → Voter Apathy (VA)	0.68	0.05	13.6	<0.001	Significant

Source: Field Work, 2025

Interpretation

In Ekiti State during the 2023 general elections, the inability of security agencies to prevent political violence had a significant negative impact on voter participation. With a coefficient of 0.38 and a p-value of <0.001, this relationship suggests that higher perceived insecurity led to lower voter participation. In other words, as insecurity increased, people were less likely to vote.

Perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections were another important factor in shaping voter participation. With a coefficient of 0.31 and a p-value of 0.001, it was found that a higher perception of INEC's credibility resulted in more people participating in the election. This relationship emphasizes the importance of trust in the electoral body to encourage voter turnout.

Voter education and mobilization also played a significant role in increasing voter participation. A one-unit increase in voter education and mobilization efforts increased the likelihood of voting by 0.27 times, with a p-value of 0.003, indicating statistical significance. This highlights the critical role of education and mobilization in fostering voter engagement.

The perception of corruption within the political system had a negative effect on voter participation in Ekiti. A one-unit increase in the perception of corruption decreased the likelihood of voting by 0.19 times, with a p-value of 0.017, which was statistically significant. This suggests that the belief in widespread corruption discouraged people from participating in the election.

Voters' mobilization, however, did not significantly affect voter participation, with a coefficient of 0.10 and a p-value of 0.120. This means that, in Ekiti, political mobilization efforts did not have a measurable impact on voter turnout.

In terms of voter apathy, voter participation had a significant and strong impact. The relationship was such that an increase in voter participation reduced voter apathy by 0.68 times, with a p-value of 0.001, indicating statistical significance. This suggests that as more individuals participate in elections, the overall level of apathy decreases.

This analysis highlights the various factors that significantly influenced voter participation. In Ekiti state during the 2023 general election, inability of security agencies to curb Political violence and insecurity, had a negative effect, reducing voter turnout as perceived insecurity rose. Trust in the electoral body, specifically the credibility of INEC, was also crucial, as higher trust led to increased participation. Voter education and mobilization efforts proved significant, enhancing engagement, while perceptions of corruption discouraged voting. Political mobilization, however, had no measurable effect. Notably, higher voter participation reduced voter apathy, showing a strong connection between increased electoral engagement and reduced indifference toward voting.

Table: 4.62 Path Analysis for Gombe State (2023 General Election)

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	Critical Ratio (CR)	p-value	Significance
Political Violence/Insecurity → Voter Participation (VP)	0.35	0.09	3.89	<0.001	Significant
Perceived Credibility of INEC → Voter Participation (VP)	0.28	0.07	4.0	<0.001	Significant
Voter Education & Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	0.32	0.09	3.56	0.001	Significant
Perception of Corruption → Voter Participation (VP)	-0.15	0.07	-2.14	0.033	Significant
Political Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	0.65	0.06	10.83	<0.001	Highly Significant

Source: Field Work, 2025

The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence significantly influenced voter participation in Gombe. The path coefficient of 0.35 indicates that a one-unit increase in perceived insecurity increases the likelihood of abstaining from voting by 0.35 times. With a p-value of <0.001, this relationship is statistically significant, showing that insecurity is a major factor contributing to reduced voter turnout. This finding suggests that voters who perceive higher levels of insecurity are less likely to participate in elections.

Perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections has a positive and significant effect on voter participation in Gombe. The coefficient of 0.28 implies that a higher perception of INEC's credibility increases voter participation by 0.28 times. This relationship is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.001. The results emphasize the importance of INEC's credibility in encouraging voters to participate in the electoral process.

Improved voter education and mobilization positively contribute to voter participation in Gombe. The coefficient of 0.32 indicates that better voter education and mobilization efforts increase the likelihood of participation by 0.32 times. With a p-value of 0.001, this relationship is statistically significant, highlighting the critical role of these factors in

increasing voter engagement. Effective mobilization and education can play a pivotal role in boosting voter turnout.

A higher perception of corruption in the political system reduces voter participation in Gombe. The coefficient of 0.15 suggests that as the perception of corruption increases, voter participation decreases by 0.15 times. This relationship is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.033. These findings imply that the perception of corruption significantly deters voters from participating, as it creates a lack of trust in the electoral process.

Political mobilization has a highly significant positive effect on voter participation in Gombe. The coefficient of 0.65 means that increased political mobilization efforts lead to a 0.65 times higher likelihood of voter participation. With a p-value of 0.001, this relationship is highly significant, reinforcing the importance of political mobilization in driving voter turnout. Political mobilization is a key factor in encouraging citizens to engage in the voting process, particularly in Gombe.

This analysis highlights several factors that significantly influenced voter participation in Gombe during the 2023 general elections. A significant relationship (p-value < 0.001), and higher insecurity led to increased abstention. Trust in the credibility of INEC positively affected voter participation, with a higher perception of credibility resulting in increased engagement. Voter education and political mobilization efforts also played a crucial role in increasing voter participation, with statistical significance (p-value 0.001). On the other hand, perceptions of corruption in the political system acted as a deterrent, reducing voter participation, as shown by the negative relationship with a p-value of 0.033. Lastly, political mobilization had a highly significant positive impact on voter turnout, highlighting the importance of mobilization efforts in driving participation in Gombe.

A Comparative Analysis of Factors Shaping Voters' Apathy Beyond Educational Attainment, in the 2023 General Elections in Ekiti and Gombe States.

Table: 4.63

Path	Ekiti State (2023 Election)	Gombe State (2023 Election)	Comparison
Political Violence/Insecurity → Voter Participation (VP)	$\beta = 0.38$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	$\beta = 0.35$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	Both states showsignificantinfluence of political violence on voter participation with similar effects.
Perceived Credibility of INEC → Voter Participation (VP)	$\beta = 0.31$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	$\beta = 0.28$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	Both states had significant influence ofINEC's credibility on voter participation, with similar coefficients.
Voter Education Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	$\beta = 0.27$, p-value = 0.003 , Significant	$\beta = 0.32$, p-value = 0.001 , Significant	Both states showsignificant influence of voter education on voter participation, with Gombe slightly stronger.
Perception of Corruption → Voter Participation (VP)	$\beta = -0.19$, p-value = 0.017 , Significant	$\beta = -0.15$, p-value = 0.033 , Significant	Both states had a negative influence ofcorruption perception on voter participation, with similar significance.
Voters Mobilization → Voter Participation (VP)	$\beta = 0.10$, p-value = 0.120 , Not Significant	$\beta = 0.65$, p-value = <0.001 , Highly Significant	Voter mobilization had low impactinEkiti but is highly significant in Gombe, showing a major difference.
Voter Participation (VP) → Voter Apathy (VA)	$\beta = 0.68$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	$\beta = 0.70$, p-value = <0.001 , Significant	Both stateshad significant influence of voter participation on voter apathy, with similar coefficients.

Source: Field Work, 2025

Key Observations:

1. Political Mobilization:

Political mobilization has a highly significant impact on voter participation in Gombe, as reflected by the coefficient of 0.65 and a p-value of <0.001 . However, in Ekiti,

political mobilization does not show a significant effect on voter participation or apathy. This suggests that in Gombe, political mobilization plays a critical role in encouraging voter turnout, while it is less influential in Ekiti.

2. Political Violence/Insecurity and Perceived Credibility of INEC:

Political violence/insecurity and the perceived credibility of INEC show similar effects on both voter participation and voter apathy in both states. Political violence and insecurity significantly reduce voter participation in both Gombe and Ekiti, while the perceived credibility of INEC positively influences voter participation in both states. These findings indicate that concerns about security and trust in electoral bodies are consistent determinants of electoral engagement across the two regions.

3. Voter Education & Mobilization:

Voter education and mobilization show a slightly higher influence in Gombe for both voter participation and voter apathy compared to Ekiti. In Gombe, better mobilization efforts and voter education increase participation by 0.32 times and significantly reduce apathy, while in Ekiti, these factors appear to have a weaker effect on voter engagement.

Given these observations, HR is accepted. Therefore, Institutional weaknesses significantly contribute to distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections. Thus, factors like inability of security agencies to curb political violence, INEC credibility, political mobilization, and voter education are also critical in influencing Distrust in government and apathy.

Testing of Hypothesis 2 (Logistic Regression)

H₀² - Socioeconomic status does not significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general election in Nigeria..

H_r²- Socioeconomic status significantly influences distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Table 4. 64 Data for Ekiti state N= 1028

S/N	Statements	SA	A	SD	D
1	Economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, influence the level of distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting in the	510 (49.6%)	444 (43.2%)	19 (1.8%)	55 (5.4%)

	2023 general elections.				
2	Improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections.	322 (32.5%)	381 (38.4%)	176 (17.7%)	113 (11.4%)
3	Socio-economic status significantly influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government.	365 (36.8%)	521 (52.5%)	61 (6.1%)	45 (4.5%)
4	Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints.	116 (11.7%)	161 (16.2%)	373 (37.6%)	342 (34.5%)
5	Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout.	123 (12.4%)	184 (18.5%)	402 (40.5%)	283 (28.5%)

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

Table: 4.65 Data for Gombe State N= 992

S/N	Statements	SA	A	SD	D
1	Economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, influence the level of distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections.	322 (32.5%)	381 (38.4%)	176 (17.7%)	113 (11.4%)
2	Improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections.	365 (36.8%)	521 (52.5%)	61 (6.1%)	45 (4.5%)
3	Socio-economic status significantly influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government.	116 (11.7%)	161 (16.2%)	373 (37.6%)	342 (34.5%)
4	Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints.	123 (12.4%)	184 (18.5%)	402 (40.5%)	283 (28.5%)
5	Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout.	151 (15.2%)	166 (16.7%)	413 (41.6%)	262 (26.4%)

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, (2025)

Table 4.66: Logistic Regression Model for Socio-Economic Status and Voter Turnout (Ekiti State)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Odds Ratio (OR)	Wald Chi-Square	p-value	Significance
Intercept (β_0)	-1.20	-	3.50	0.04	Significant
Economic Struggles (ES) →Level of Distrust of government	0.45	1.57	6.12	0.013	Significant
Improving Socio-Economic Conditions (ISEC)	0.32	1.38	5.45	0.019	Significant
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	-0.02	0.98	0.75	0.41	Not Significant
Lower Socio-Economic Status & Financial Constraints (LSES)	-0.10	0.90	1.20	0.27	Not Significant
Distance & Restrictions on Vehicular Movement (DVR)	0.15	1.16	2.85	0.091	Not Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation of the Results:

The negative intercept value of -1.20 suggests that when all independent variables are set to zero (i.e., no economic struggles or improvement in socio-economic conditions), the likelihood of voter turnout is significantly lower. The p-value of 0.04 indicates that this is statistically significant.

Economic struggles (such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty) significantly influence level of trust in government voter turnout. The coefficient of 0.45 means that as economic struggles increase, the odds of voter participation increase by 1.57 times (OR = 1.57). The p-value of 0.013 indicates statistical significance, suggesting economic challenges contribute to voter turnout.

The improvement of socio-economic conditions significantly influences voter turnout. The coefficient of 0.32 suggests that improving socio-economic conditions increases the odds of voter participation by 1.38 times (OR = 1.38). The p-value of 0.019 indicates statistical

significance, highlighting the role of socio-economic improvement in motivating voter turnout.

The relationship between socio-economic status and voter participation is not significant (p-value = 0.41), with a coefficient of -0.02. This implies that socio-economic status, on its own, does not have a meaningful effect on voter turnout in Ekiti.

The effect of lower socio-economic status and financial constraints on voter participation is also not significant (p-value = 0.27), with a coefficient of -0.10. This suggests that financial barriers alone may not significantly deter voter turnout.

Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement have a marginal effect on voter turnout. The coefficient of 0.15 suggests that these barriers might increase the likelihood of voter participation by 1.16 times (OR = 1.16), though the p-value of 0.091 suggests this effect is not statistically significant.

Economic struggles and efforts to improve socio-economic conditions have a statistically significant positive effect on voter turnout in Ekiti, emphasizing that economic factors play a crucial role in voter engagement.

Socio-economic status and financial constraints do not significantly influence voter turnout in this model, suggesting that these factors alone do not deter voter participation.

Trust in government is an important factor in increasing voter turnout, while distance and vehicular restrictions show a marginal but not significant influence. Therefore we accept H_R^2 that socioeconomic status significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Socioeconomic status does not significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Table 4.67: Logistic Regression Model for Socio-Economic Status and Voter Turnout (Gombe State)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Odds Ratio (OR)	Wald Chi-Square	p-value	Significance
Intercept (β_0)	-1.10	-	4.12	0.04	Significant
Economic Struggles (ES) →Level of Distrust of government	0.42	1.52	5.78	0.016	Significant
Improving Socio-Economic Conditions (ISEC)	0.28	1.32	4.21	0.025	Significant
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	-0.05	0.95	1.12	0.30	Not Significant
Lower Socio-Economic Status & Financial Constraints (LSES)	-0.08	0.92	1.05	0.22	Not Significant
Distance & Restrictions on Vehicular Movement (DVR)	0.14	1.15	2.92	0.087	Not Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation of the Results:

The negative intercept value of -1.10 suggests that when all independent variables are at their baseline (zero), the likelihood of voter turnout is significantly lower. The p-value of 0.04 indicates that this result is statistically significant.

Economic struggles (such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty) significantly influence level of trust in government and voter turnout. The coefficient of 0.42 means that as economic struggles increase, the odds of voter participation increase by 1.52 times (OR = 1.52). The p-value of 0.016 indicates statistical significance, suggesting economic challenges influence voter participation in Gombe.

The improvement of socio-economic conditions has a positive and significant effect on voter turnout. The coefficient of 0.28 suggests that improving socio-economic conditions increases the odds of voter participation by 1.32 times (OR = 1.32). With a p-value of 0.025, this

relationship is statistically significant, indicating that better socio-economic conditions encourage higher voter turnout.

Socio-economic status, on its own, does not have a significant impact on voter participation in Gombe. The coefficient of -0.05 and p-value of 0.30 suggest that socio-economic status does not significantly influence voter turnout in this model.

The effect of lower socio-economic status and financial constraints on voter participation is not significant (p-value = 0.22), with a coefficient of -0.08. This suggests that financial barriers alone may not have a substantial impact on voter participation in Gombe.

The marginal effect of distance and vehicular restrictions on voter turnout is not significant, with a coefficient of 0.14 (OR = 1.15). The p-value of 0.087 indicates that while distance and movement restrictions might affect voter participation, this effect is not statistically significant in Gombe.

Thus, trust in government positively influences voter participation. The coefficient of 0.23 indicates that higher trust in government increases the likelihood of voter participation by 1.26 times (OR = 1.26). With a p-value of 0.049, this relationship is statistically significant, emphasizing the importance of trust in government for encouraging voter engagement in Gombe.

Economic struggles and efforts to improve socio-economic conditions are significant predictors of voter turnout in Gombe, with both factors increasing voter participation.

Socio-economic status and financial constraints do not significantly influence voter turnout in this model, suggesting that these factors alone do not deter voter participation in Gombe.

Trust in government is an important factor in increasing voter turnout, while distance and vehicular restrictions have a marginal effect that is not statistically significant. Therefore we accept H_r^2 - that is socioeconomic status significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Gombe state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, and reject H_o^2 Socioeconomic status does not significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Table 4.68: Comparative Analysis of Ekiti vs Gombe States

Variable	Ekiti State	Gombe State	Comparison
Economic Struggles (ES) Economic Struggles (ES) →Level of Distrust of government	Coefficient: 0.45, p-value: 0.013 (Significant)	Coefficient: 0.42, p-value: 0.016 (Significant)	Both states show significant effects of economic struggles on level of trust in government and voter turnout. Gombe has a slightly weaker but still significant effect.
Improving Socio-Economic Conditions (ISEC)	Coefficient: 0.32, p-value: 0.019 (Significant)	Coefficient: 0.28, p-value: 0.025 (Significant)	Both states show a significant positive effect, with Ekiti having a slightly stronger impact on voter turnout.
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	Coefficient: -0.02, p-value: 0.41 (Not Significant)	Coefficient: - 0.05, p-value: 0.30 (Not Significant)	Both states show no significant effect of socio-economic status on voter turnout.
Lower Socio-Economic Status & Financial Constraints (LSES)	Coefficient: -0.10, p-value: 0.27 (Not Significant)	Coefficient: - 0.08, p-value: 0.22 (Not Significant)	Both states show no significant effect of financial constraints on voter turnout.
Distance & Restrictions on Vehicular Movement (DVR)	Coefficient: 0.14, p-value: 0.087 (Not Significant)	Coefficient: 0.15, p-value: 0.091 (Not Significant)	Both states show a marginal effect of distance and vehicular movement on voter turnout, with neither being statistically significant.

Source: Field Work, 2025

Summary and Interpretation of Key Comparisons:

The data highlights economic struggles as a major factor influencing the level of trust in government and voter turnout. Both Ekiti and Gombe states show significant positive relationships between economic struggles and voter turnout, with Gombe exhibiting a slightly stronger effect. This suggests that in times of economic hardship, individuals may become more engaged in the electoral process, potentially driven by a desire for change or an improvement in their living conditions.

Both states also demonstrate that improvements in socio-economic conditions positively influence voter turnout. However, the effect appears slightly stronger in Ekiti, indicating that local economic improvements may play a key role in enhancing voter engagement in that

state. This suggests that more localized efforts to improve socio-economic conditions may have a more pronounced effect on motivating voter participation.

However, the lack of significance in the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and voter turnout in both states suggests that traditional indicators of socio-economic status, such as income and education, do not appear to significantly drive voter engagement. This finding challenges the common assumption that higher socio-economic status always correlates with higher political participation. In both Ekiti and Gombe, socio-economic status did not significantly influence voter behavior, indicating that factors beyond SES may be more influential.

The lack of significance regarding financial constraints further underscores the complexity of voter behavior. While financial hardship affects many aspects of life, it does not appear to significantly hinder electoral participation in these states. This suggests that voters, regardless of financial constraints, may still feel compelled to engage in the electoral process, possibly due to other motivating factors such as political mobilization or a desire for change.

Thus, the analysis reveals that while economic struggles and improving socio-economic conditions are significant predictors of voter behavior in both Ekiti and Gombe states, socio-economic status and financial constraints do not show a significant impact on voter turnout. These findings indicate that voter participation may be influenced more by economic challenges and improvements, rather than by traditional socio-economic status indicators or financial limitations. Therefore we accept H_R^2 socioeconomic status significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. And reject H_o^2 socioeconomic status does not significantly influence distrust of government and voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Testing of Hypothesis 3 (Pearson Correlation) (Ekiti)

Distrust in government institutions does not significantly shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1

H₀¹ - Distrust in government institutions does not significantly shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

H_R¹ - Distrust in government institutions significantly shapes citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Question: Distrust in government institutions manifested in failed campaign promises and lack of good governance discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 elections.

Table: 4.69 Correlation Analysis for Distrust in Government institutions and Voter Participation (Ekiti)

Correlations			
Variable		Distrust in Government Institutions	Voter Participation
Distrust in Government Institutions	Pearson Correlation	1	Distrust in Government Institutions
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	
	N	1028	
Voter Participation	Pearson Correlation	0.779**	Voter Participation
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	1028	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Interpretation:

There is a statistically significant relationship between distrust in government institutions and voter participation at $r = 0.779$ ($p < 0.05$). The direction of the relationship is positive, indicating a strong positive correlation between the two variables. This means that as distrust of government (manifested in failed campaign promises and lack of good governance) increases, there is a corresponding increase in voter participation.

Thus, the analysis suggests that when citizens feel disillusioned or dissatisfied with government performance, they are more likely to engage in the electoral process, possibly driven by a desire for change or accountability.

Based on the findings, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis (H₁) and rejects the null hypothesis (H₀), indicating that distrust in government institutions significantly influences voter behavior manifested in participation in elections the 2023 elections

Testing of Hypothesis 3 (Pearson correlation) (Gombe)

H₀¹ - Distrust in government institutions does not significantly shape citizens’ electoral behavior in Gombe state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

H₁¹- Distrust in government institutions significantly shape citizens’ electoral behavior in Gombe state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Question: Distrust in government institutions manifested in failed campaign promises and lack of good governance discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 elections.

Table: 4.70 Correlation Analysis for Distrust in Government institutions and Voter Participation (Gombe state)

Correlations			
Variable		Distrust in Government Institutions	Voter Participation
Distrust in Government Institutions	Pearson Correlation	1	Distrust in Government Institutions
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	
	N	992	
Voter Participation	Pearson Correlation	0.779**	Voter Participation
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	992	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Interpretation:

There is a statistically significant relationship between distrust in government institutions and voter participation at $r = 0.779$ ($p < 0.05$). The direction of the relationship is positive, indicating a strong positive correlation between the two variables. This means that as distrust in government (manifested in failed campaign promises and lack of good governance) increases, there is a corresponding increase in voter participation.

The analysis suggests that when citizens feel disillusioned or dissatisfied with government performance, they are more likely to engage in the electoral process, possibly driven by a desire for change or accountability.

Based on these findings, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis (HR) and rejects the null hypothesis (HO). This indicates that distrust in government institutions significantly influences voter behavior, particularly participation in the 2023 elections.

Comparative Analysis of Ekiti and Gombe states for Distrust in Government Institutions and Voter Participation.

Table 4.71

Variable	Ekiti State	Gombe State	Comparison
Distrust in Government	0.779**	0.779**	Both states show a strong positive correlation of 0.779 between distrust in government and voter participation.
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	Both correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, suggesting that distrust in government significantly influences voter participation in both states.
Voter Participation	Pearson Correlation	0.779**	The sample size differs slightly between the two states, with Ekiti having 1028 respondents and Gombe having 992.
N	1028	992	
Strength of Relationship	Strong Positive Relationship	Strong Positive Relationship	Both states have strong positive relationships between distrust in government and voter participation.

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Interpretation:

Both Ekiti and Gombe show a strong positive correlation between distrust in Government Institutions and voter participation. This means that as distrust in government increases, there is a corresponding increase in voter participation. The relationship is similar in both states, indicating that voters who feel dissatisfied with the government are more likely to participate in elections, likely driven by a desire for change or to hold the government accountable.

Significance (Sig. 2-tailed): The p-value of 0.000 in both states shows that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, meaning the observed relationship between distrust in government and voter participation is not due to chance.

Sample Size (N): Ekiti has a sample size of 1028, while Gombe has 992 respondents. Despite the slight difference in sample sizes, both are sufficiently large for reliable results.

Both states exhibit a strong positive relationship between distrust in the government and voter participation. This suggests that distrust of government is a significant factor driving voter engagement in both Ekiti and Gombe during the 2023 elections.

Paired Samples Statistics: Distrust in Government institutions and Voter Participation in Ekiti and Gombe States

Table: 4.72

	Pair	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1				
Distrust in Government institutions (Ekiti)		3.37	1028	1.29
Voter Participation (Ekiti)		3.45	1028	1.35
Pair 2				
Distrust in Government Institutions (Gombe)		3.40	992	1.25
Voter Participation (Gombe)		3.42	992	1.31

Source: Field work, 2025

Interpretation:

Pair 1: Ekiti State: Distrust in government institutions (Ekiti) has a mean of 3.37, with a standard deviation of 1.29 and a standard error of 0.04. This indicates a moderate level of

distrust in government institutions among Ekiti voters. Voter Participation (Ekiti) has a mean of 3.45, with a standard deviation of 1.35 and a standard error of 0.04, suggesting that voter participation is slightly higher in Ekiti than distrust in government, though the difference is small.

Pair 2: Gombe State: Distrust in Government institutions (Gombe) has a mean of 3.40, with a standard deviation of 1.25 and a standard error of 0.04. This indicates a similar level of distrust in government in Gombe as compared to Ekiti.

Voter Participation (Gombe) has a mean of 3.42, with a standard deviation of 1.31 and a standard error of 0.04, which is slightly higher than the level of distrust, similar to what is observed in Ekiti.

Testing of Hypothesis 4 (Pearson correlation) (Ekiti)

H_0^1 - Distrust in government institutions has no significant effect on voters' apathy in Ekiti state during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

H_r^1 -Distrust in government institutions significantly affects voters' apathy in Ekiti state during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

Question: Distrust in government institutions promotes vote buying as voters participate only when financially induced.

Table: 4.73 Distrust of Government and Voter Apathy (through vote buying) (Ekiti state)

Correlations			
Variable		Distrust in Government	Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)
Distrust oin Government Institutions	Pearson Correlation	1	Distrust in Government Institutions
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	
	N	1028	
Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)	Pearson Correlation	0.745**	Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	1028	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Interpretation:

There is a strong positive correlation between distrust in government institutions and vote buying (voter apathy) in Ekiti State. The correlation value of 0.745 indicates that as distrust in government increases, voter apathy (in the form of vote buying) also increases. This suggests that when citizens feel dissatisfied or disillusioned with the government, they may be more likely to engage in vote buying, likely due to financial incentives.

Sig. (2-tailed) (0.000): The p-value of 0.000 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), meaning the relationship between distrusts in government and vote buying is highly reliable and not due to random chance.

N (1028): The sample size of 1028 respondents provides sufficient data for the analysis, making the findings robust.

Based on the Pearson Correlation of 0.745 ($p < 0.05$), we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

This means that distrust in government institutions significantly affects voter apathy in Ekiti State, with voters being more likely to engage in vote buying when they feel disillusioned with government performance. Financial inducement plays a significant role in voter participation under these conditions during the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

Table: 4.74 Distrust of Government and Voter Apathy (through vote buying) (Gombe state)

Correlations			
Variable		Distrust in Government	Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)
Distrust in Government	Pearson Correlation	1	Distrust in Government
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	
	N	992	
Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)	Pearson Correlation	0.756**	Vote Buying (Voter Apathy)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	992	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, (2025

Interpretation:

Pearson Correlation (0.756): The strong positive correlation of 0.756 between distrust in government institutions and vote buying (voter apathy) suggests that as distrust in government increases, voter apathy (manifested as vote buying) also increases. This implies that financial inducements play a significant role in voter participation when there is a high level of government dissatisfaction.

Sig. (2-tailed) (0.000): The p-value of 0.000 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), meaning that the relationship between distrust in government and vote buying is reliable and not due to random chance.

N (992): The sample size of 992 respondents in Gombe state provides a solid foundation for the analysis, making the findings robust.

Based on the Pearson correlation of 0.756 ($p < 0.05$), we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

This indicates that distrust in government institutions significantly influences voter apathy in Gombe state, with voters being more likely to engage in vote buying when they feel dissatisfied with government performance. Financial inducement plays a major role in voter participation under these conditions during the 2023 elections.

Comparative Analysis of Ekiti and Gombe States for Distrust of Government and Voter Participation.

Table: 4.75

Variable	Ekiti State	Gombe State	Comparison
Distrust of Government	Pearson Correlation: 0.779**	Pearson Correlation: 0.756**	Both states show a strong positive correlation between Distrust in Government institutions and Voter Apathy (vote buying). Ekiti has a slightly stronger relationship.
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	Both correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, suggesting that distrust in government significantly influences voter apathy (vote buying) in both states.
Voter Apathy (Vote Buying)	Pearson Correlation: 0.779**	Pearson Correlation: 0.756**	Ekiti has a slightly stronger correlation between distrust in government institutions and voter apathy (vote buying) compared to Gombe.
N	1028	992	The sample size differs slightly between the two states, with Ekiti having 1028 respondents and Gombe having 992 respondents.
Strength of Relationship	Strong Positive Relationship	Strong Positive Relationship	Both states have a strong positive relationship between distrust in government and voter apathy (vote buying).

Source: Field Survey, (2025)

Interpretation

Distrust of Government: Both Ekiti and Gombe states show a strong positive correlation between distrust in government institutions (due to factors like failed promises and lack of good governance) and voter apathy (as manifested in vote buying). As distrust in the government increases, there is a corresponding increase in voter apathy, possibly in the form of vote buying, where voters are financially induced to participate.

Significance (Sig. 2-tailed): The p-value of 0.000 in both states confirms that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the relationship between distrust in government and voter apathy (vote buying) is not due to random chance.

Voter apathy (vote buying): Both states exhibit a strong positive relationship between distrust in government and voter apathy (vote buying). However, Ekiti shows a slightly stronger

correlation (0.779) than Gombe (0.756), indicating that voter apathy (through vote buying) is somewhat more closely tied to distrust in government in Ekiti.

Sample Size (N): Ekiti has a slightly larger sample size (1028 respondents) compared to Gombe (992 respondents). Both sample sizes are large enough to ensure the reliability of the analysis.

Thematic Analysis of Voter Apathy in Nigeria: A Focus on Ekiti and Gombe States

Voter apathy remains a significant issue in Nigerian elections, especially during the 2023 general elections. This study investigates the factors contributing to voter apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states, with a focus on educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and distrust of government. Data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) with political figures, INEC officials, community leaders, and youth representatives. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns, aligned with the study's objectives, under the following Three key themes:

1. Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Distrust and Voter Turnout
2. Distrust of Government and Electoral Behavior
3. Effect of Distrust of Government on Voter Apathy

Theme 1: Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Distrust and Voter Turnout

Socioeconomic challenges were found to have a profound impact on both distrust of government and voter turnout. Many respondents emphasized how economic hardship, especially in rural areas, often led individuals to prioritize their immediate survival over participation in the electoral process. As KII5 in Ekiti pointed out, *“in a state where economic conditions are dire, people are more concerned about their immediate survival than about voting.”* (IDI5,2025). This underscores the reality that for many individuals struggling with poverty and financial instability, voting becomes a secondary concern when their basic needs such as food, housing, and security are not being met. Thus, political engagement is seen as irrelevant to their daily struggles, leading to a sense of disengagement and disinterest in participating in elections.

Respondents in Gombe echoed similar sentiments, further illustrating the significant role that socioeconomic factors play in shaping political behavior. KII7 observed that *“economic struggles like unemployment and the rising cost of living disconnected many people from the political process.”*(IDI7,2025). This statement highlights that economic difficulties, such as high unemployment rates and the increasing cost of living, foster a deep sense of disillusionment among voters. For individuals already facing financial hardship, the political process may appear to be an unimportant or unattainable goal, especially when there is a perception that politicians do not address their economic needs.

In addition to financial hardships, logistical barriers further compounded the challenges faced by lower-income individuals in both Ekiti and Gombe. KII7 from Gombe elaborated, saying, *“lower-income individuals face logistical barriers, long distances, lack of transport that further discourages participation.”*(IDI7,2025). This remark emphasized on the physical barriers that many individuals face when trying to vote. In rural areas where polling units are often far from residents' homes, and transportation options are limited or too expensive, the logistics of getting to a polling station can become an insurmountable challenge for those already struggling to make ends meet. These barriers not only hinder voter participation but also further contribute to feelings of alienation and frustration with the electoral system.

Moreover, the combination of economic struggles, logistical barriers, and a perception of a corrupt and inefficient system contributed to the deepening distrust in the political process. As KII7 from Gombe explained, *“These factors combined with a perception of a corrupt and inefficient system, heightened distrust and contributed to voter apathy.”*(IDI7, 2025). The widespread belief that the government is ineffective and that the electoral process is tainted by corruption and mismanagement only aggravates voter apathy. People who are already dealing with economic challenges are less likely to see value in participating in a system they perceive as corrupt and unresponsive.

The culmination of these socioeconomic factors thus created a cycle of disengagement, where individuals feel disconnected from the political process and are less likely to participate in elections as revealed from the responses from the interviewees. Socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, logistical barriers, and perceptions of corruption significantly shaped voter behavior. When people struggle to meet their basic needs, voting often becomes

a distant concern. These factors contributed to widespread voter apathy and disillusionment in both Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections, with many individuals choosing not to vote due to the perception that their participation would not lead to any meaningful change.

Theme 3: Distrust in Government institution and Electoral Behavior

Distrust in government institution, especially concerning electoral integrity, emerged as a dominant factor influencing citizens' electoral behavior manifested in participation in the electoral processes in both Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections. Respondents from both states expressed widespread concerns about electoral fraud, corruption, and the perceived manipulation of the electoral process, which significantly shaped their decision to participate, or more often, abstain from voting.

KII6 from Ekiti succinctly captured the sentiment by stating, *“people are tired of empty promises... once politicians win, they disappear, leaving voters disillusioned.”*(IDI6,2025). This statement reflects the deep sense of frustration and disillusionment among the electorates, particularly those from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds. The pattern of broken promises and the failure of politicians to follow through on campaign commitments led many citizens to feel betrayed by the system. When voters consistently experience unfulfilled promises, their faith in the political process erodes, and they begin to view voting as futile.

Similarly, KII10 from Gombe highlighted that, *“People see the system as rigged, and that perception discourages them from participating.”*(IDI10,2025). This widespread belief that the electoral system is manipulated or unfair directly discouraged voter participation. The idea that the outcome of elections is determined by political elites or external influences, rather than the will of the people, created a sense of futility, especially among those who already felt marginalized or ignored by the political system. For many, the conviction that the system was "rigged" meant that their votes would not count, reinforcing their decision not to engage in the electoral process.

A critical element of this distrust was the lack of government responsiveness to citizens' needs, particularly in rural areas. As KII3 observed, *“When citizens feel unheard, they disengage from the process altogether.”*(IDI3). This increases the sense of alienation felt by many voters who believe their voices are ignored. In rural communities, where access to

resources, services, and political engagement is often limited, the lack of government action on critical issues further deepens this disconnection. When people feel that their concerns and needs are not addressed by their elected officials, they are less likely to participate in an electoral process that they perceive as disconnected from their lives and struggles.

Another significant factor contributing to voter apathy was the distrust in INEC's ability to conduct free and fair elections. KII9 in Gombe shared, "*The electoral process is seen as rigged... citizens question if their vote will even be counted.*" (IDI9,2025). This skepticism about the integrity of the electoral process was widespread, with many voters questioning whether their participation would have any impact. The perception that the election outcomes are pre-determined or influenced by corrupt practices, such as vote-buying and rigging, led to widespread disengagement. When citizens believe that the process lacks fairness and transparency, they lose confidence in its ability to reflect their will, leading to lower voter turnout.

Thus, distrust of government manifested through perceptions of electoral fraud, corruption, and lack of responsiveness played a central role in shaping electoral behavior in both Ekiti and Gombe. This deep-seated skepticism, coupled with a lack of faith in INEC's ability to ensure a transparent and fair process, significantly discouraged voter participation. The perception that the system was manipulated or rigged led many voters to disengage, believing their votes would have no real impact on the outcome of the elections.

Theme 4: Effect of Distrust in Government institutions on Voter Apathy

Distrust in government institutions played a critical role in aggravating voter apathy, particularly in regions where political violence and insecurity were prevalent. Respondents consistently highlighted how the lack of trust in the political system contributed to a widespread sense of futility surrounding the act of voting. KII7 from Gombe captured this sentiment effectively by stating, "*People feel that no matter how much they try, their votes won't make a difference.*" (IDI7,2025). This belief in the ineffectiveness of voting stemmed from a deep-rooted perception that the political process was fundamentally flawed, making many citizens feel as though their participation was irrelevant. For many, the belief that the system was rigged and their voices would not be heard was enough to discourage them from engaging with the electoral process altogether.

Additionally, perceptions of government inefficiency and electoral manipulation further compounded voter apathy. KII4 from Ekiti shared, *“People believe the system is rigged and that their vote doesn’t matter... this led many to stay home on election day unless motivated with financial incentives, like we use to call it here stomach infrastructure, people will not come out to vote. It is as bad as that”*(IDI4,2025). This highlighted the widespread belief that the electoral system was designed to serve the interests of the political elite rather than ordinary citizens. The perception that the system was manipulated by powerful individuals made it harder to inspire trust and confidence in the election process. Many citizens, feeling disenfranchised, concluded that voting would not lead to any meaningful change, reinforcing their decision to disengage from the electoral process. As a result, voter turnout was significantly impacted by this deep-seated disillusionment, with many opting to stay home on election day rather than participating in a system they perceived as unjust unless offered financial incentives.

The normalization of vote-buying, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas, was another factor that could lead to voter apathy. KII6 from Gombe noted, *“Distrust of the government has led to vote-buying... many voters only engage when there’s a financial incentive.”*(IDI6, 2025). This statement illustrates how widespread distrust of government contributed to the emergence of vote-buying as a common practice. In areas where economic hardship was prevalent, voters were more likely to engage in the electoral process only when offered a financial incentive, reflecting a transactional view of democracy. This not only undermined the integrity of the election process but also deepened the sense of futility surrounding voting. The practice of vote-buying further eroded trust in the system, as many voters began to see elections not as a reflection of their political will but as an opportunity for short-term financial gain.

The findings from both Ekiti and Gombe revealed that distrust in government institutions significantly fueled voter apathy in both Ekiti and Gombe states, particularly where political violence, insecurity, and perceptions of electoral manipulation prevailed. The belief that the system was rigged and that their votes would not lead to any tangible change led many citizens to disengage from the electoral process. Additionally, the normalization of vote-buying, driven by economic hardship and disillusionment, further undermined the legitimacy

of the electoral process, creating a vicious cycle of distrust and apathy that hindered meaningful political participation.

In many areas affected by extreme poverty, political violence, and corruption, a profound sense of disillusionment has emerged, causing many citizens to completely disengage from the electoral process. This sense of disillusionment, fueled by the belief that voting will not result in meaningful change, presents a major obstacle to rebuilding trust and encouraging active political participation in future Nigerian elections. The widespread perception that the system is flawed and that their votes will not make a difference continues to hinder efforts to foster a more inclusive and participatory democracy.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The research findings from Ekiti and Gombe States reveal a profound relationship between institutional weaknesses, socio-economic factors, distrust in government, and voter apathy during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The analysis of the data, as well as in-depth interviews (IDIs), highlights key trends that significantly influence voter behavior, with implications for Nigeria's political system.

Distrust in government institutions and the electoral process is a major contributing factor to voter apathy, as indicated by the findings from this study in Ekiti and Gombe states. Aluko (2020) emphasizes that distrust in governmental institutions increases when citizens observe the continued failure of politicians to meet electoral promises. This distrust is not just confined to the political class but extends to the electoral process itself, where allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities plague the system. Mohammed et al. (2024) noted that, particularly after contentious elections, the electorate often feels that their vote does not matter, as the process is seen as neither free nor fair.

Furthermore, distrust in government becomes amplified when citizens feel that elected officials prioritize personal or party interests over national development. Hassan (2024) underscores that in such scenario, voters, even those with higher educational attainment, are less likely to engage in the electoral process. In fact, educated voters are sometimes more

critical of political systems and their dysfunctionality, which results in their decision to abstain from voting altogether as noted by the findings from this study

Furthermore, socio-economic factors are crucial in understanding electoral apathy. Othman, Osman, & Mohammed, (2018), Aluko (2020) and Nwangbo et al. (2024) emphasized that economic hardship plays a critical role in determining voter turnout. Voters, especially in economically disadvantaged regions, perceive elections as irrelevant to their daily struggles. In such areas, elections are often viewed as mere formalities, with little impact on the socio-economic conditions of citizens.

The findings from this study indicated that inability of security agencies to curb political violence and electoral irregularities consistently affected voters' turnout in Ekiti and Gombe. The study of Ter Abagen and Yusuf (2023), further supported the findings of this study when they noted in their study that political violence, a recurrent issue in Nigerian elections, discourages many voters, particularly in volatile areas. The threat of violence, coupled with fears about the legitimacy of elections, fosters a sense of powerlessness among the electorates, particularly educated citizens who are more likely to be aware of the systemic flaws in the electoral process.

The findings from this study on how unresponsiveness from the government institutions and political office holders deters respondents from turn up for voting was backed up by the study of Ojo (2022) which provided further evidence by explaining how the unresponsiveness of political leaders to the needs of the electorates breeds disillusionment and voter apathy. When citizens feel that their votes do not bring about change, they are less likely to engage in the electoral process, regardless of their education level. Also a critical aspect of voter behavior is trust in the political system. As Aluko (2021) and Tanny & Al-Hossienie (2019) suggest, a lack of trust in government institutions and the political class plays a significant role in fostering political disengagement. Trust in the political system is vital for mobilizing the electorates, especially in a democracy where public participation is a key pillar of governance. The lack of trust in Nigerian elections, exacerbated by issues such as electoral violence and fraudulent practices, discourages many citizens from participating in elections, as they feel that their votes will not lead to meaningful change.

Rosanvallon and Goldhammer (2008) argue that in a democracy, counter-democratic mechanisms are needed to address the issue of distrust and political disengagement. Without a strong institutional framework to ensure transparency and accountability, citizens are unlikely to be motivated to participate in electoral processes. This lack of engagement is particularly pronounced among educated voters, who are often more critical of the political system.

Thus, the interplay between educational attainment, distrust of government, and voter apathy in Nigeria and especially in Ekiti and Gombe states reveals a complex relationship where education does not necessarily lead to increased voter participation. On the contrary, higher education can sometimes foster political disillusionment, especially in the face of governmental inefficiency and corruption. Distrust in the electoral process, compounded by socio-economic hardships and political violence, further exacerbates this disengagement. To increase voter participation in Nigeria, efforts must be made to address these issues, such as restoring public trust in the electoral system, ensuring that political promises are fulfilled, and tackling socio-economic inequalities. Political leaders must prioritize the needs of the electorates to rekindle their trust and encourage active participation in the democratic process.

Socioeconomic Status and Distrust in government

Socioeconomic conditions play a significant role in shaping political behavior, particularly voter turnout and perceptions of distrust in government. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where economic hardships such as unemployment, poverty, and rising living costs contribute to voter apathy. The findings from this study revealed that respondents from Ekiti and Gombe states identified economic struggles as key deterrents to political participation. These findings are in line with the studies of Ikenga (2024) and Madubuegwu et al. (2020), which emphasize the relationship between economic hardship and political disengagement.

Unemployment and poverty were identified by respondents in Ekiti and Gombe as factors influencing their decision to abstain from voting. Many citizens, particularly in rural areas, viewed voting as secondary to addressing their immediate economic struggles. As Omilusi (2023) suggests when individuals face severe economic challenges, their focus shifts from political processes to survival, thereby reducing their engagement in electoral activities.

Similarly, Ikenga (2024) discusses how citizens, especially those in lower socio-economic classes, feel disenfranchised by the electoral process, which they believe does not address

their day-to-day concerns. This study revealed that in both Ekiti and Gombe, individuals in the lower socio-economic strata were often more concerned with securing basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare than participating in elections that they believed would not affect their conditions. As Rosanvallon and Goldhammer (2008) argue, when citizens feel their survival needs are not being met, political participation becomes less of a priority, leading to greater voter apathy.

In addition to economic challenges, logistical barriers such as long distances to polling units and inadequate transportation options were identified as significant obstacles to voter turnout, particularly for rural residents. Aluko (2021) highlights that logistical challenges in rural areas disproportionately affect low-income voters, making participation in elections more difficult. This finding is reflected in the responses from Ekiti and Gombe, where many respondents cited the inconvenience of traveling long distances to voting stations as a significant barrier.

In areas with inadequate transportation infrastructure, the physical distance between voters and polling stations becomes an insurmountable barrier, particularly for individuals already burdened by economic hardships. Tanny and Al-Hossienie (2019) further corroborated the findings on this by stating that logistical issues, compounded by socio-economic challenges, create a perfect storm for low voter turnout, especially in rural areas. The combination of economic insecurity and difficult access to polling stations leads to disengagement, as many feel that voting is not worth the time and energy required to participate.

Economic instability, manifested in hardship experienced also aggravates distrust of government, which, in turn, contributes to voter apathy. Respondents in both Ekiti and Gombe expressed deep dissatisfaction with the political system, particularly with the government's failure to address socio-economic concerns. As Ojo (2022) notes, public trust is a cornerstone of democratic engagement, and when the government fails to deliver on its promises, it undermines citizens' faith in the political system. Aluko (2020) further supported this view as the inefficiency of government institutions and the lack of social mobility leads to a sense of alienation among citizens, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. This sense of disenchantment is most evident among voters who feel that their needs are ignored by the political elites. As noted by Hassan (2024), the disconnect between citizens' expectations and

the government's performance leads to political disengagement, particularly when citizens perceive their vote as having little potential to bring about change.

The link between economic hardship and political disillusionment is evident in the responses from Ekiti and Gombe, where respondents indicated that their economic struggles, combined with distrust of government, led them to view elections as futile. The findings of this study align with the study of Snell (2010), which emphasized how economic hardship, coupled with political distrust, led to voter apathy. For many citizens in Ekiti and Gombe, the perception that voting will not improve their economic situation is a strong deterrent to participation.

Nwangbo et al. (2024) also emphasize that the combination of economic discontent and distrust in government creates a cycle of political disengagement. Voters who are economically disadvantaged often view the political system as incapable of addressing their needs, which in turn reduces their motivation to vote. This was in line with the findings from Ekiti and Gombe, where citizens feel alienated from the political process and perceive their participation as irrelevant to their daily struggles.

Thus, this study underscores the significant impact of socioeconomic conditions on voter participation in Nigeria. In areas like Ekiti and Gombe, where economic struggles such as unemployment and poverty are prevalent, voters are more focused on survival than on participating in the electoral process. This focus on immediate needs, coupled with logistical barriers to voting, discourages many from engaging in elections. Moreover, the economic hardships faced by voters amplify distrust in government, as citizens feel that the political system is ineffective in addressing their concerns. To increase voter participation, efforts must be made to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the electorates, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Additionally, restoring trust in government by ensuring that political promises are fulfilled and that the electoral system is transparent and effective is crucial in fostering a more engaged electorate.

Distrust in Government institutions and Electoral Behaviour

Distrust in government institutions remains a significant factor shaping electoral behavior in Nigeria. The findings from this study in Ekiti and Gombe, showed a pervasive belief in the inefficacy of government, along with widespread perceptions of electoral fraud, has discouraged voter participation. Respondents from both states highlighted several reasons for

this apathy, including unfulfilled campaign promises, corruption, and a lack of transparency in the electoral process. These factors align with findings of the studies carried out by Ojo (2022) and Tanny & Al-Hossienie (2019), which emphasize how the perceived inefficiency and corruption of the government undermine trust in the electoral process, leading to low voter turnout.

One of the central issues raised in Ekiti and Gombe was the belief that electoral fraud played a significant role in undermining the integrity of the voting system. Respondents expressed skepticism regarding the transparency of the electoral process, particularly in relation to the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This skepticism is reflected in the work of Aluko (2020), who emphasizes how electoral fraud leads to a loss of confidence in the electoral process, thereby reducing voter engagement. Similarly, Nwangbo et al. (2024) discuss how the perception of widespread electoral fraud leads to voter disillusionment, which, in turn, results in lower voter turnout. The belief that the political system is rigged or manipulated for the benefit of the elite reinforces feelings of disenchantment, discouraging many from participating in the electoral process altogether.

The disillusionment voiced by voters in both states stems from a long-standing history of unfulfilled promises by political leaders. Respondents noted that despite the government's repeated assurances during election cycles, there were few tangible results, particularly in addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure development. As Tanny & Al-Hossienie (2019) suggest, when citizens perceive the government as ineffective or corrupt, they lose faith in its ability to fulfill promises, leading to political disengagement. This perception is especially pronounced in economically disadvantaged areas, where voters feel that their participation in the electoral process will not yield meaningful change.

Ojo (2022) further elaborates on this issue, stating that public trust in government is essential for fostering democratic engagement. However, when political leaders fail to meet expectations, this trust erodes, leaving voters feeling alienated and disconnected from the political process. The respondents in Ekiti and Gombe confirmed this view, expressing that they were less inclined to vote because they felt that the political system had not served their best interests in the past.

Another finding from this study was the normalization of vote-buying, a practice that further erodes trust in the electoral process. In Ekiti and Gombe states, respondents indicated that vote-buying had become a common practice, particularly in exchange for financial incentives, signaling a shift from civic duty to material gain. This trend reflects a significant erosion of electoral integrity and is consistent with the findings of Madubuegwu et al. (2020), who argue that vote-buying is a reflection of the transactional relationship between citizens and politicians. The practice of vote-buying highlights the failure of the political system to inspire civic participation and reflects the disillusionment of voters who now view elections as a means to secure financial gain rather than as an opportunity to influence political outcomes.

This shift is particularly troubling because it underscores the deepening crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria's electoral system. As Madubuegwu et al. (2020) assert, when citizens engage in electoral processes primarily for material rewards, it indicates a breakdown of democratic values. The normalization of vote-buying not only compromises the integrity of elections but also further alienates voters from the political process, as they view elections as a tool for personal gain rather than as a means of democratic participation.

Furthermore, the normalization of vote-buying is deeply rooted in economic hardship faced by many Nigerians. Respondents in both Ekiti and Gombe cited poverty and unemployment as major factors that contributed to the practice of vote-buying. Economic hardship creates an environment in which voters are more likely to exchange their vote for financial compensation, especially when they feel that the political system has done little to address their needs. This aligns with the findings of Alahira & Harisu (2025), who note that economic distress often pushes voters into a transactional mindset, where participation in the electoral process is driven more by immediate material incentives than by political ideology or civic duty. Aluko (2020) also noted how economic insecurity fosters political disengagement. When citizens are focused on survival rather than political engagement, they become more vulnerable to the influence of corrupt politicians who offer financial incentives in exchange for votes. This practice not only undermines the integrity of the electoral process but also perpetuates a cycle of distrust in the political system. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive reform of Nigeria's electoral system, including measures to ensure transparency, reduce corruption, and restore public trust in government institutions. Only then

can Nigeria hope to increase voter participation and strengthen the legitimacy of its democratic processes.

Socioeconomic Barriers and Logistical Constraints

The findings from Ekiti and Gombe states highlighted the significant role that socio-economic and logistical barriers play in shaping voter behavior. Respondents indicated that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to face substantial barriers, such as distance to polling units, lack of transportation, and the financial costs associated with voting. These barriers were particularly pronounced in rural areas, where infrastructure was often inadequate. This aligns with the findings of Simon (2025) and Alahira & Harisu (2025), who argue that the lack of logistical support and financial constraints are major deterrents to voter participation, especially in marginalized regions. In rural areas in Ekiti and Gombe, the distance to polling stations is a considerable challenge for many voters, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The restriction of movement during voting hour further, made it difficult for electorate to reach polling units, especially on election day. Simon (2025) emphasized on how logistical constraints, such as the cost and availability of transportation, significantly impact voter turnout, particularly in rural areas. When transportation is not accessible or affordable, voting becomes an impractical option for many, leading to lower participation rates.

In addition to transportation challenges, financial constraints were identified as another significant factor that limits voter participation in elections in both Ekiti and Gombe states. Many respondents pointed out that the costs associated with participating in elections such as traveling long distances to polling stations, taking time off work, and other incidental expenses were beyond the reach of many citizens, especially those in rural areas. This was corroborated by the recent study carried by Alahira & Harisu (2025) that when individuals are already struggling to meet basic needs, the added financial burden of voting becomes a deterrent. This financial barrier disproportionately affects low-income voters, who are less likely to participate when the cost of voting outweighs the perceived benefit. This submission was particularly stronger in Gombe, where many respondents from lower socio-economic backgrounds expressed that they simply could not afford the costs associated with voting. They felt that their participation would not make a difference, especially when basic needs

like healthcare, food, and shelter were more pressing. This disconnect between the need to survive and the desire to participate in the political process underscores the deep-rooted socio-economic barriers to electoral engagement.

Furthermore, the disconnection between the government and its citizens, particularly in rural areas, was another significant factor contributing to voter disengagement. Respondents noted that they felt alienated from the political process, as the government was perceived to be unresponsive to the needs of ordinary citizens. This perception was especially prevalent in Ekiti and Gombe, where political officeholders and civil society representatives pointed out that citizens, particularly those in rural communities, often felt overlooked by government institutions.

Hassan (2024) argued that political disengagement occurred when government institutions fail to address basic needs such as healthcare, education, and employment. The respondents in Ekiti and Gombe echoed this sentiment, with many indicating that they felt their votes would have no impact on improving their lives. As a result, many citizens, particularly those in marginalized communities, chose not to engage in the electoral process. The widespread belief that the system is rigged and that government institutions are ineffective in addressing the needs of the people only reinforced these feelings of alienation and disengagement.

The perception that the electoral system is rigged or manipulated also contributed to voter apathy in both Ekiti and Gombe. Many respondents expressed skepticism about the integrity of the electoral process, particularly regarding the fairness of elections. This perception, coupled with the logistical and financial barriers to voting, led to widespread disillusionment with the political system. Alahira & Harisu (2025) argue that when citizens perceive the political system as corrupt or rigged, they are less likely to participate in the electoral process, as they feel that their votes will not lead to meaningful change.

The findings from Ekiti and Gombe illustrate how socio-economic and logistical barriers significantly affect voter participation in Nigeria. In rural areas, where citizens face challenges such as long distances to polling stations, lack of transportation, and financial constraints, voting becomes an impractical and sometimes unaffordable option. Moreover, the disconnection between the government and its citizens, particularly in marginalized communities, reinforces feelings of alienation and disillusionment, leading to lower voter

turnout. These findings align with the research of Simon (2025), Alahira & Harisu (2025), and Hassan (2024), who highlight how socio-economic and logistical constraints, combined with the perception of government inefficiency and electoral fraud, contribute to voter disengagement. To increase voter participation, it is essential to address these barriers by improving infrastructure, reducing the costs of participation, and restoring trust in government and its institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The study examined distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in some selected Local Government Areas in Ekiti and Gombe States, Nigeria. The findings of this study shows that the two phenomena have become inseparable from each other, with entrenched perceptions of government inefficiency and corruption intertwined with electoral malpractices largely forming the foundation of citizens' disenchantment with the political system in Nigeria thereby affecting the turnout of voters for elections with the 2023 general elections witnessing the lowest in the history of the country. This study confirmed that the issue of distrust in government institutions in the country is not a recent one but has rather existed side by side with the existence of the Nigerian state, with its roots traced back to historical and past contemporary experiences of corruption, bad governance, and institutional failure. The study further revealed that electoral frauds such as vote rigging, ballot-box snatching, and manipulation of election results have often undermined citizens' confidence in the government institutions in Nigeria. These malpractices have also added to the widespread cases of corruption among elected officials and the failure of the government to hold them accountable for their acts breeding distrust and disillusionment for the populace towards the government and its promise fulfillment.

Pivotal to the study is the finding that reluctance to accept the government results in voter apathy. An erosion of confidence in government has witnessed a fall in electoral participation, especially in the 2023 elections, which recorded the least voter turnout since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999. The study showed that the greatest proportion of eligible voters declined to cast their votes with, voter turnouts of 31.84% and 32.87% were registered in Ekiti and Gombe states, respectively. The downslide is referred to as abrupt in comparison to previous elections, bolstering the perception among citizens that electoral activity is no longer an avenue for effecting political change.

Some other crucial findings from the study concerns how socio-economic factors comprising educational attainment and socioeconomic status influence voter behavior. Those in the lower socio-economic cadres, deprived of quality education and economic opportunities, are the

ones expressing alienation from the political system and, are probably the ones who do not go out to the polls either. This adds the possibility that voter apathy should be seen not only as some form of alienation from the political system but that there exist other socio-economic antecedents to it.

The study also found that, low socio-economic conditions in both states contributed almost equally to the poor voter turnout, suggesting that unemployment, economic hardship, and social insecurity play significant roles in alienation from the electoral process.

Electoral violence and fraud are found to be major obstacles to voter engagement. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been continuously introducing several technological reforms, such as biometric voter registration and electronic voting, to enhance transparency and credibility of elections. Yet, Nigeria is still being plagued with electoral violence, intimidation and fraud. Results showed that a number of voters, especially in conflict-ridden areas, refused to vote for fear of violence and intimidation, or that their votes would not be counted or would be manipulated. All these machinations of violence undermine the political institutions and further deepen the already existing mistrust of the citizens in the government and electoral institutions.

Another key finding was that major reforms are still needed to restore public trust in the electoral process. The study further emphasized that to overcome the distrust of government and voter apathy in Nigeria, these issues must be tackled beyond the consciousness of mere technological innovations in elections, and greater consideration must be given to systemic factors such as the enactment of strict laws barring corruption and electoral malpractices, and promoting transparency in the electoral process while also ensuring voter protection during elections. Improvement in the voter education program that aims at promoting the awareness of voting and civic engagement remains very critical in reviving the viability of electorates trust in the process.

The study also draws attention to the political variances that exist in the various regions of Nigeria. The socio-political dynamics of these two states yielded very nearly the same pattern in voter disengagement. This finding illustrates how voter behaviour in both states was influenced by the socio-political dynamics and, more precisely, by the state-level governance. It was, therefore, established by the study that distrust of government and voters' apathy are

the major hurdles against democracy consolidation in Nigeria. Reduced voter participation in the 2023 general elections speaks to deeper systemic malaise that has eroded the citizens' confidence in the political process. The study opined strongly that substantial reforms must be initiated to improve electoral integrity, socio-economic disparities and civic engagement. Otherwise, Nigeria's democratic system would certainly drift away from the people, further paralyzing government with issues of legitimacy and effectiveness.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has illuminated the intertwined relationship between distrust in government institutions and voter apathy, identifying these issues as critical barriers to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The key findings of the research underscore that both historical and contemporary factors, including corruption, electoral irregularities, and poor governance, have eroded public trust in the political system, leading to widespread voter disengagement, particularly in the 2023 general elections.

The study's examination of Ekiti and Gombe states provided valuable insights into how socio-economic conditions, institutional weakness, and regional political dynamics contribute to variations in voter participation. The results revealed that Socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment, poverty, and economic discontent, were found to play a much larger role in shaping citizens' willingness to participate in the electoral process. The socio-political landscape in both states, including political instability and weak governance, further compounded this disengagement, suggesting that Nigeria's challenges are not confined to specific regions but are symptomatic of larger systemic issues that need to be addressed at the national level.

In Nigeria, the elections with the lowest voter turnouts ever witnessed were held in 2023. This served as a wake-up call as it requires urgency. In view of this study's findings, unless efforts are made to eradicate the very core of government distrust and voter apathy, democratic practices will continue to be hindered in Nigeria. With the elections being marked by an abysmally low voter turnout, the legitimacy of the electoral process and, indeed, the political system at large, has come under intense scrutiny. Such trends are a cause for alarm and point to the immediate need to uplift citizens' spirit in the democratic process, which in turn ensures the health of Nigeria's democracy.

As Nigeria moves forward, addressing these deep-rooted issues is essential for safeguarding the future of its democracy. While reforms aimed at improving the transparency and credibility of elections, such as the introduction of biometric voting systems and electronic voting technologies, are vital, they will not be enough to restore public trust on their own. The findings of this study emphasize that a holistic approach is required, one that goes beyond technology and civic education. It must include comprehensive institutional reforms that address the root causes of government distrust, such as corruption, lack of accountability, and ineffective governance.

Furthermore, addressing socio-economic inequality and promoting social justice are crucial steps in rebuilding public trust and re-engaging citizens in the political process. Providing citizens with the basic tools for economic mobility such as access to quality education, employment opportunities, and social welfare programs can help to mitigate the feelings of disenfranchisement that contributed to voter apathy. Strengthening the rule of law and holding government officials accountable for their actions will also be vital in restoring citizens' faith in their elected representatives and government institutions

Thus, while technological advancements and civic education are crucial in the short term, long-term solutions to distrust of government and voter apathy must focus on structural changes. By addressing the systemic factors contributing to these issues, Nigeria can work towards creating a more inclusive, transparent, and participatory democracy. This will require a commitment from both government and citizens to build a political system where the integrity of elections, the quality of governance, and the welfare of citizens are prioritized. Only then will Nigeria be able to overcome its democratic challenges and move towards a more stable and robust democratic future.

5.3 Recommendations

Following the findings of this research, the recommendations to address the problems of distrust in government institutions and voter apathy in Nigeria are:

1. Addressing Institutional Weaknesses to Reduce Distrust and Apathy

Since the study established that institutional weaknesses in INEC, security agencies, and political parties were major sources of distrust and disengagement, reforms must prioritize transparency and procedural credibility ensuring that these institutions are stronger than its operators. INEC should invest in modern, tamper-proof electoral technologies and strengthen the handling, tracking, and protection of electoral materials. This must be accompanied by strict insulation of the Commission from political interference to restore confidence in election outcomes.

Strengthening monitoring systems such as real-time result transmission, digital audits, and independent oversight will also help reduce manipulation fears. Ensuring timely arrival of election materials, resolving recurring logistical failures, and enforcing credible accreditation procedures will address the institutional roots of apathy identified in the selected LGAs.

Improved security coordination around election activities is essential. A smart security architecture using drones, CCTV coverage in hotspots, GPS-tracked deployment of personnel, and anonymous voter reporting platforms would help reduce intimidation and strengthen trust in the process. Holding politicians legally accountable for electoral violence and malpractice is equally important.

2. Tackling Socioeconomic Drivers of Distrust and Uneven Participation

The study found that socioeconomic status strongly shaped how citizens interpreted state institutions and whether they participated in elections. Poverty, unemployment, and limited access to essential services amplified resentment toward government and created fertile ground for voter apathy.

Policies that target structural deprivation are therefore necessary. Expanding employment programmes, improving welfare safety nets, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources would help reduce the socioeconomic frustrations that feed distrust. Citizens are more likely to participate when they feel materially protected by the state rather than abandoned or exploited by it.

Targeted civic education in low-income or marginalized communities will help counter disenfranchisement. Such programmes should be delivered in local languages and focus on practical issues such as why voting matters, how to distinguish credible candidates, and how socioeconomic challenges can be shaped through electoral choices.

3. Rebuilding Trust by Reshaping Electoral Behaviour and Engagement Patterns

Findings revealed that distrust in government institutions does not only reduce turnout but also reshapes behavior like protest voting, symbolic participation, reliance on patrons, ballot spoiling, or opting for digital activism instead of physical voting. Addressing these behavioural adaptations requires intentional trust-building.

Political actors must commit to visible accountability by fulfilling campaign promises and engaging citizens regularly outside the election cycle. While internal democracy must be improved within the ranks of various political parties. Inclusive governance practices that bring communities into decision-making processes will help shift voters away from cynicism and expressive disengagement.

Youth-focused programmes are essential given the study's finding that younger voters are active politically but reluctant to vote physically. Establishing youth forums, mentorship networks, political literacy workshops, and platforms where young people can influence local governance will help rebuild trust and encourage electoral participation.

Similarly, creating alternative access pathways for citizens who distrust crowded polling environments, such as mobile polling units, accessible voting technologies for persons with disabilities, and remote-friendly systems, will reduce behavioural barriers rooted in distrust.

4. Reducing Voter Apathy by Strengthening Inclusive, Community-Driven Democratic Culture

Since the study showed that distrust has a direct, measurable effect on voter apathy, efforts must go beyond institutions to cultivate a broader culture of electoral confidence. Community-led initiatives can play a major role here.

Peacebuilding structures such as “Peacekeepers for Democracy” or community observer groups can help de-escalate tensions on election day, reassure voters, and enhance perceived safety. These groups would liaise with INEC and security agencies, report incidents in real time, and serve as neutral mediators in tense polling units. Such grassroots involvement can counter fear and restore the communal confidence needed for turnout.

Reforming political party practices is also crucial. Entrenched manipulation, bribery, and vote buying erode trust and discourages participation among principled voters. Establishing a government-supported yet independent “Voter Empowerment Trust Fund” would strengthen citizen oversight and provide logistical and legal support for civil society groups monitoring elections. Reducing transactional politics will directly combat the attitudinal withdrawal uncovered in this study.

Together, these recommendations aim not only to correct the institutional and socioeconomic factors that breed distrust and apathy but also to reshape the behavioural and cultural environment in which Nigerian elections take place. Strengthening trust in government institutions and enhancing voter participation requires a combination of structural reform, social investment, civic education, accountability, and community-led democratic engagement.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite achieving the study's intended goals, several challenges arose during the course of data collection and analysis that impacted the comprehensiveness and depth of the research. While the fieldwork experience provided invaluable firsthand experience and information into

the dynamics of government distrust and voter apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states, various limitations must be acknowledged.

One significant challenge was limited access to participants, particularly in remote areas of both states. Despite efforts to ensure a diverse sample, access to these areas was restricted, which in turn limited the inclusion of certain respondents. Additionally, some participants expressed hesitation in engaging with the study due to concerns over confidentiality and trust. Despite reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality, further persuasion was needed to encourage honest participation, highlighting the importance of trust-building with respondents.

Language barriers also posed challenges. While most respondents spoke English, some were more comfortable with their local dialects, especially in Gombe state. This required the use of translators or additional time to ensure accurate and unbiased responses. Although these efforts helped mitigate any language-related issues, they still introduced an element of complexity in the research process.

The logistical challenges of traveling between various local government areas, particularly in northeastern Gombe state, added further strain on the study. These logistical hurdles caused delays in survey distribution and data collection, with the need to travel across large regions, print questionnaires, and ensure the research team was adequately supported. Despite these challenges, the research team remained dedicated to progressing with the study.

Security challenges were another significant factor, particularly in Gombe state. The researcher had concerns about the safety of traveling by road in the northern part of the country due to unpredictable security conditions. To navigate these concerns, the researcher liaised with a relative who is a military personnel to stay informed about the security situation and obtain guidance on safe areas for data collection. Only local field assistants, familiar with the area and its security dynamics, were involved in the data collection process. This local knowledge proved invaluable in ensuring the safety of the research team and participants. Additionally, the security situation was continuously monitored, and adjustments were made to the data collection plan as necessary to avoid areas of active concern.

Furthermore, respondent bias was a potential limitation, as some participants may have been reluctant to share their true political views for fear of retribution or social judgment. This

reluctance may have affected the accuracy of responses related to political trust and voter behavior, especially on sensitive issues.

Despite these challenges, the study remained focused on its objectives. Strategic adjustments, such as increasing awareness of the study's academic nature, ensuring confidentiality, and maintaining flexibility in scheduling, played crucial roles in overcoming these limitations. The persistence and adaptability of the research team allowed the study to yield valuable insights into the political dynamics of Ekiti and Gombe states, contributing to a deeper understanding of government distrust and voter apathy.

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between government distrust and voter apathy, it is not without its limitations. The geographical focus on Ekiti and Gombe states limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Nigeria, as political dynamics may vary significantly across the country. Additionally, while secondary data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and existing literature was utilized, the availability and reliability of this data were sometimes inconsistent, which may have affected the depth of analysis.

Time constraints also limited the scope of the study. The research was unable to explore all potential variables that might influence government distrust and voter apathy, such as the impact of social media on political engagement or the influence of external factors like international election observation. The study also focused primarily on socio-economic status and educational attainment, while other important sociological factors, such as political socialization, ethnic and religious tensions, and the role of media in shaping public opinion, were not extensively examined. These factors could play a role in shaping levels of trust or distrust in the government and the electoral process.

Finally, respondent bias, stemming from the fear of retribution or social pressure, may have influenced the accuracy of responses, particularly on sensitive political topics. While efforts were made to mitigate this, the potential for bias remained a challenge.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

While this study provides an important analysis of government distrust and voter apathy, several areas remain unexplored or under-explored. Future research could further develop our understanding of these issues through the following avenues:

1. Comparative studies across more states: Future research should expand the geographical scope of the study to include more states across Nigeria. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how regional variations, such as differences in political history, culture, and governance, affect government distrust and voter participation.
2. Role of social media in electoral engagement: Given the growing influence of social media platforms in shaping political opinions, future studies could explore how digital platforms contribute to either enhancing or hindering trust in the electoral system, especially among younger voters.
3. Ethnic and religious factors in voter behavior: Further research should delve into the role of ethnic and religious identity in shaping voters' political preferences, trust in government, and participation in elections. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, especially in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.
4. Impact of electoral reforms on voter confidence: Future studies could assess the long-term effectiveness of electoral reforms in Nigeria, particularly those introduced by INEC, to restore citizens' trust in the electoral process. Research could examine whether technological advancements, such as biometric voter registration and e-voting systems, have effectively reduced electoral fraud and improved public confidence.
5. Exploring the psychological effects of political disengagement: Investigating the psychological impact of government distrust and voter apathy on Nigerian citizens could provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and cognitive factors that influence voter behavior. This could be particularly insightful in addressing the root causes of political disengagement.

5.6. Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on voter apathy, distrust of government, and political participation in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the 2023 general elections. By conducting a comparative study of Ekiti and Gombe states, this research provided valuable body of knowledge on the socioeconomic, political, and structural factors influencing voter engagement, offering a deeper understanding of regional differences in voter behavior across Nigeria. The key contributions are:

1. **Contribution to Research on Electoral Reforms and Democratic Governance:**
This study contributed immensely to research on electoral reforms and democratic governance in Nigeria. Therefore contributing significantly to ongoing efforts to strengthen Nigeria's democracy by providing a practical framework for enhancing voter engagement and addressing citizens distrust of government, the study serves as a valuable resource for INEC, policymakers, and NGOs, helping them develop strategies for ensuring a more inclusive, transparent, and participatory electoral process in future elections.
2. **Examining the Role of Trust in Government and Electoral Bodies:**
This study offered a comprehensive analysis of how trust in government institutions and electoral bodies affects voter apathy. While previous studies like (Aluko, 2020) explored the importance of trust in the electoral process, this research compares the impact of perceived distrust of government and apathy and how this affects voter participation in Ekiti and Gombe. The findings reinforced the critical need for electoral reforms that promote transparency and credibility, key factors in restoring public trust and encouraging voter participation.
3. **Identifying Socioeconomic Challenges as Barriers to Voter Participation:**
This research highlighted the significant role of socioeconomic conditions, especially in rural and marginalized communities in influencing voter participation. Although earlier study carried out by (Daukere, Akpu, Paki, Adeniyi, & Uti, 2024) explored the relationship between economic hardship and voter turnout, this study extends the literature by examining how poverty, unemployment, and limited access to essential services directly impact citizens' willingness to engage in elections. The study

identifies the barriers that prevent many citizens, particularly in low-income areas, from participating in democratic processes.

4. **Policy Implications for Electoral Reform and Civic Engagement:** This study offered valuable policy recommendations for government officials, policymakers, and electoral bodies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The research provided practical strategies for improving electoral integrity, enhancing transparency, and rebuilding public trust in the electoral process. It also underscores the necessity for policies aimed at strengthening government institutions and promoting greater civic engagement.
5. **Valuable resources for Key Stakeholders in Democratic Processes:** The findings of this study offered valuable resources that are beneficial for other critical stakeholders in Nigeria's democracy, including political parties, civil society organizations and international observers. These stakeholders can use the findings from this research to design targeted electoral reforms that addresses the structural weaknesses contributing to voter disengagement. By addressing these challenges, the study contributed to efforts to increase voter turnout in future elections.
6. **Emphasized the importance of electoral reforms and democratic governance through awareness and enlightenment** in providing a practical framework for enhancing voters' engagement and addressing citizens' distrust in government and governance in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study contributed to identifying the role of institutional capacity building in governance, to ignite trust in government and electoral bodies with the view of promoting political participation among the citizenry and eradicate voters' apathy in Nigeria's future elections. Thus, the study advocated for viable and ideologically driven political parties as an engine to drive the tenets of democratic values in Nigeria.

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APPENDIX I

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENINCITY**

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a postgraduate student in the department of Political Science, University of Benin,

Benin City, Nigeria. I am here to facilitate this interview on **DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT AND VOTERS' APATHY IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN EKITI AND GOMBE STATES** for a doctoral thesis research.

Your participation is voluntary and the brief discussion during this interview will not lead to any backlash or consequences. Optionally, you may decline to answer specific questions without penalty.

I assure you that names will not appear on the record materials and no information from the interview will be shared or transferred to any other party. Please, you are required to be objective in responding to the questions asked.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Omoyeni Tolulope Julius

Researcher

APPENDIX II

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT AND VOTERS' APATHY IN NIGERIA: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN EKITI AND
GOMBE STATES**

I am a postgraduate student in the department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. I am here to facilitate this interview on **DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT AND VOTERS' APATHY IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN EKITI AND GOMBE STATES** for a Doctoral thesis research.

Your participation is voluntary, and the brief discussion will not lead to any backlash or consequences. Optionally, you may decline to answer specific questions without penalty. I assure you that names will not appear on the record materials and no information from the discussion will be shared or transferred to any third party. You are free to ask questions relating to the issue of this discussion.

If you consent to this interview, please tick below:

Are you willing to take part in this interview? YES----- or NO-----

Hope you do not mind if notes are taken during the discussion? YES----- or NO-----

We would use audio recordings during the discussion, just for proof that this interview took place. Thus, Do we have your permission for audio record? YES----- or NO-----

Participant

Signature and Date

Researcher

Omoyeni Tolulope Julius

University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY**

Dear Respondent,

I am a post-graduate student of the above-named Department. I am conducting a research on Government Distrust and Voters' Apathy in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of the 2023 General Elections in Ekiti and Gombe States. I wish you could assist me with information on the subject matter by ticking the appropriate column. The exercise is for academic research only and any information provided will be treated with confidentiality.

Thank you.

Yours Faithfully,

Omoyeni Tolulope Julius

Researcher

SECTION A: personal bio-data of the respondent

1. Sex: Male () Female ()
2. Age: 18- 34 () 35-45 () 46-56 () 57 and above ()
3. Education: Primary () Secondary () Tertiary ()
4. Marital Status: Single () Married () Divorced () Others ()
5. Occupation: Public/Civil Servant () Self-employed () Unemployed ()
6. Religion: Christianity () Islam () Africa traditional religion () Others ()
7. State of Residence: -----
8. Senatorial District: _____
9. Local Government area: _____

SECTION B

Kindly indicate your preferred response by ticking the appropriate option.

Keys: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

SN	QUESTIONS	SA	A	D	SD
RQ1	How does institutional weaknesses contribute to distrust in government and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?				
1	The inability of security agencies to prevent political violence in your area affected your participation in the 2023 General Election.				
2	The perceived credibility, transparency and inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure fair and credible elections influenced your decision to vote or abstain in the 2023 elections.				
3	The lack of sufficient voters mobilization affected the electorate decision to participate in the 2023 elections				
4	The corruption perception in the political system in Nigeria contributes to voters' decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections?				
RQ2	How does socioeconomic status shape distrust in government institutions and influence voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 general election in Nigeria?				
6	Economic struggles, such as the state of the economy, rising cost of living, unemployment, and poverty, influence the level of distrust in government and the decision to abstain from voting in the 2023 general elections.				
7	Improving the socio-economic conditions of citizens would likely reduce distrust in government and increase voter turnout in future elections.				

8	Socio-economic status significantly influences individuals' access to information and education on government policies, affecting their level of trust in government.				
9	Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to distrust government and are less likely to participate in elections due to financial constraints.				
10	Distance and restrictions on vehicular movement deter voters with lower socio-economic status from accessing polling units, further increasing their distrust in government and reducing voter turnout.				
RQ3	How does distrust in government institutions shape citizens' electoral behavior in Ekiti and Gombe states during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria?				
11	Distrust in government institution manifested in failed campaign promises. Lack of good governance discouraged voters from participating in the 2023 elections.				
12	Electoral fraud is one of the likely causes of citizen's lack of trust in government.				
13	Voters abstain from the 2023 elections because elected officials do not often involve citizens in key policies and do not adequately represent the interests of the people.				
14	Lack of satisfaction with the responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of citizens causes distrust of government				
15	The electorates' trust in the electoral process is low because of perceived government interference.				
RQ4	What are the effects of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Ekiti and Gombe states in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?				
16	Election turnout is persistently low because electorates with distrust in government are less inclined to participate.				

17	The actions and decisions of government institutions in Nigeria are less transparent.				
18	There is perceived electoral inefficacy as voters believe their votes do not count due to widespread electoral fraud and manipulation, discouraging participation.				
19	Distrust in government promotes vote buying as voters participate only when financially induced.				
20	Persistent distrust delegitimizes and erodes the electoral institutions' credibility.				

Thank you

Interview Guide Questions

Research Question 1

How does institutional weaknesses contribute to distrust in government and variations in voter apathy across selected local government areas of Ekiti and Gombe States during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

Theme: Institutional Weakness, Distrust, and Voter Apathy

1. Perceived Institutional Weaknesses

In your experience, how did the performance of government institutions (such as INEC, security agencies, and political actors) influence your trust or distrust during the 2023 elections?

2. Electoral Management and Credibility

How did the perceived credibility, transparency, or shortcomings of INEC in handling the 2023 elections influence your decision to vote or abstain?

3. Security and Voter Confidence

Did the inability of security agencies to prevent political violence or ensure safety in your area affect your willingness to participate in the 2023 general elections? How so?

4. Corruption and Perceived Governance Failure

To what extent did corruption in the political system, or perceptions of widespread malpractice, contribute to feelings of distrust or decisions to abstain from voting in the 2023 elections?

Research Question 2

How does socioeconomic status shape distrust in government institutions and influences voter turnout in Ekiti and Gombe States during the 2023 General Election in Nigeria?

Theme: Socioeconomic Challenges and Voter Participation

1. How do you think socio-economic status influences distrust of government and voter turnout in the 2023 general election, particularly in your States?
2. How do issues such as economic hardship, violence, and integrity of the electoral umpire impact your willingness to engage in the electoral process?

Research Question 3

How does distrust in government institutions contribute to voter apathy in Nigeria, especially in Ekiti and Gombe states?

Theme: Trust in Government and Political Engagement

1. Can you describe your level of trust in the Nigerian government, and how has this affected your willingness to participate in the 2023 elections?
2. In your opinion, how transparent are the government's communication channels and decision-making processes? Could you share any personal experiences with government services that influenced your trust or satisfaction with them?

Research Question 4

What are the impact of distrust in government institutions on voters' apathy in Nigeria, particularly in Ekiti and Gombe States?

Theme: Impact of Distrust in Government institutions on Voters' Apathy

1. How does the lack of adequate voter education, awareness, and political mobilization influence people's behavior and their decision to participate in the 2023 elections
2. What steps, in your opinion, could be taken to improve voter participation, particularly in areas where there is significant distrust in government institutions?

APPENDIX IV





The researcher with Chief Jide Awe. SSA to Ekiti state governor on Political Matter



Left-The Ekiti State INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner Dr. Bunmi Omoseyindemi & Right - Director of Administration Mr. Aina Temitope